

# Policy Launch Speech: Joseph Cook, Prime Minister (LIB)

**Town Hall, Paramatta, 15 July 1914**

“It is peculiarly appropriate that here in Parramatta, whence the fertilising forces of civilisation first spread over the vast expanse of the virgin continent that a Liberal policy and propaganda which stands hard by the personal pioneering qualities should be articulated.

Here, where the first crops were grown and reaped, is surely the place from which to propound a policy vibrating with sympathy for the grain growers and cultivators of to-day. Here, too, where the first flax factory and the first Australian woollen mills still stand, is the place from which appropriately to emphasise the priceless value to the nation of its industrial operators and the absolute necessity for leaving them reasonably alone in their callings, and freeing them from all unnecessary and irritating interference, as well as encouraging them in all wise ways.

Here, also where the first great secondary schools still stands and flourishes, is the rostrum from which to preach aloud to the nation and the world the necessary flourishes, is the rostrum from which to preach aloud to the nation and the world the necessity that in the re-organisation of our future economic relationships the growth of the individual shall keep pace with the growth of the community. And here likewise, within sight and call of the old Government House in the park, which measures by contrast the unparalleled development of this young and hopeful nation during the past century, is the spot from which to speak to the people and bid them go forward still in the sane, safe track of progressive Liberalism which the passing years with all their wonderful wealth of achievement, have demonstrated to be the only wise course to pursue.

May not this old fabric, when compared with the more palatial structures of these modern days, indicate to us the ageless principle of Liberalism, which as the generations pass, constantly renews itself and makes its appeal – always adequate and wise – to the new times and conditions in which we live.

A little more than a year ago I stood on this platform as the newly-elected leader of the Federal Liberal party to deliver its policy in connection with the election which shortly afterwards took place. The result of that appeal was to reduce the supporters of the late Government. In the House of Representatives from a majority of ten to a majority of one. As a consequence they resigned, and I was commissioned to make an effort to carry on the King's government under conditions of difficulty never before experienced in this country. With a majority of one we were compelled to officer both the positions of Speaker and Chairman of Committees, the former occupants refusing to continue with a Liberal Government to power.

In these circumstances any Government attempting to do the business of the country was entitled to the help and assistance in a reasonable way of those who, after three years of office, were, by the verdict of the country and their own admissions, no

longer able to carry on. These considerations have never been once apparent during the unprecedented difficulties of the stormy period now happily for the country closed. Our opponents never once, 'played the game'. From the first day we had to meet a hurricane of virulent abuse and bitter recrimination. Every effort has been made to prevent business by a powerful minority in the House of Representatives, while in the Senate the one place of all where one would expect calm and reasonable consideration of the country's affairs the insolence and over-bearing arrogance of the Socialist party have more nearly resembled the Tory tactics of the old oligarchies than the ejection of a free people living under five conditions.

Until the timely dispatch of that body by the constitutional method of the double dissolution the country was obstructed by those who, though elected to safeguard State interests, used their position to prosecute party aims and promote party maneuvers, and who boastfully proclaimed that the will of the nation should be made subservient to that of the caucus. Their whole policy was, and is, an affront to a free democracy, and is the outcome of the pestilent growth in our midst of upas tree, whose deadly exhalations threaten the organic life of a liberal community. Amid all the disappointment of the past year we have laboured unweariedly to ring down the curtain on this House of insolvent obstructors and bring them with us and all our issues and policies to the great amaze of the public opinion.

It was the only honourable course to take. We are taunted to-day that we did not stay in office and pass non-contentious legislation. To give the country breathing time, and rest this was attempted, but with what result? In the simplest and most elementary measures such as the Norfolk Island Transfer and Northern Territory Railway Bills, efforts were made by the Opposition to introduce all the contentions of a party propaganda into them. Similarly, a proposal for the appointment of a tender board to control and check the public supplies of the Commonwealth Departments was emasculated and contemptuously thrown aside. Two other useful bills – the Committee of Public Works and the Committee of Public Accounts – were passed, but with the conditions imposed that they were not to be operated until the caucus could have its full say in a new session as to the personnel of these positions of emolument. The whole contention about non-party legislation has, therefore, been proved in the stormy period of the expired Parliament to be the veriest cant. All reasonable efforts were made to do the practical business lying to our hand and it was only after exhausting all the possibilities of the situation that we decided to clear the decks, alter the course, and steer the ship of State back to the port of public opinion from which it had set out on its tempestuous voyage a year ago. In these conditions to have remained in office and frittered away the country's time and money would have been an unforgivable, crime against the taxpayers of Australia.

