

Commonwealth of Australia  
Parliamentary Debates  
(Hansard)  
Session 1923  
(First Session of the Ninth Parliament)  
Vol. CII.  
(Comprising the period from 28<sup>th</sup> February to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1923.)  
Senate and House of Representatives.

## Prime Minister Bruce's "New Broom" Speech 1 March 1923

**Mr. Bruce** (Flinders – Prime Minister) – I can very well understand the feelings of the honorable member for Bourke (Mr. Anstey). The position in which honorable members opposite find themselves is certainly very unfortunate. For some considerable time past they have been building their hopes upon dissension in the ranks of those opposed to them, and upon no possible merit of their own. To-day they are faced with the distressing fact that they have opposed to them a united Ministerial party, headed by a Government who have a substantial majority in the House, and who are determined to carry out a progressive policy.

**Mr. West** – What is it?

**Mr. Bruce** – The mover of the amendment tried to force events by persuading himself that what he thought would happen had actually happened. If there were to be an amalgamation of the forces opposed to honorable members opposite, their nightly prayer was that the combination might be one dominated by Conservatism and reactionary to the core. That was their only hope. Unfortunately for them nothing of the sort has happened or will happen. The Government will not be reactionary, and it will not do any of the things which the honorable member for Bourke predicted as likely to be done under our rule. I do not think that the honorable member has any personal antipathy to me, but he did not appear to care for my method of dressing, or my manners, or some quality which he described as culture. But if he thinks that any of those characteristics indicate the good old Conservative mind, or Tory instincts, I assure him he is quite wrong. The members of the Government are not Tories. We are just as progressive in our ideas as are the majority of honorable members opposite. But we show a little more sanity in connexion with the means by which we hope to give effect to those ideas.

The honorable member complained of the absence of any policy. He said that this was the first Government which had met Parliament without a complete policy, and suggested that if the Labour party had been in our place they would have been ready with their policy. Of course they would; it is ready made. It would be given to them at the door and they would have introduced it to the House.

**Mr. West** – And given effect to it.

**Mr. Bruce** – The party would do what it was told to do. But we are not in that position. I personally prefer not to be so situated; I think it is more desirable that the Government elected by the representatives of the people should frame their own policy and should not be dominated by outside influences. Not having a ready-made policy, we require a little time to consider some of the great problems with which we are faced, and to endeavour to find a solution of the difficult circumstances which surround us to-day. That is what the Government propose to do.

I remind the House of the circumstances in which the Government have met Parliament. The Ministry came into being on the 9<sup>th</sup> February, and the majority of its members are men who have not previously held office. Of necessity, owing to the results of the election, the absence of ex-Ministers and the defeat of others, work in the Departments, of which they assumed control, was in arrears. We have taken over the reins of government, we have gone into the Departments and tackled the problems which confronted us; but no Government with any intelligence, or who made any pretence of considering the problems which have to be solved, could produce a policy in so short a time. It would have been a grave and serious mistake to attempt to do so. Some time will be required to frame a policy and present it to the House. I intend, however, to indicate to honorable members some of the problems with which we have to cope, in order that they may realize how impossible it was to present to the House a completed policy without first having had an opportunity of giving it the most mature consideration.

The honorable member for Bourke took considerable objection to some of the speeches that I have made since the formation of the Government. I venture to suggest that they contained many things which required to be said, and I invite honorable members opposite to study and repeat them. The honorable member for Bourke said that my speeches were platitudes. I can imagine the type of speech the honorable member would have made had he been in my place. My remarks may have been platitudes, but they were commonsense platitudes. His would have been the wild platitudes of the Communist or Socialist, which mean nothing to sane minds, but carry away those who do not understand them. If we are to have platitudes, I prefer them savoured with a little sanity rather than those which the honorable member would have uttered. The honorable member repeatedly said that the combination now in office is without common principles of common ideals, and was brought about merely for the purpose of keeping the Labour party out of office. That is quite absurd. The two parties that have combined have common ideals and a common basis, and we shall endeavour to carry through a programme which represents those ideals. But even if that were not so, I think it would have been very proper for the parties on this side to combine if for no other objective than to keep the present Labour party out of power. Some things are so terrible to contemplate for Australia that almost any preventive action would be justified. One of those possibilities is the advent to power in the Commonwealth of the Labour party as at present constituted. I had a very considerable respect for the Labour party of those days of which the honorable member for Bourke spoke, which put upon the statute-book some admirable measures.

**Mr. Charlton** – Most of the men who placed those measures on the statute-book are in the House now, but the parties opposite have kicked out all but two of those who went over to them from the Labour party.

