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Title:

Abolition of the Means Test (5KA broadcast by Des Corcoran, Acting Leader of the
Opposition)

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ABOLITION OF THE MEANS TEST.

During a radio broadcast on 5KA on May 7, the Acting Leader of the Opposition and Member for Millicent (Mr. Corcoran) spoke about the abolition of the Means Test.....

Every Australian in my view, should be vitally concerned about the plight confronting the aged and infirm people of Australia.

At a recent by-election in WA, for the Federal seat of Curtin, the attention of the public was drawn to one of the iniquitous penalties that exists in the Social Service scheme.

This was because an independent candidate for Curtin polled extremely well, although his only platform was the abolition of the means test. Labor policy for many years has provided for the abolition of this test.

In fact, during the Ben Chifley Government's term of office, a national welfare fund was started, with one of its purposes being to finance the abolition of the test.

This fund has subsequently been dissipated by the Liberals.

Had it been allowed to remain intact, many of the problems that confront the aged today would not exist.

We often hear Federal Liberal Members of Parliament from SA sympathising with the pensioner, and saying what the Government should be doing to assist the aged community.

But we must remember that the Federal LCL Government has been in power for the last 20 years, and in spite of the fact that as far back as 1949 it promised the abolition of the means test, it has still done nothing more than to slightly ease its application.

On every occasion that the Labor Party in Canberra has moved in the House to improve Social Service benefits, particularly to pensioners, all the MP's from this State, despite their boasts that they are fighting to help the needy, have voted against the ALP proposals.

For example, when an amendment to the Social Services Bill was moved last year by the Labor Opposition, the entire Government voted against it.

This amendment would have provided for an increase in pension rates to enable pensioners to enjoy a good standard of living, for social service benefits to be adjusted in each year's Budget, and for the abolition of the Means Test.

The LCL Government has said that it would be ruinous to do away with the Means Test, as it would cost \$340m.

However, the Leader of the Federal Opposition (Mr. Whitlam) has said that this would not be the case.

He has said that it would cost \$65m. to provide a pension to all people 75 years and over, irrespective of their financial position, and \$12m. to provide similar benefits to all people aged 74 years.

and it can be shown quite conclusively that it would be practical to abolish the Means Test over a period of two Parliaments.

However, apart from the Means Test, there are many other aspects of Social Services that the Liberal Government has shrugged off as not being important.

The Labor Party has a clear cut policy with regard to Social Services, and some of these are as follows:

The payment of Social Service benefits to assist the needy sections of the community, and thus remove the gross inequalities in living standards.

The payment of Social Service benefits at the highest possible rate warranted by the respective services.

That no Australian citizen shall cease to receive pensions because of residence abroad.

A full pension for the wife of an aged or invalid pensioner who does not qualify for it in her own right.

The appointment of a Parliamentary committee to keep Social Services under constant review.

A typical example of the Liberal Government's approach to Social Services was provided when the Minister for Social Services (Mr. Wentworth) answered a question put to him by the Labor Opposition in the House of Representatives.

Mr. Wentworth was asked what increases the Government has made in maternity allowances during the last 20 years, and what amount would these allowances have to be increased by to have the same value today. The Minister replied, and I quote, "The amounts paid by way of maternity allowances have not varied since 1943." He then went on to say that the present payment of \$30, made when there is no child under 16 years of age, would have to be increased by \$57.45 to have the same purchasing power as it had in 1943.

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