Of the intervening stages to the actual double dissolution you are already aware. It is a story which finds no parallel in the worst days and moods of the unreformed House of Peers. Day after day, the people's Government had to submit to the contumely of the dominant senate party. Standing orders were to set at naught, and brushed aside almost, daily while some mandate of the caucus was considered, or some packed and partisan committee was appointed to pronounce upon some administrative act of the Government, as, for instances, the dismissal of some protégé of theirs from the Public Service. And the rare spectacle has been offered the public of a Senate presenting to the Governor-General a motion of censure on his Ministers, and immediately the Senate refused suspending the forms of the House to appoint a committee to collect evidence to sustain the censure. Altogether, the performances of these gentlemen

have made a perfect parallel to one of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. For three whole days on one occasion these gentlemen closed the Senate, refusing to do business, and by these means tried to coerce the Government to waste the time of the country, in considering the motions of censure galore.

To crown all, we lately beheld these erstwhile saviours of the people's petitioning, the representative of the King to set aside the advice of his responsible Ministers and the decision of the people's House, so that their miserable and futile existence might be prolonged, and the House which has either democratic value nor tenure might be erected to a position of superiority to the House of Representatives. With the Senate as a States House, safeguarding State interests, we can have no possible quarrel. But with a Senate attempting to subvert the will of the people constitutionally declared, to exercise a control over the Government, never hitherto attempted by any second Chamber in Australia and perverted to sectional uses, Liberalism can hold no truce. It was time to end this costly and stupid farce; and we did so at the earliest moment.

Meantime, issues of far-reaching and fundamental importance have shaped themselves, and I now submit, as the most important section of our programme, the following:- The preservation of the principle of responsible government and the resumption by the people of the control of their legislative and administration affairs in a Parliament unfettered by outside agencies alien to the constitution.

The principle here enunciated is no less one than whether this country is to be controlled by Ministers, responsible primarily to the people of Australia through their representative Chamber, or a small body of Senators, who are controlled by the Caucus, and pledged to subordinate the interests of the country to the sectional interests of certain agencies alien to the spirit and purpose of the Constitution, and I ask the whole of the people of Australia to erase the scandalous blot which has besmirched the pages of its Federal history during the past 12 months. Our attitude is much the same as that sketched by the 'Daily Citizen' – a Labour paper – in London, concerning the House of Lords difficulty, namely:- 'It is the duty of the Government and the House of Representatives to absolutely refuse to assent even by the implication of conduct to the proposition that laws enacted by the House of Representatives are not in the fullest sense the embodied will of the people.'

Any action which does not finally and firmly uphold the right of the democracy to sovereign power, and compel the Senate ultimately to bow to that power, would be a betrayal of the people. The action of the States House in this crisis in petitioning the Governor-General to ignore the people's House is the most violent attack on the liberties of the people made in any Parliament for many generations.

While redressing the balance between the Senate and the House of Representatives by the method already provided in the Constitution, it appears to be an appropriate opportunity to remove the anomalies in the composition of both Houses by means of improved electoral principles. We have witnessed in late years the growing power and control of two huge electoral organisations, which in the prosecution of their purpose, narrow the choice of the electors to those who are fortunate enough to secure the approval of the organisations, which at best represent but a portion of the whole electors.

Moreover, the fight for re-selection is not less arduous and costly in many cases than the subsequent campaign for election. The result is that many eligible men of intellect and experience are refusing to offer their services to the country. Altogether it would

seem that our electoral organisation is in need of some adjustment, so that these fundamentals of honesty and intelligence may be honoured full in the selection of the candidate, and also to modify the constantly hardening mechanism, which excludes from the service of their country many of our best citizens, and tends to make all the victims and servants of an expert machine.

Moreover a sound electoral system, which is the complement of democratic institution, would seem to be essential if Parliament is to be the reflection of the national mind. The ideal to be attained in the Senate is representation, approximately in proportion to numbers, of the effective parties in the several States; the fair representation of the leading lines of opinion with majority rule. The present method of the block vote fails to give Australians a Senate which fairly represents the mind and wishes of the electors. It is clear, from the result of the last two elections, that, when party consolidations becomes complete, the majority for the time being may lose, through the working of the block vote, all share of the representation.

Under the circumstances, it is intended to apply the principle of proportional representation to elections of the Senate. This method, we are told operates with marked success in some European countries. It is applied to Territorial elections in the Dominion of South Africa, and has been recommended for second chambers by the Imperial Electors Commission, which reported in 1910. It is also proposed to adopt the principle of the preferential vote to elections for the House of Representatives, so as to ensure the rule of the majority, while affording the electors the widest possible choice of candidates. It is intended to invite the further co-operation of the States in the direction of electoral uniformity in Federal and State law and administration. Our complete proposals are contained in the following propositions. Namely:- (a) Proportional voting for the Senate, (b) preferential voting for the House of Representatives (c) restoration of the postal vote, (d) removal of unreasonable press restrictions, (e) uniform rolls for State and Federal, (f) improved machinery and safeguards.