**Mr. Speaker** – Order! I ask honorable members to resist the temptation to interject.

**Mr. Bruce** – I repeat that I had a very considerable admiration for the Labour party of days gone by, and the things for which it stood. Honorable members opposite flatter themselves if they think that they are anything like the old Labour party, or that their proposals resemble the principles for which Labour stood in years gone by. In those days the Labour party stood for great things, and was not dominated by outside and sinister influences. To-day the position is very different. I say quite frankly that while the Labour party is in its present position, and stands for those things that are forced on it from outside, I am going to do everything in my power to keep it out of office. I am sorry to have to say what I must say about the honorable member for Bourke (Mr. Anstey), but he said much about the party on this side, and I must point out that honorable members opposite are not so blameless as he might suggest. There is one phase which I desire to mention for the consideration of the honorable member. We all know what the Labour party stand for to-day. The party makes no disguise of the fact that it stands to-day for what its programme says – the socialisation of production, industry, distribution, and exchange. I presume that, should the Labour party come into power, honorable members opposite are prepared to carry out their own programme.

**Mr. Charlton** – Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bruce** – Then it is to be regretted that the honorable member did not tell the country what is party's programme was. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Charlton) went up and down the country and made many speeches. I have the greatest admiration for those speeches, because he skated over such thin ice that it is almost inconceivable that he did not go through. This, however, did not happen; the honorable member evaded all the dangerous subjects and avoided all mention of the real objectives for which his party stands. The present Government may have some demerits - personally, I hesitate to believe it has - but they and their supports certainly had the courage to tell the country what they stood for and what they believed in. There are quite a number of gentlemen opposite who did nothing of the sort. I free the honorable member for Bourke (Mr. Anstey) from any such charge, as he never hesitates to say what he thinks. He not only says it on the platform, but has also put it into books, and I have in front of me one of his very frank utterances in regard to a policy for Australia:-

No skin-plaster legislation, no mere policy of alleviation, will meet the position. Revolution in action and method is the one saving instrumentality, the sole alternative to a long grinding period of absolute slavery. I make no apology for this statement...Australia is moving to the crisis.

At least I admire my honorable friend opposite for thus declaring what he thinks and stands for.

I now desire to deal with some of the questions as to which the honorable member for Bourke says that the Government could have solved them in a day and submitted to Parliament a policy in regard to them. If, however, the honorable member will consider those questions for a moment – and remember that I am not so fortunately placed as he is in having his policy made for him – he will see that the Government was in considerable difficulties in attempting its task in the period allowed. I wish, first of all, to deal with the question that I mentioned in Adelaide, and which appears to have caused such intense pain to the honorable member for Bourke. He did not like my referring to the Empire and Empire defence. I suggest to him that it is the most vital question of all, seeing that Australia's defence is wrapped up in the question of Empire defence. It is useless for the honorable member to talk of all those great ideas and ideals of Socialism that he would bring into force in Australia, unless he takes the first necessary step, namely, to assure Australia's safety and the integrity of the territory which we govern to-day. That is why, I take this subject first. It is, as I have said, the most important question that faces Australia to-day. There is, I think, not one of us, certainly not any of us who came into close contact with the recent war, but is determined that there shall be no repetition of that tragedy if we can avoid it. I think there are few of us who do not believe absolutely in the reduction of armaments as far as it can be brought about and a minimum expenditure even on defence. Expenditure for war or warlike preparation to-day is not to be contemplated in any civilized country, and even for defence we must consider what is the minimum compatible with our safety. But within those limits it is a sacred obligation on us to provide for the safety and integrity of the country we are called upon to govern. It is a question of the defence of Australia, and we can only defend this country if we are inside the Empire, and if we have the assistance of the Motherland and the Empire as a whole. I believe in the League of Nations. Some day I believe that that League is going to insure the peace of the world if it gets the support it should from all the nations. But that hour has not come, and we have to-day to preserve our safety. To attempt this task alone, and not under an Empire defence scheme, is to court disaster, and the cost of the attempt would place a paralyzing burden on the people of Australia. I ask honorable gentlemen opposite to turn their minds to the importance of this great question. I know there are some men I shall never convince, and I know also that there are some who realize these facts, but have not the courage to state them. But I appeal to every man who has courage and vision to realize the importance of the question. The Government believe that to-day, for the discussion of the question of an Empire naval defence scheme, consultation between the Dominions and the Motherland is essential; and if an Imperial Conference is not summoned, Australia will press for one at the earliest possible moment, believing, as we do, that the formulation of a common scheme of defence is vital to our safety and our whole future welfare. Wrapped up in the question of Empire defence, is the question of Empire foreign affairs. There are some in Australia who think that we can be a law unto ourselves – that we are 12,000 miles away from Europe, and need not worry about what happens in other parts of the world. I remind those who take that view that the distance of 12,000 miles did not save us from being involved in the late war, nor will it save us in the future. We have to try to insure that any Empire foreign policy for which we must bear responsibility is one to which we have assented. With full appreciation of the responsibility for what I am saying I suggest that this question to-day is not in a satisfactory position, and that, unless some better arrangements can be made, the position of an outlying

