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Title:

Speech for the opening of the Australasian Public Service Commissioners' Conference

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SPEECH FOR THE OPENING OF THE AUSTRALASIAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONERS' CONFERENCE BY DON DUNSTAN, PREMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

27/9/71.

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE THIS MORNING TO WELCOME YOU ALL HERE.

THE AUSTRALASIAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONERS' CONFERENCE IS, I BELIEVE, A MOST IMPORTANT BIENNIAL EVENT IN THE CALENDARS OF BOTH AUSTRALASIAN GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICES. I HOPE THAT, AS A RESULT OF YOUR MEETING IN ADELAIDE, BOTH THESE AREAS OF INTEREST WILL RECEIVE CONSIDERABLE BENEFITS FROM YOUR DELIBERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

I WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE TO WELCOME AT THIS STAGE THOSE DELEGATES FROM INTERSTATE, AND FROM PAPUA-NEW GUINEA, FIJI AND NEW ZEALAND. I TRUST THAT YOUR STAY IN ADELAIDE WILL BE ENJOYABLE. AND I WOULD ALSO LIKE ON BEHALF OF MY GOVERNMENT AND, I AM SURE, THE CONFERENCE, TO EXTEND CONGRATULATIONS TO SIR FREDERICK WHEELER ON HIS APPOINTMENT TO THE POST OF SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, IN CANBERRA, WHICH WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM THE 1ST OF NOVEMBER.

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I WAS INTERESTED TO READ THAT THE MAIN THEME OF YOUR CONFERENCE CONCERNS WHETHER THE PRESENT INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES OF OUR PUBLIC SERVICES ARE RELEVANT TO COMMUNITIES WHICH ARE QUITE RAPIDLY CHANGING, AND THIS WITH ESPECIAL REGARD TO THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONERS.

I THINK THAT THIS IS AN ENTIRELY APPROPRIATE THEME FOR A CONFERENCE, WHICH, MEETS , AS YOU ARE, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE "SEVENTIES", AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ADELAIDE.

PUT
IN ADELAIDE, OR TO/IT MORE GENERALLY, IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, WE ARE FACED WITH THE VERY KINDS OF PROBLEMS AND CONSIDERATIONS WHICH, I HAVE NO DOUBT, PROMPTED THE FORMULATION OF YOUR MAIN THEME. THEY HAVE BEEN WITH US FOR SOME TIME. THEY ARE ENDEMIC TO ALL DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND STATES.

WHAT MY GOVERNMENT IS ENDEAVOURING TO ENSURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA IS A COMMUNITY WHOSE ORGANISED PARTS ARE CAPABLE OF RESPONDING IN AN EFFECTIVE AND INTELLIGENT WAY TO THE PROBLEMS AND TO THE GREAT AND OBSERVABLE CURRENT SHIFTS IN POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL VALUES, AND THE DEMANDS OF RAPID TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE.

BECAUSE GOVERNMENTS ARE BY THEIR VERY NATURE AUTOMATICALLY INVOLVED IN, FOR INSTANCE, NEW ATTITUDES TO OWNERSHIP, OR CHANGING CONCEPTS OF FAMILY ORGANISATION, OR EMERGENT MATTERS LIKE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND CONTROL, SO TOO ARE PUBLIC SERVICES.

FURTHER, GIVEN THE GREAT RANGE, AND INDEED THE INCREASING RANGE, OF GOVERNMENTAL INTEREST IN BOTH THE PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY 'ORGANISED' PARTS OF THE COMMUNITY, AND THE EVER INCREASING NUMBER OF POTENTIALLY CRITICAL MATTERS UPON WHICH A GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO ACT WITH SKILL OR SPEED, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT IT HAVE WORKING FOR IT A SERVICE WHICH IS CAPABLE OF TENDERING THE MOST CAREFULLY CONSIDERED ADVICE AND PUTTING THE MOST SUBTLE OF POLICY DECISIONS INTO EFFECT. IN FACT, MANY OF THE AREAS REQUIRING FUTURE ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS HAVE NOT UNTIL NOW BEEN CONSIDERED ITS PROVINCE. AND BECAUSE PROBLEMS AND AREAS OF ACTION ARE ARISING FROM RAPID CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES OR THE INCREASING IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON BOTH THE ECONOMY AND THE WORKFORCE, GOVERNMENTS ARE INCREASINGLY NEEDING ADVICE ON MATTERS WHICH HITHERTO HAVE BEEN THE PROVINCE OF SPECIALISTS LABOURING IN A HUNDRED DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES OR ENTREPRENEURS DEALING IN A THOUSAND DIFFERENT COMMODITIES.

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AND THE CHANGES ARE SPEEDING UP. A COOLING OFF PERIOD, OR PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION CANNOT BE PREDICTED. AND BECAUSE OF THIS IT IS MY BELIEF THAT NOW AND IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OUR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION WILL NEED TO HAVE BUILT INTO IT A CAPACITY FOR CONSTANT FLEXIBILITY AND INCREASING INTELLECTUAL COMPETENCE.