Liberals now as always stand inflexibly for a white Australia - white, not alone in colour, though it is appropriate in these days once again to emphasise this aspect of a wide and wise humanitarian sentiment. Viewed dispassionately, the racial complications in other countries should make us profoundly thankful for our immunity in Australia, and steel our determination to maintain these ideas for ourselves and our children, as well as the world in large. Whatever may be our sense of justice, religions, and social ideas, our sympathies are and ought to be with our kinsmen and blood brethren, and we cannot afford to countenance the 'pacific penetration' of our country by those of alien civilisations, whether under the British Crown or not. As Kipling says:- "East is East, and West is West: and never the twain shall meet". Recently the 'Times has glimpsed very vividly for us the latest phase of this difficult problem in British Columbia. The census alone in that State, in addition to 8687 Japanese and many thousands of other Asiatic races. Resolved into its elements, it is really a clash of civilisations a conflict between the legal status of the King's coloured subjects and the racial purity and paramountcy of the whole portion of them; and as one writer puts it 'neither of Imperial rule can fully reconcile this clash.

But, if within our clearly and rigidly marked lines we enact the purity of our blood and colour, we are not also under obligations to preserve the ethical and social and industrial standards which alone comport with these high ideals and aspirations. In

other words, should not the connotation of the term 'White Australia' to be applied all around? To be a really free, fair, federal, and just Australia: federal in spirit and purpose, as contemplated in the Constitutions and fair and just in all our social and human relationships. The very elements of this ideal require us to encourage co-operation rather than promote strife, to share the profits rather than limit and destroy them. This ideal would demand social reform without the accompaniment of social hatred, and the solidarity of class or section. But above and beyond all there is no appropriate or rightful place in a "White Australia" for the selection and preferential treatment of a section of the community by a Government which is sworn to be just and equal to all. Preferences and discriminations, and in particular discriminations in Government employment, are especially odious in a free, young, democratic community.

Our institutions, social and industrial, are an off-shoot and extension of those institutions and traditions which owe their strength and potency to a long, incessant struggles against disabilities of all kinds in the kingdom, whence we come. To turn round on all this fabric of freedom and opportunity, and begin again to impose artificial tests in Government employment at the demand of a section of the people, however important to the welfare of the community that section may be, is a blow aimed deliberately at the whole structure of British liberty. My Government stakes its existence on the principle of the square deal for all the citizens and taxpayers of this great, free Commonwealth and will resist now and always the restoration of the vicious system of 'spoils to the victors' which was introduced by the present one. By all means, let us serve the purity of our race and blood, but let us also labour to be fair and free and just in our standard and in spending the peoples money to do the people's work and let there be always an open door to the public services through which skill and character and competence may enter and remain.

In the carrying out of our Federal ideals and purposes it is necessary to see that our instrumentalities from time to time are equal to the tax imposed upon them. It has been said that institutions are the mechanism of society and that we should live by and not for them. Institutions are good by evil, according to the ends they service. Accordingly our Constitution has been framed not to overpower the people of Australia and thwart their progress by rather to facilitate our national development. There is positive danger to a people when the institutions of a country become ossified, so that they fail to respond to the unfolding spirit of the times.

It is appropriate to inquire if any amendment of our Constitutions is necessary, and the conclusion we have come to is that certain changes appear advisable, and should be made. More power, for instance, is needed to cope with the undoubted menace which may arise from the aggregation of industrial enterprises and their unscrupulous and predatory manipulation. And so, while adhering firmly to the Federal principle upon which our Constitutions is based, Liberals realise that national growth and development necessitate from time to time the revision of our charter of government. Liberals are always prepared to take action when the necessities arise and submit proposals to the people of Australia.

The policy of the Liberal party is to repress combinations and monopolies of such a character as to affect injuriously any Australian industry or public interest. This party favours an amendment of so much of the provisions of the Constitution as will give the Federal Parliament adequate power to legislate effectively against combinations and monopolies of a harmful character.

The Constitution does not grant sufficient power to the Federal Parliament to pass a company law for Australia, similar to the company's legislation of the United Kingdom and the several States. The absence of such provision impeded and hinders trade and commercial relationship. The Constitution should be amended to permit to the enactment of a proper Federal Companies Act.

We believe that the experience of arbitration as a sole method of settling disputes has proved costly and slow in its operations and unsatisfactory in its results. The Constitution should be amended to permit of the establishment of industrial boards to regulate the conditions of industries extending beyond any one State, and the constitution of a judicial appellate industrial tribunal. These proposals we ask the people to believe have been proved to be necessary by our rapid social and industrial evolution and in order to equip the Federal power with the requisite strength to carry out its high aims for the protection and safety of the people of Australia. We confidently submit them for comparison and contrast, with the destructive and devouring proposals of our opponents. Theirs, we submit, would utterly destroy of Federal principle; ours, on the other hand, will preserve and strengthen it. Our proposal for the institutions of wages boards is behind it and the sanction and wisdom of experience. In Victoria, where they have had a long trial, strikes are fewer, discontent is less rancorous, and the effective wage of the worker considerably higher, than in those States, where arbitration only has had rule and sway.