Dominion like Australia will become intolerable. If we are to take any responsibility for the Empire's foreign policy, there must be a better system, so that we may be consulted and have a better opportunity to express the views of the people of this country. This is a matter that will have to be considered at the Imperial Conference. We cannot blindly submit to any policy which may involve us in war. We want to know where we are going. Another great question of vital concern to the safety and welfare of the Empire is that of communications – wireless, shipping, and all means of communication between Australia and the Motherland. These are problems which come first – our safety must stand before everything. When that safety is assured we may then consider schemes for the betterment of our internal condition, but not before.

As to the other question, that of Empire trade relations, the Government regard it as of paramount importance. We all realize the great change that has come over Australia's position during the last few years. Before the war we had the whole world as our market; our surplus production was small, and no difficulties presented themselves in its disposal. During the war, however, the whole position changed, and to-day we are faced with a very different problem. Our production has increased, and we hope will go on increasing. To-day we have a great surplus to dispose of, and it is useless to go on producing unless we have markets. I venture to suggest that there has been too much stress laid on production, and not quite enough concern about markets for the disposal of our products. These two questions walk hand in hand, and to solve one we must first solve the other. The solution of the problem of the disposal of surplus production is more difficult to-day than at any other time in history. We all know the financial conditions that have followed as an aftermath of the war. A great number of nations which in ordinary course would take our surplus production are to-day so situated financially that it is impossible for us to trade with them. While our production has increased, and the surplus we have to dispose of is greater, our markets to-day are very greatly restricted. There is really only one sound way in which we can solve this problem, and that is by improved economic relations within the Empire itself. As honorable members know, Australia has entered into a reciprocal treaty with the Dominion of New Zealand; we have carried on negotiations with the Dominion of Canada for a reciprocal agreement, and the Government hope that as a result of the visit of Mr. Robb, the Canadian Minister for Customs, some satisfactory progress will be made. If these two agreements are entered into they will be helpful, but we must have something more. It is to the Motherland we must look primarily in considering the question of markets and the disposal of our surplus products. The position to-day is that Australia has given a great preference in her markets to British trade and commerce, a preference certainly greater than the Motherland would ever have felt justified in asking for herself. It is true, perhaps, that we expect from the Motherland some additional consideration in return for what we have done, but we realize here vast and very great difficulties. However, the Government feel that if the suggested Conference be held, the visit of Dominion statesmen and the holding of the Conference may create an atmosphere which will render possible the carrying through of arrangements which to-day appear to be beyond the realms of practical policy. For that reason, and believing that this question of the marketing and disposal of our surplus products is more vital than is any other, Australia welcomes the idea of the Economic Conference, and if it be held the Government will see that

the Commonwealth is properly represented.

I have had to deal with these matters at some length, but they are of paramount importance. In addition to the external Australian problems for which we have to find some solution, I would like to deal briefly with some of our internal problems. I do not propose to present the Government's policy, but in view of the suggestion that in a short period of less than three weeks we could have taken over the Departments, made all the necessary arrangements, framed our policy, and presented it to the House as a whole, it is only fair that I should lay before honorable members some of the problems we have to solve. First, I take those concerning the Territories over which the Commonwealth presides, as against those matters which involve the Commonwealth and the States. The Northern Territory problem has been with us for some time, and irrespective of what we may think of it, it remains. It is a fact – a problem that must be solved. We have to hold this gateway into Australia from the north. We must attempt to populate it and try to develop it.

**Mr. Gregory** – We cannot hold it unless we populate it.

**Mr. Bruce** – It is quite true that we have to develop it and populate it in some way, because it is imperative that we should hold it. The position in the Northern Territory was very closely considered by the late Government, and as far as opportunity presented itself has also been considered by the present Government. For some days past the Minister for Home and Territories has conferred with representatives of the pastoral and mining industries in the Territory. The whole question has been considered very closely. The Government are quite clearly of opinion that the only way in which this portion of Australia can be developed is by concentrating efforts on the development of the pastoral and mining industries. People have had visions of turning this Territory immediately into a great agricultural country even with small holdings, but the present Government do not believe that the position can possibly be handled in this way. We realize that development must follow through the improvement of the pastoral and mining industries.

Wrapped up in this problem is the question of the tenure under which land is held. There are some leases held under the old South Australian laws; others are held under Commonwealth ordinances. The Government think that the solution of the trouble lies to a large extent in the alteration of the leases at present held, by means of which subdivision will take place. A more complete, or, at all events, a more adequate stocking than at present is necessary in the Territory. Transport and communication facilities must also be improved. That, of course, embraces a better scheme for shipment from the Territory at some point yet to be determined, also railway development, and provision for roads and additional stock routes. I put these points forward because we have been challenged that we could have put forward a policy in regard to these very great things within a few weeks. This is the first internal problem I want honorable members to consider. The Government will say what they propose to do in regard to the Northern Territory when they submit their policy.