MY REASON FOR SAYING THIS IS THIS: BETWEEN NOW AND THE END OF THIS CENTURY GOVERNMENT THE WORLD OVER WILL BE REQUIRED TO MAKE STRATEGIC DECISIONS THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH WILL BE FUNDAMENTAL TO NOT ONLY A LOCAL CONCEPT OF SUBURBAN COMFORT, BUT ALSO TO THE VERY SURVIVAL OF THE RACE. AND THIS IS BECAUSE OF TWO BASIC GENERAL AREAS OF CONCERN, WHICH EMCOMPASS ALL THE SUBSIDIARY AREAS IN WHICH GOVERNMENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO TAKE ACTION. THEY ARE THE CURRENT FAMILIAR AND FASHIONABLE ONES OF POPULATION AND POLLUTION. THEY WILL BECOME LESS FASHIONABLE PROGRESSIVELY, MORE HORRIFYING RELENTLESSLY, AND HENCE MORE POLITICALLY DEMANDING.

FOR GOVERNMENTS THE RAMIFICATIONS ARE IMMENSE. FOR INSTANCE, FOR POPULATION READ BIRTH CONTROL PROGRAMMES, HEALTH AND HOUSING, CITY PLANNING OR THE LACK OF IT, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT; FOR POLLUTION READ, FOR INSTANCE, THE EFFECT OF LARGE HUMAN POPULATIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE POLLUTION CAUSED BY INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES DESIGNED TO SERVE SUCH POPULATIONS. THE TWO AREAS OF CONCERN ARE INEXTRICABLY COMMINGLED.

IT IS, I BELIEVE, EXTREMELY LIKELY THAT WITHIN THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS DECISIONS WILL BE TAKEN THE WORLD OVER (AND THAT INCLUDES AUSTRALIA) THAT WILL LIMIT NATIONAL POPULATIONS, PROSCRIBE THE LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION OF MANY DOMESTIC AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS, AND LIMIT OR BAN CERTAIN INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES, MODES OF TRACTION, AND METHODS OF AGRICULTURAL PROPHYLAXIS. AND AS A CONTINUALLY DEVELOPING CONSEQUENCE OF THE WHOLE SERIES OF DECISIONS WHICH WILL BE TAKEN REGARDING THESE MATTERS, GOVERNMENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO ADMINISTER ECONOMIES THAT ARE NO LONGER EXPANSIVE. IN FACT THEY WILL HAVE TO BE, BY AND LARGE, STATIC, CONTROLLED, AND PREDETERMINED.

NOW, WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID HAS BEEN PUT IN WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE. IMPLICIT IN ITS PHRASING IS THE BELIEF THAT MANKIND IS INGENIOUS ENOUGH TO WORK OUT EFFECTIVE WAYS TO DO THESE THINGS, AND TO STABILISE HIMSELF AND HIS EFFECT ON HIS ENVIRONMENT. TO APPROACH THE MATTER IN ANY OTHER WAY IS TOO SERIOUSLY DEPRESSING.

BUT THE POINT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IS THIS: THE RANGE AND COMPLEXITY OF GOVERNMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES THAT WILL BE NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT WHAT WILL BE A RAPIDLY GROWING LIST OF SPECIFIC POLICIES UNDER THE GENERAL HEADINGS OF POLLUTION AND POPULATION, WILL BE STAGGERING. FURTHER, THE STAGGERING PART WILL BE QUALITATIVE RATHER THAN QUANTITATIVE. IT WILL NOT BE A MATTER OF ESTABLISHING OR EXPANDING A NEW OR OLD MASSIVE BUREAUCRACY, BUT RATHER A MATTER OF MAKING SURE THAT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IS CAPABLE OF HANDLING TASKS THAT WILL NOT ALLOW FOR RIGIDITY OF THOUGHT OR ORGANISATION, OR ELABORATE HIERARCHIES

IN WHICH COMMUNICATION IS DIFFUSED, OR FOR EMPIRES OF AUTHORITY IN WHICH THE CAPACITY FOR OBJECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING IS DIMINISHED.

PUBLIC SERVICE ORGANISATIONS TEND TO REFLECT THE SOCIETY IN WHICH THEY WORK, AND THEIR VARIOUS STRUCTURES CAN OFTEN BE JUDGED BY HOW EASILY THEY RESPOND TO CHANGES IN THEIR SOCIETY. HENCE, THE CRITERION OF JUDGMENT OFTEN APPEARS TO BE THE RELATIVE LEVEL OF INERTIA. BUT THE SAME CAN BE SAID FOR THE PARLIAMENTS AND CABINETS WHICH ULTIMATELY WIELD THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT, AND FOR THE MEDIA WHICH INFORMS THE PUBLIC, AND FOR THE PUBLIC WHICH ELECTS THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS AT THIS LEVEL NOT A MATTER OF WHICH COMES FIRST, THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG, BUT RATHER WHICH EGG AND WHICH CHICKEN AND HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS WITHOUT SCRAMBLING OR PLUCKING THE WHOLE COOP.