The same reasoning which leads to change and constitutional adjustment, leads us likewise to the conclusion that certain changes in the financial machinery of the Government are matters of proved necessity. Our party has always held that the Commonwealth Bank was built upon a faulty basis, and is to-day inadequate to all the growing obligations of a thoroughly useful and thoroughly national bank.. We propose, therefore, to ask for powers to make it a truly national bank for truly national purposes. We propose to begin by restoring to the States the sole control of the people's saving banks. The duplication of these agencies was unnecessary, costly, and unfair to the States, and was not justified on any ground of public policy. An arrangement has now been arrived at by which the States agree, in return for the cessation of the savings banks competition, to transact the bulk of their business with the Commonwealth Bank. This agreement has been embodied in a bill framed under instructions of the present Government.

It is also the opinion of the Government that the management of the bank should be placed upon a broader basis. We have in the governor a man of reputation and capacity, but the question is not one of personal capacity, but rather of principle and expediency. The Act practically gives the governor unlimited authority. With the Government backing given by the Act, there is practically no limitation upon his powers in relation to the general business of banking, and the advances made, the securities to be taken, land or other property to be acquired for the purpose of administration, or in fact, on his power to incur as a banker liabilities to any amount that he may deem necessary in relation to the administration of the business of the institution.

It was pointed out by members of the Liberal Party during the discussion in Parliament, that while safeguards must be provided against political influence, in the management, it would be a great mistake to place one man in the sole and absolute control of the bank. There are no effective provisions in the Act enabling anyone on behalf of the Commonwealth to watch or in any way influence by advice any

operations of the Institution. All great banks associated with Governments have directorates or boards of advice. Very effective provision in this way was made by Congress recently in the banking system of America. In Canada there is as here an expert general manager; but he is associated with a body of directors, to whom he has to furnish periodical reports on the management for their guidance. The governor of the Bank of France has sub-governors and expert controllers associated with him in the management. It is the intention of the Government to go fully into the question of the constitution of the bank, with a view to increasing its effectiveness and affording greater safeguards to the Commonwealth, whose guarantee is at the back of the institution, by the creation of a directorate.

I express the hope that before long the States may find a place on the directorate of a powerful national bank, by which and through which eventually all the financial operations of both the Commonwealth and the States may be transacted. A bank so constituted may very safely and usefully be entrusted with the control of the note issue, as well as the control and custody of the gold reserves. As the essential requirement to the stability of a paper currency is an adequate gold reserve, it is intended to re-introduce the bill rejected by the Senate to give to the note issue that margin of safety recommended by expert advice and approved by experience.

A useful agency would also be thus created to assist in the transfer and consolidation of the State debts. Latterly this question has been again discussed with the State Premiers, and, although it has been decided to defer the question for a time, the way was distinctly cleared for its final settlement. The chief difficulty standing in the way is a wholesome fear of the Commonwealth curb being placed on their future borrowing. I believe that a bank reconstructed as suggested would go far, allay a powerful and beneficial leverage in the negotiation of loans at more reasonable rates in the future. We propose to preserve with this great question with, we hope the sympathetic co-operation of all the States.

At the last election we promised, if returned to apply business methods to the huge expenditure of public moneys. Our efforts were largely thwarted by the opposition in the Senate. We succeeded in placing upon the Statute Book Acts for the investigation and control of our large public works and undertaking, and also for the appointments of a finance committee to investigate the way in which these moneys are disbursed by the departments. The edict of the Senate went forth, however, that they must remain dead letters, for the time being and, accordingly, these committees have not been constituted. Meantime, these expenditures go on with very imperfect checks being applied. This must be so until the re-allotment and realignment of the departments has taken place, and these various committees and agencies have had the opportunity of complete investigation. These reforms are long overdue, and would have been carried out had it been possible for the Government to do so.

Meantime, enterprises are afoot involving large outlays of public money, and either heavy additional taxation must be imposed - which, in the circumstances would be criminally unwise or other means must be provided. The building of the capital, the development of the vast territories, and the erection of the capital, promise to strain our financial resources to the utmost.

We propose to create a special trust fund in connection with the Federal Capital, to be vested in Commissioners responsible to Parliament for:- (1) The elimination of waste in construction by the observances of a fixed design, and building policy, and by securing even continuity of construction; and (2) the improvement of the lands of the

territory and their proper administration and regulation, the aim being to make it self-supporting at an early date. Wisely administered on these lines, outside the cost of Government buildings, the construction of the capital should involve no charge on the revenues of the Commonwealth.