In regard to Papua and New Guinea, we are obliged to develop the mandated Territories according to the lines laid down by the mandate we have received. It is a complicated

question involving considerable difficulty in regard to the expropriated properties. Great efforts have been made for some time to dispose of these properties, but they have not been disposed of, and some alteration may have to be made in respect to the terms on which the Government are willing to sell. The problem of the mandated Territories involves the question of the protection of the natives. The Government have, as one of their basic ideas, the determination to carry out to the letter that phase of the mandate Australia has received which contemplates the fair, just, and equitable treatment of the native population.

With regard to the Federal Territory, embracing the Federal Capital, the Government are perfectly clear as to where they stand in this matter. They believe that the establishment of the Federal Capital on the basis accepted in the original compact must be honoured. Before the war it was contemplated that the Commonwealth should build at Canberra a capital with monumental buildings, which would stand for all time, and constitute a worthy metropolis for the great nation of Australia. But the war, which altered many things, rendered the carrying out of that original plan quite impracticable. Consequently the position was reviewed, and a means of honouring the obligation without putting an intolerable strain upon the finances of Australia was arrived at. Under the present plan the Capital will be gradually erected, and as soon as possible rendered habitable for the carrying on of the government of Australia. The Government are very clear on three points: Firstly, the work of the Federal Capital must proceed smoothly and evenly; money must be made available so that it will be a continuous job. Secondly, the Government believe that the Federal Territory and the building of the Capital should be placed in the hands of a Commission, somewhat on the lines of the Commission which administers the Federal Capital of Washington, in the United States of America. When we submit our policy, we shall submit such a scheme to Parliament. Thirdly, we propose to encourage private enterprise to come in and help in the development of the Territory, and in the building of the Capital. We do not think that the whole of the work should be carried out by the Government itself.

May I suggest to my friends – who say that we could have produced our policy here and gone ahead with legislation – one thought in regard to this matter. It is not the work of a week or of two weeks to prepare the whole basis upon which we would propose to hand over a great undertaking of this character to a Commission which would be responsible for the future conduct of such an important matter.

The next point to which I wish to direct the attention of honorable members relates to matters involving the Commonwealth and the States. The first of these questions is that of immigration. I need not remind honorable members of the position in regard to immigration and land settlement. They are all familiar with the fact that, with the exception of the territories to which I have just referred, the whole of the land in Australia is in the hands of the States, and that the States control this side of the question. I remind them, however, of the necessity for getting people into Australia, and I can tell them this much of the policy of the Government, that we intend to press on with immigration. It would be simplicity itself to have made a policy speech which merely indicated that we proposed to do this. The question is how it is to be done, and the consideration of that, I suggest, is a matter which

will take a little time. Within a fortnight no Government could have taken the whole of the immigration position, examined what has been done in the past, ascertained exactly where it stood in relation to the States, formed its opinion on all that has already been done, and formulated a policy for the future. Yet that is exactly what is suggested should have been done. The suggestion is absurd. The Government propose to consider the whole question of immigration. At the conference with the States, to which I have already referred, we propose to review all that has been done up to date, the agreements entered into with the three States concerned, the position of the British Government in respect to the matter, and the assistance it is prepared to give. When we meet the House, and set out our policy, we hope to be able to say clearly and exactly how we propose to bring about a steady flow of settlers. There is much talk about its necessity, but we find that there are really few people who pay much attention to it generally, and very few who consider particularly how the result which they desire may be brought about.

The finances of the Commonwealth and of the States will form another matter for consideration at the Conference. The Commonwealth, and each of the States, conducts its own finances, both with regard to revenue and loan. There are too many people in Australia who seem to think that Commonwealth and State finances are entirely separated. The credit of Australia is the credit of the Commonwealth and of all the States. It will be for us to try to insure that our finances throughout the whole country shall be conducted on the very best possible basis, because a weakness in any link is a source of weakness in the whole chain of our national credit. The necessity for our credit to-day being placed upon the very best possible basis will become apparent to all when the Conference is held. I do not propose to set out the figures at this stage, but the Commonwealth authorities will place before the Conference the full and exact position concerning existing loan commitments – not the loan commitments of any one State, or of the Commonwealth alone, but of Australia as a whole. We intend also to set out details of the loans which are to be converted between the present date and 1930. It will be an excellent thing that Australia's national position, for once at any rate, should be presented as a whole, so that we may all take stock of the real facts, ... (continues)

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