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Title:

Address to National Conference of Australian Federation of Construction Contractors

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Mr. Mierisch,
Bob Bakewell,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to open your National Convention today, because it is the first time you have held your annual gathering outside of Canberra. Appropriately, you have chosen Adelaide where we encourage conventions and hope that delegates to them will not only have an informative time, but an enjoyable one as well. The range of facilities in Adelaide itself is superb, and I expect many of you will find that extra bit of time to see some of the beautiful country which surrounds our city.

Specifically I was thinking of the Barossa Valley: I am sure you will be very interested in our construction programme in that region.

I am also pleased to speak to you this morning because of your convention's theme: Teamwork. Today you will be discussing Teamwork in the Industry, and your attentions will also be directed to teamwork in your respective companies, and teamwork between contractors.

The concept of the team is fundamental to any industrialised society. It is rather a paradox that a system which so vigorously extols individual initiative and reward is so dependent on teamwork and co-operation, but the gap between the practical operation of our community and the old laissez-faire theories of capitalism widens daily. And it widens not because of interfering governments or excessive bureaucracy - although often those excuses are used as smokescreens to hide the real reason for change - but because the future of modern society depends on people's being involved in all levels of that society.

The old relationships of subservience to authoritarian figures - be those figures in the social, school or work environment - are changing. And the duty of governments is to try to point out the changes and influence the processes for the good of the whole community.

If we take your industry, the most relevant topic is the question of industrial relations, in its broadest sense rather than just the more newsworthy context of settling or causing strikes. Teamwork is vital to industrial relations, because when it breaks down, the conflicts which result cause a loss of wages to workers, loss of money to their employers and disruption of the community. In order to encourage teamwork, successive State and Federal Governments, both Liberal and Labor, have encouraged structures of conciliation and arbitration - and I stress the point that the conciliation function is rightly put ahead of the other, less co-operative method. Without a widely supported system of conciliation first, and arbitration second, attempts at economic management would collapse, and with it the structure which provides employees and employers alike with their rewards.

Significantly, the only serious attempt by a government to rid itself of conciliation and arbitration responsibilities was in 1929 when the Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, lost his own seat at the subsequent Federal election on the issue.

So the teamwork implicit in our system of industrial relations is supported by almost the entire community. But when we discuss the next phase of that co-operative spirit - industrial democracy - the business world begins to tremble and often the union movement also fears for its own jealously guarded - and often bitterly fought for - privileges. It need not be such a cause for uneasiness for either party, nor should the concept of industrial democracy be analysed emotionally.

If we accept that the old autocratic relationships have gone, we must ask firstly whether the values which have replaced them are better, and secondly we must ask whether they can be further improved. My answer to both those questions is Yes.

I believe it is infinitely preferable for the workers involved in a job to be interested in their industrial environment, which includes not only the day to day conditions on the shop floor, but the present and future financial viability of the company and the social effect of the company's products. The alternative is an alienation which is not only soul destroying but often destructive of the company's productivity potential.

In South Australia we have started to encourage alternatives to the alienation of industrialisation. Socially, we have encouraged community

groups in a wide variety of cultural and sporting activities as a means of providing the facilities for stimulating use of leisure time.

We have, more controversially, initiated a programme of worker participation which, we hope, will provide a flexible model for the public sector. From that, it will provide the stimulus for the growth of a similar model in private industry. Our model is not workers' control, nor is it the blueprint for revolution which some people apparently see it as.

Quite simply, the aim of these proposals is to bring democracy into the work-place, just as surely as democracy has been introduced into the political structures of most developed countries. The reason for such a move is that without effective democracy in all areas of life, our system will not be able to bear the strains of a lack of teamwork.

We come back to that word again, don't we. It is fundamental to our model of industrial democracy, because without proper co-operation and consultation worker participation will not work. The task of any industrial democracy schemes must be to create teamwork for the mutual benefit of management, employees and shareholders.

It is not an easy goal, because we must evolve - and I stress the word evolve - a framework which suits South Australian conditions, and which does not give any one of those three groups reason to be suspicious or antagonistic. Moreover, progress will be slow because we are moving in areas unknown to most of us, and in which overseas experience is useful but by no means definitive.

If we take the model we have circulated for the South Australian Housing Trust, it has been reviewed by the unions involved, by the Trust itself, by the employees and by the Unit for Industrial Democracy within my Department. All have had comments to make and all their comments will be carefully considered in the stage when the final model is defined. In itself, the introduction of worker participation in the Trust has been an example of the industrial democracy which we are anxious to encourage throughout the community.

The Housing Trust will be our first trial: inevitably there will be errors and misjudgements, but I hope the experience we gain from this trial - and which the private sector will gain as well - will enable us to start similar arrangements in other public instrumentalities. From there, it must grow naturally and without the artificial stimulus

of legislation, into the rest of the work community.

Only with a programme of worker participation will industrialised society change sufficiently to meet the enormous pressures which are being made on it now, and which must become greater in the future. But no government can force such developments. Certainly my Government will not. What we will do, however, is provide the encouragement, the information, and most importantly, the lead to the rest of the community.

Thank you for asking me to open your convention, thank you again for holding it in Adelaide. I hope your discussions are productive and that from them the idea of teamwork will take on wider meanings.

Thank You.

ADDRESS TO NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF CONSTRUCTION
CONTRACTORS BY THE PREMIER, MR. DON DUNSTAN.

15/10/75

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