The Government is of opinion, to which it intends to give effect that Commonwealth grants in aid of territorial expenditure may properly be regarded as of two classes: one class comprising contributions with obligation to repay, and the other advances to be recouped, when resources and consequent revenue of the obligations being discharged without great strain. Though a territory, being part or under the administration and control of the Commonwealth, must be financed to an extent reasonably necessary, out of the revenue of the Commonwealth. It is clear that the larger lines of capital expenditure, such as for railway construction, permanent buildings etc., should be met, since local resources cannot bear them, out of loan moneys advances by the Commonwealth subject to an obligation to repay. In those and other similar directions, our over-strained revenue may be relieved and set free for ordinary administrations of Government, greater financial responsibility for the adequate control of these great projects will be established, business efficiency will be pressed into their development, and further heavy taxation can in this way – and only in this way – be avoided.

A great and obvious effort is being forwarded to make political capital out of the tariff question by men who set themselves to the purpose, with the Hobart conference hobbles securely round their limbs. The conference, which binds them with iron bands, has definitely declared that the tariff question, other than what is called “new protection”, shall find no place in their programme. Our position is perfectly simple and perfectly clear. We have arranged for a complete and expert investigation of the whole question by the Interstate Commission, so that Parliament may be thoroughly informed when it comes to deal with the matter. The work of the Commission is now well forward, and it is as certain as anything can be that it will report in time to deal with the tariff during the first session of the next Parliament. My colleague, the Minister for Trade and Customs, also informs me that a lengthy list of anomalies will be ready for Parliamentary rectification by the time the new House meets.

The position of the party is set out clearly in the following proposals:- (1) To maintain the protective policy of Australia as decided upon by the people, amending the tariff as necessary in the light of investigations by the Interstate Commission. (2) To forthwith adjust all anomalies already ascertained. (3) To enter into reciprocal trade relations with other self-governing portions of the Empire. To delay in dealing with this matter arises from the nature and complexity of the investigations to be made, and justified to the full the wisdom of the course taken by Parliament in bringing this expert and judicial knowledge to the treatment of the question.

It is intended to proceed with the steady development of defence, both naval and military, on the lines already laid down. Although experience may point to the necessity for modifications in detail or of method, nothing would be more pernicious than any vacillation in regard to main principles. Not only must there be continuity of policy, but that policy must be pursued, not in alternating spasm of activity and stagnation, but by steady and consistent effort. To this end the Government has announced a naval building programme for the immediate future, and having obtained the assistance of a recognised naval engineering expert (Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice), and by this precautionary measure safeguarded against the possibility of costly

mistakes, will proceed without delay to the erection of the naval establishment recommended by Admiral Henderson as necessary for the needs of the fleet.

Many difficulties affecting both the convenience of the officers and men and the efficiency of the army have made themselves apparent. Prominent amongst these difficulties are those arising from insufficiency of instruction and of rifle range accommodation. The latter not only seriously handicaps the citizen forces, but also the rifle clubs and tends to dispirit those who are loyally striving to discharge a duty to their country. Steps will be taken to remove these disabilities, and by so doing ensure the greater efficiency of the defence forces of Australia.

The increasing cost of defence falls for close scrutiny, though it is well to remember that this is materially enlarged by items of initial expenditure not allowed for in Lord Kitchener's estimates. The Government has given evidence of its intention to secure economy, so far as it is compatible with efficiency, but its careful supervision of the defence expenditure during the past year. With a view to the introduction of improved business methods in the administration as distinct from purely military training of the defence force, effect will be given to the recommendations of General Sir Ian Hamilton. The result will be to relieve military offices of a mass of extraneous work, and leave them free to devote themselves to their command, while the business of supplying the needs of the army will be entrusted to others with business qualifications, and specially trained for the purpose. By this reform, it is confidently anticipated that material economy and increased efficiency will be secured.

My Government still regard this as among the vital questions, and, in some respects, fundamentally necessary to our national existence. The adequate defence of our goodly heritage calls aloud for the more rapid peopling of the land. If our defences are to be effective, the staying powers of the nation must be proportionately increased as the strain of it becoming heavier. The burden of all increases daily, almost, hourly, and already the voice of the pessimist is heard in the land demanding a rigorous cutting down of these defensive preparations with a view of relieving the heavily-laden taxpayer. The real remedy is not to lessen the bulk and weight of the burden, but to increase the power to carry it by the multiplication of the burden-bearers.

