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Title:
Radio Broadcast - Rail Standardisation (G.T. Virgo)

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5-KA BROADCAST - BY THE MINISTER OF ROADS & TRANSPORT (MR. VIRGO)

C.O. Theme - Opening and hold under for

ANN: This is a broadcast by the Minister of Roads and Transport; Mr. Geoff Virgo, on behalf of the Australian Labor Party.

GOOD EVENING: ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FUTURE PROJECTS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S RAILWAYS IS THE CONNECTION OF ADELAIDE TO THE NATIONAL EAST-WEST STANDARD GAUGE RAILWAY LINE AT PORT PIRIE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S SECONDARY INDUSTRIES, TO OUR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, AND TO THE PEOPLE AS A WHOLE WHO DEPEND ON THOSE INDUSTRIES FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD.

THEREFORE IT CAME AS A SURPRISE LAST WEEKEND TO READ REPORTS OF STATEMENTS MADE IN ADELAIDE BY THE FEDERAL MINISTER FOR SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT, MR. SINCLAIR. HE WAS, WE LEARNED, SPEAKING TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH OF THE COUNTRY PARTY, AND HIS REPORTED STATEMENTS CONCERNED THE MATTER OF THE STANDARD GAUGE RAILWAY LINE AND HOW, IN HIS WORDS, THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN, WAS "DELAYING" WORK ON THIS PROJECT. MR. SINCLAIR WAS ALSO REPORTED AS SAYING THAT SOMEHOW THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS NOT A "RESPONSIBLE" GOVERNMENT, AND HE MENTIONED FORTHCOMING LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT THIS IDEA.

WELL, THE FACT IS THAT MR. SINCLAIR'S WORDS DID NOT SOUND PARTICULARLY RESPONSIBLE. IN FACT IT WOULD SEEM THAT PARTY POLITICS ARE NOW BEING INTRODUCED INTO A MATTER WHICH SHOULD SURELY BE ONE OF FACTUAL CONSIDERATIONS.

LABOR
WHEN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN/GOVERNMENT TOOK OFFICE WE WERE FACED FIRSTLY WITH THE MAUNSELL REPORT -WHICH PROPOSED AN ENTIRELY NEW STANDARD GAUGE RAILWAY LINE FROM ISLINGTON TO A POINT EAST OF CRYSTAL BROOK ON THE EAST-WEST STANDARD GAUGE LINE - AND SECONDLY WITH A REPORT FROM THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS COMMISSIONER POINTING OUT THAT THE MAUNSELL SCHEME DID NOT CONNECT SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S HEAVY INDUSTRIES TO THE

STANDARD GAUGE LINE DIRECTLY, AND THAT TRANS-SHIPING AND BOGIE EXCHANGE WOULD STILL BE NECESSARY BETWEEN THE BROAD GAUGE LINE IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA AND THE NEW LINE AT ISLINGTON. THE RAILWAYS COMMISSIONER ALSO POINTED OUT THAT THE MAUNSELL SCHEME WOULD MEAN A LONGER HAULAGE FOR GOODS FROM BOTH EAST AND WEST, AND THAT THE SCHEME WOULD BE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THE S.A. RAILWAYS ADELAIDE-PORT PIRIE TRACK CONVERSION SCHEME BY SOME FIVE MILLION DOLLARS INITIALLY, AND BY \$200,000 IN OPERATING COSTS ANNUALLY.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE STANDARD GAUGE CONVERSION SCHEME PROPOSED BY THE S.A. RAILWAYS COMMISSIONER ARE THEREFORE QUITE CONSIDERABLE, AND ON TAKING OFFICE, THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN, WROTE TO THE PRIME MINISTER ASKING HIM TO HAVE OFFICERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH RAILWAYS THOROUGHLY EXAMINE THE SCHEME. WE ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT SUCH A RE-EXAMINATION WOULD CREATE SOME MINOR DELAY IN HAVING ADELAIDE CONNECTED TO THE STANDARD GAUGE EAST-WEST SYSTEM, BUT IT WAS FELT THAT THIS WAS IN FACT DESIRABLE IF IN THE LONG RUN WE COULD ENSURE A MAJOR AND ESSENTIAL TRANSPORT BENEFIT TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S MAJOR INDUSTRIES.

THEREFORE BOTH THE PREMIER AND I, AND I WOULD ADD ALSO A GREAT MANY SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSMEN, WERE SURPRISED AT THE STATEMENTS MR. SINCLAIR WAS REPORTED TO HAVE MADE. NOT ONLY WERE THEY A TOTALLY UNWARRANTED AND BASELESS ATTACK ON THE STATE GOVERNMENT, BUT IN ADDITION THEY MADE THE ISSUE OF STANDARD GAUGE CONVERSION A POLITICAL FOOTBALL. BUT ON THAT LEVEL, IF MR. SINCLAIR HAD MADE A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE PROPOSALS OF THE S.A. RAILWAYS COMMISSIONER, I BELIEVE HE WOULD HAVE REALISED THAT THEY GIVE REAL BENEFITS TO COUNTRY PEOPLE AS WELL AS CITY PEOPLE, AND THAT HIS OWN COUNTRY PARTY'S INTERESTS WERE IN FACT ALSO ADVANCED BY THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SCHEME.

THE FACT IS THAT THE ISSUE OF A STANDARD GAUGE CONNECTION FOR ADELAIDE SHOULD NOT BE A POLITICAL FOOTBALL. WHAT WE HAVE ASKED FOR IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA IS SIMPLY A RE-EXAMINATION IN THE LIGHT OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HAVING BEEN RECEIVED. THIS I BELIEVE IS AN ENTIRELY REASONABLE AND RESPONSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION - AND HAVING KEPT ALL SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES INVOLVED IN RAIL TRANSPORT FULLY INFORMED AND DOCUMENTED ON THIS, WE KNOW THAT THEY STAND IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION.

MR. SINCLAIR HAD PREVIOUSLY SUGGESTED THAT THE MAUNSELL PROPOSAL SHOULD BE ACCEPTED IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, AND THAT THE CONNECTION OF ADELAIDE INDUSTRIES TO THE STANDARD GAUGE SYSTEM BE CONSIDERED AT A LATER DATE. BUT THIS, OF COURSE, WOULD NOT HELP THE SITUATION SINCE UNNECESSARY EXPENDITURE WOULD BE INCURRED, THE DISABILITIES OF THE MAUNSELL SCHEME IN LONGER HAULAGE AND INCREASED OPERATING COSTS WOULD STILL HAVE TO BE COVERED, AND ESTABLISHED INDUSTRIES IN IMPORTANT METROPOLITAN LOCALITIES WOULD BE UNABLE TO HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO ENABLE THEM TO PLAN THEIR FUTURE ACTIVITIES.

WHAT WE NEED IN THIS MATTER IS AN INTELLIGENT UNDERSTANDING IN CANBERRA OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S PARTICULAR TRANSPORT AND INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS. IT IS NOT AN UNDERSTANDING THAT HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING, WHETHER IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP DEVELOP COMMUNITY SERVICES OR IMAGINATION AND INTELLIGENCE IN THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF MAJOR COMMONWEALTH WORKS. WE HOPE THIS SITUATION WILL SHORTLY CHANGE, SINCE ONLY THE COMMONWEALTH WILL SUFFER IN THE LONG TERM BY IGNORING SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S NEEDS.

GOOD NIGHT.