YET IT APPEARS CLEAR THAT IN THE POLITICAL ARENA AS REFLECTED BY POPULAR COMMUNICATIONS, THE VALUES OF THE COMMUNITY ARE PERCEPTIBLY CHANGING AND THAT GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS WILL HAVE TO CATCH UP IF DISLOCATION IS NOT TO OCCUR, OR IF STRATEGICALLY DAMAGING DECISIONS ARE NOT TO BE MADE.

OF COURSE, NONE OF US, I AS A MINISTERIAL HEAD AND LEADER OF A GOVERNMENT, YOU AS ADMINISTRATIVE HEADS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ORGANISATIONS, CAN FORESEE PRECISELY THE STRAINS TO WHICH OUR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF CONTROL, AUTHORITY OR RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE SUBJECT IN THE FUTURE. WE BOTH KNOW, I SUPPOSE IN VARYING DEGREES, WHAT OUR CURRENT PROBLEMS ARE, AND MANY OF THESE HAVE EMERGED BECAUSE OF FACTORS OF CHANGE IN OUR SOCIETIES THAT WERE NOT FORESEEN. BUT FOR THE FUTURE, WE CAN WITH VARYING DEGREES OF EXPERTISE ONLY TAKE CALCULATED OR INFORMED BETS ON WHICH SPECIFIC AREA WILL MAKE A NEW AND MASSIVE ORGANISATIONAL DEMAND.

AS WE ARE STRUCTURED NOW, BOTH THE LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT ARE GENERALLY CAPABLE OF RESPONDING EFFICIENTLY TO THE DEMANDS THE COMMUNITY IS MAKING UPON THEM; WHETHER THIS WILL CONTINUE TO BE SO IS THE QUESTION, AND IF THE ANSWER IS NEGATIVE, THE FUTURE IS BLEAK INDEED. ONE WOULD HAVE THAT SITUATION COMMON TO ALL SYSTEMS UNDER COLLAPSE, A SMOOTH, UNHURRIED AND UNRESPONSIVE ADMINISTRATION, QUIETLY GOING ABOUT THE TASK OF RUNNING ITSELF RATHER THAN SERVING AN INCREASINGLY DISLOCATED SOCIETY.

AND SO WE GET BACK TO THE POINT THAT THE INTELLECTUAL DEMANDS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ARE INCREASING, AND HENCE WE NEED A CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITY OF RECRUITMENT. I AM GLAD TO SAY THAT MY PARTY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN ABLE TO RECOGNISE THIS. IN 1967 WE INTRODUCED A NEW PUBLIC SERVICE ACT WHICH ELIMINATED ALL REFERENCE TO SENIORITY IN RESPECT OF PROMOTIONS OR APPEALS IN THE SERVICE. PROMOTIONS ARE NOW MADE ON THE 'MERIT' CRITERION ONLY. IN ADDITION, THE NEW ACT ALSO PROVIDED FOR THE FIRST FULL-TIME PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, AND THE PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE BOARD WERE APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN 1968.

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BECAUSE WE ARE A SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT IN A FEDERATION OF CO-EQUAL GOVERNMENTS, IT IS NECESSARY THAT WE MUST PLAN FOR MOBILITY BETWEEN OUR VARIOUS PUBLIC SERVICES. THIS IS, I BELIEVE, VITALLY IMPORTANT TO THE HEALTH OF ALL THE SERVICES, ENABLING NEW BLOOD TO BE BROUGHT IN FROM OTHER SERVICES, AND ESTABLISHING AN ADDITIONAL MEASURE OF INDEPENDENCE FOR OFFICERS. TO ASSIST IN THIS, MY GOVERNMENT HAS AUTHORISED A COMPLETE REVIEW OF THE LEGISLATION COVERING THE SUPERANNUATION FUND TO ALLOW FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE PORTABILITY OF PENSIONS.

IN CLOSING, MAY I AGAIN WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS IN YOUR CONFERENCE, AND AN ENJOYABLE VISIT TO THIS STATE. I TRUST THAT THE OUTING ARRANGED ON THURSDAY WHICH I UNDERSTAND IS TO TAKE YOU THROUGH THE SOUTHERN DISTRICTS WINE AREA TO A MAJOR HISTORICAL AND TOURIST AREA OF THE STATE, WILL BE ENJOYABLE AND RELAXING. MANY OF THE AREAS YOU WILL PASS THROUGH ARE CURRENTLY BEING LOOKED AT WITH A VIEW TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL CLASS TOURIST RESORTS AND PLANNING AREAS.

IN THIS, THE CONCEPTS WITH WHICH WE ARE DEALING NOT ONLY ENCOMPASS THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AS AN INDUSTRY, BUT ALSO THE WAYS IN WHICH THIS CAN BE DONE WITHOUT EXCESSIVE DAMAGE TO THE NATURAL OR THE ESTABLISHED HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS. I MENTION THIS, BECAUSE IT HAS IN A MINOR WAY SOME BEARING ON WHAT I SAID EARLIER, AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO SUCH MATTERS.

I NOW HAVE GREAT PLEASURE IN DECLARING YOUR CONFERENCE OPEN.