For these reasons, as well as the more effective occupation of this huge continent, the Government intend to direct a vigorous immigration policy towards the settlement of the vast areas of fertile land which the State will offer to men of enterprise, capital, or that persistent and intelligent industry, which, under the favourable conditions this continent affords, serious seldom fails to produce a healthy competence. As happily the conditions of the British rural labourer are improvising the supply in the United Kingdom of a class of workers capable of developing into useful settlers of our primary industries has recently fallen off, a fact which necessitates increased inducements to the right class of immigrants, and more extensive advertising not only at home, but in certain European countries and in the United States. To that end, and to supplement more substantially the efforts of the States, it is proposed this year to increase the advertising vote and to provide a sum of £150,000 towards additional assisted immigration.

In submitting these proposals to the States at the recent conference of Premiers, I insisted on two requirements, namely: 1. Our proposals were additional to what the States were doing already, and not in relief of them in any way. 2. The care and direction and housing of immigrants on arrival should be a strong feature of any co-operative scheme. It is proposed to relieve the States of some of their duties oversea,

while they in turn will devote themselves here to an effort to prevent the drift back to the towns and cities. In other words, to take them to the country, and keep them there.

A bill has already been prepared embodying an agreement made between the Commonwealth and the States concerned, with a view to the expansion of the settlement along the course of the River Murray by the utilisation of its waters for navigation and irrigation. This is by far the greatest proposal of its kind yet ventured in Australia, and promised a wonderful transformation in interior. For years past the States have been unable to agree as to the necessary riparian adjustments. Further, the financial obligations involved constituted a serious difficulty. We have cut the Gordian knot, by becoming a shareholder in this great national scheme, to the extent of a million pounds. This sum will be devoted to the locking of rivers and by this fulfilling a duty laid upon us in the Constitution, to conserve and set free for the service of the settlers the waters of the Murray, which now waste themselves in devious tracks to the sea.

The scheme is a large and an attractive one. The total estimated cost is £4,000,000 one million of which we propose to contribute. It is estimated that by this scheme sufficient water will be available to irrigate 1,400,000 acres of good land. At present in Mildura 12,000 acres of irrigated land sustain a population of over 6000, and furnish an annual return of £400,000 in produce alone. Applying those figures to the better land of the Murray River watershed, they suggest the direct maintenance of 700,000 people directly dependent upon this enterprise, with an annual production of nearly £50,000,000 sterling. This is a sum of equal to the total of our agricultural returns for all Australia to-day. Add to this the secondary and collateral employments and returns, and it will readily be seen to be the greatest and most complete proposal for settlement ever conceived in our history.

It is a great and real effort for close settlement. It is a great proposal for that decentralisation so much needed here in Australia. It is a real, federal, co-operative effort, as well as a great scheme of inland territorial development, and withal a broadening of the base of our social superstructure. As a Government we count ourselves fortunate indeed to have been privileged to have a hand in settlement. And it is also reassuring and suggestive of the real efficiency of the federal spirit to find that this first attempt of the Commonwealth to help the directly interested States to solve a long vexed and exceedingly important proposal is likely to prove successful.

A matter of utmost importance to the future development of Australia is the question of unrestricted trade and commerce between the States, and the multiplication of facilities to this end. One of the chief reasons for the union of the States in the Federal compact was to break down the barriers interposed therefore by State policy, and although these fiscal barriers have been broken down to the great advantage of the States, there are other hindrances to our trade and commerce which should be removed at the earliest moment. Not the least important of these are the breaks of gauge, of which there are no less than ten in number in various parts of Australia. Moreover, so long as these obstacles to unimpeded traffic remain, our defence preparations are less neutralised, and until every obstacle to the transport of troops and munitions of war is removed, we may hope in vain to provide adequately for the defence of this great continent. Under present conditions the movement of troops and their impediments would be ruinously and disastrously slow.

This is a matter of the gravest and most vital consequences in these days, when the war preparations of the countries of the world are being feverishly pushed forward.

Accordingly I submitted the matter to the Interstate Conference of Premiers and after full discussion induced them to agree to refer to the Interstate Commission the question of a uniform railway gauge for Australia. The points agreed upon by the conference as desirable to be determined by the Interstate Commission are: - (1) The desirability of uniformity, (2) What gauge should be finally adopted. (3) What benefits will result in the first place to the Commonwealth, and secondly, to each of the States, (4) What will be the cost of conversion? (5) In what manner and to whom shall such cost be apportioned?

The whole question has, therefore been referred to the Interstate Commission, who will enter upon the inquiry as soon as an opportunity presents itself. It cannot be too strongly impressed upon all concerned that delay in this matter means additional heavy cost, and the sooner these barriers are swept away and the traffic of the continent is unimpeded, the better for the taxpayers themselves, and the greater will be the efficiency of our national and social and industrial organisations. It cannot be too strongly affirmed that having regard to the many and complex interests involved, this problem can only be satisfactorily settled by the joint effort and harmonious co-operation of the Commonwealth and the several States.

The development of the Northern Territory, a responsibility intimately associated with defence, calls for the systematic application of a definite and comprehensive policy. On June 30, 1913, the total debt in respect of the territory, including that the Port Augusta railways, was £5,430,957. The deficiency on revenue and expenditure account was then, exclusive of £240,899 paid for loan redemption, £393,050, and the actual, and until recently the prospective, increase of settlement has been far from an adequate justification of the cost of administration.

The Government proposes to boldly face the problem of territorial settlement by submitting proposals for the construction of about 1600 miles of transcontinental railways, to connect Oodnadatta with Katherine River, Newcastle Waters with Camooweal, and Anthony's Lagoon with a harbour in the Gulf of Carpentaria, at the Pellew Islands, at the mouth of the M'Arthur River; and by promoting closer pastoral settlement of country known to be suitable; but affording further inducements to suitable settlers to take up land for mixed farming and agriculture; by a generous expenditure on maintenance of existing and opening up of new stock routes, on improvement of water supply and of ports and rivers, on encouragement of mining, one of the most promising sources of substantial progress; by affording facilities to capitalists to establish, on terms that conserve other interests, freezing works, and by other methods of turning the great pastoral, and in places rich agricultural, areas, and excellent mineral resources of the territory to the best account.

The administration of Papua is another important responsibility assumed by the Commonwealth, for which adequate provision must be made. In developing the undoubted resources of the territory, our moral obligations to the natives have been and will continue to be recognised. In addition to provisions in aid of revenue, it is proposed to make advances to the local Government for construction of railways, roads, and bridges, reclamation, improvement of harbours, construction of wharves, coastal lighting, more effective development of the Government plantations, and for other directly and indirectly productive works. A subsidy is to be granted towards the industrial training of the natives. Wire-less communication will be established with Samaral and Woodlark Island. The testing and opening up of oil-fields, which are

most promising, will be continued, under expert advice and supervision. A system of superannuation allowances for the Public Service of Papua is being prepared.

It is with infinite regret, and not a little disgust, that I have to announce this most useful measure as still amongst proposals for legislation. It should have been on the Statute Book, and would have been there but for the determination to prevent it on the part of the Senate. It was discussed in the House of Representatives all the session and then intimation came to me that the Senate would refuse to pass it if it were sent up. The bill is before the public, and there is no need for me to elaborate it here. Altogether it is one of the most modest, as it is one of the most useful measures that could be passed for the benefit of the rural dwellers of this country.

I appropriately mention here a proposal which the Government has in view with regard to the export of our produce. Our exports are vital to our welfare, as they form such a great part of our national wealth, and their regulation and control is of first importance to the producers and the country generally. We propose to constitute an advisory body, drawn from the producers themselves experts in their won lines of production to assist the Ministers in charge of the Commerce Act in the framing of regulations dealing with the control of exports, such as meat, butter, fruit, etc., and to this end we propose to call a conference of representative bodies of producers to arrive e at a method of representation which will be fair to every branch of production, and whose exports it is found necessary to regulate from time to time.

A body of this kind should be of the greatest use to the Minister, and prove eventually a most useful focal point for the development of co-operative effort in placing our primary products on the markets of the world. Co-operation is, we believe, the true means whereby our producers will obtain the best results from their labour, and we will use every effort to help them to help themselves in this profitable way. Mr Fisher, on the other hand, puts forward a wild proposal, which bolted down, means the nationalisation of distribution in regards to the whole of our export trade, with the nationalisation of shipping thrown in.

We also propose to utilise the undoubted powers already contained in the Constitution to replace all harmful combines engaged in overseas trade, and to protect the consumer and producer alike from all injurious trusts and monopolies in restraint of trade, or injurious to the public from whatever source arising. There can be but little doubt that the best beef combinations of America have commenced operations in Australia, and careful watch and the closest scrutiny will be necessary in their case. We have already appointed Mr Justice Street a Royal Commission to inquire thoroughly into their operations and into the trade generally, and his report will receive the fullest consideration and action if recommended. We submit these proposals as sections of a broad and wise scheme of rural territorial development, which we hope and believe will foster and safeguard the agrarian and productive prices of the interior.

We intend to proceed promptly with the question of civil service superannuation and retiring allowances. Our civil service is composed of a body of men competent and upright and zealous in the performance of their duties. These men to the real detail work of government in comparative silence from year to year, and the greatest encouragement should be given to them in the performance of their important duties. Moreover, they should perform those duties stripped of carking care for the future, so far as is possible. There is a reciprocal duty in this case on the part of the servants to serve the Crown with the ability and devotion, and on the part of the Crown to see

that its servants are properly cared for when the time for their compulsory retirement arrives. There are many men to-day in the service of the Crown to whom the day of retirement is a constant defect, by the enactment of a mutual and just scheme of retiring allowance and superannuation.

A scheme must also be provided for the naval and military forces. This is absolutely necessary if these services are to be kept in a high state of efficiency, and without this it were better to save the money which goes in military and naval preparations. The rule in the Imperial service is one of constant progression while remaining in the service, and when opportunity for going up are denied them, they are given the choice of going out on a suitable and adequate retiring allowances. In this way the best ability procurable in these services is in a constant state of circulation. Only in this way can they be maintained in efficiency, and the security of Australia reasonably guaranteed.

While on the question of insurance, mention should be made of our old age pensioners and their sympathetic treatment by the Government of the day. A bill was introduced in the Parliament, which has now almost run its course, having, for its object the amelioration of the condition of the old age pensioners by providing that when an old age pensioner enters a benevolent asylum, he shall do as a free man, and as a paying guest, and that any difference between what is paid to the institution and the amount of his pension should be his own to spend as he pleases. The bill did not become law because the Labor party objected to its going through at once, although warned that any delay would mean the loss of the measure for the session.

The Government, however proposes to reintroduce the measure, and if possible, to make other amendments for the benefit of the old-age pensioners. It is a melancholy reflection that owing, to the increased cost of living, the value of the pension originally agreed upon has been greatly reduced. Unfortunately, there is great need for circumspection at the moment in the control of the public finances, but if the revenue during the coming year show reasonable elasticity, I hope it may be possible to make their pensions a little more generous than at present with a view to enabling the recipients to meet their increasing expenses. These old people who have the misfortune to be compelled to rely on the State in their old age may be assured of the Government treating them with the fullest generosity.

The great question of national and social insurance has been the subject of comprehensive inquiries during the year, with a view to the formulation of a contributory scheme to include sickness, maternity, accident, and unemployment, within its scope. In reply to exhaustive question administered to the many directly interested persons and associates, such as the registrars of the friendly societies, the registrar of industrial unions, the pharmaceutical societies, and the medical societies of all the States, a great deal of information has been received as to the probable attitude for these bodies in relation to the proposals for social insurance, and as to the conditions on which some of them would accept and facilitate the administration of a National Insurance Act and the German Insurance Scheme as recently amended, it is hoped to frame a system that will secure the acceptance and co-operation of the friendly societies, the medical profession and the other interested bodies.

Bills for the regulation of life and fire insurance have already been prepared, and are ready for presentation, when a working Parliament has been restored.

In a Parliament constituted like the present one, it was impossible to make any proposals for the more adequate control of the Post Office by the appointment of expert managing commissioners. Experience shows more and more conclusively the absolute [unclear] by the appointment of experts managing commissioners. Experience shows more and more conclusively the absolute necessity for reforms in this direction. A huge loss is the only return at the end of the year for each year's efforts. The Post Office to-day constitutes a serious drain on the revenue of the country, while the machinery itself, whether of the Post Office, the telephones, or the telegraphs, cannot be said to work with efficiency and success. It is a huge service and needs thoroughly toning up from top to bottom in a way we cannot hope to accomplish under the present regime.

Meantime the best has been made of the condition of things we found on our entrance to office. Many reforms have been accomplished, and many facilities granted to the people of the country. The Government has not been unmindful of the comfort and general well-being of the personnel. Much more, however, is needed and an early effort will be made. My Government if successful in this appeal, will bring into existence a system management which, while dealing fairly with the causes of dissatisfaction among the staff, will make our Post Office what it should be, namely an aid to the development of the country, a large contributor to the welfare of the rural population, and a sound business proposition to the people at large.

The draft regulations under the Navigation Act are being framed. The regulations cover a very extensive range of subjects, but before promulgation they will be carefully considered by capable experts. The position of Director of Navigation has been advertised, and the qualifications of the applicants are now under consideration. Amendments to the Navigation Act will be submitted to Parliament, in accordance with the recommendations of the recent International Conference with respect to safety at sea.

We have already begun the erection of a number of new lights on the Australian coast, and are now settling the preliminaries for an early transfer of the whole of the coastal light service of the Commonwealth. This involves the transfer of 118 existing lights, and the construction of 74 new lights during the next six years.

It is proposed to make provision to complete the survey of the Australian waters.

My Government propose to introduce legislation to provide for uniform bankruptcy legislation, uniform banking legislation, and offences against the Commonwealth.

I submit this outline of our proposals to the people of Australia for their reasoned judgement, and I trust cordial approval. My object will have been attained if they regard it as instinct with freedom, staunchly federal and wise in its constitutional setting, progressive in its aim and intention, fair and just to all the people of the land, respecting and honouring the best traditions of the past, and looking forward with hope and confidence to the future."

Source: Compiled from The Sydney Morning Herald July 16, 1914, Page 12, The Age and The Brisbane Courier.