

94K Fraser Court,
Kingston, 2604.

6th February, 1975

Dear Sir,

A possible change of government later this year should not be a matter for too much concern, since the difference in policies between the Labor government and the conservative alternative is becoming increasingly difficult to discern. Thus in September Dr. Cairns told us all to work harder, and at Christmas Mr. Bryant urged us to buy more. In January the Prime Minister insisted that wage demands were the cause of inflation, and in February our 'socialist' Treasurer who had previously exhorted us to buy more cars, tells us, in effect, that the business of Australia is business.

That the Labor government, although presenting itself as one of "change and reform", has a commitment to the industrial-consumer status quo and protecting business, and an aversion to politically difficult decisions approaching that of its predecessors is demonstrated by its determination that there shall be no restructuring (even on a long-term basis) of employment in the motor vehicle industry. This industry is widely recognised as a major polluter and waster of resources, and was, until recently, the favourite target of several ministers who are now strangely silent on the subject. The employment in this environmentally damaging industry which the government is determined to preserve without change, on a long term basis and apparently at virtually any cost, is of such poor quality that the industrial sabotage which was common a few years ago and is now reappearing was attributed by the unions to the miserable nature of the work. In normal times of full employment the immigration program played an essential part in maintaining the supply of workers to fill these undesirable jobs.

The impression of the early days of the Labor government that Australians had somehow managed to elect a government of courage, independence and principle has long since faded. But nowhere is the lack of these qualities so clear as in the decision to compete with the opposition in the development stakes and to proceed with the sale of uranium for 'peaceful purposes'. The Prime Minister has attempted to quell doubts about environmental hazards by appealing to the inadequate standards of the International Atomic Energy Authority and by stating that no one overseas to whom he spoke cared a jot about the hazards of pollution from controlled nuclear plants or waste, and that (therefore) no one here should either. Mr. Connor, displaying a similar slavish concern for what the international neighbours think, claims that the Australian government would become a laughing stock if it attempted to act with courage and principle on the matter of uranium sales. The request for a public inquiry to enable adequate public discussion of the momentous moral issues involved in uranium sales has been refused, on the thin and question-begging grounds that this would jeopardise one prematurely concluded contract and others in the pipeline.

The switch to nuclear fission energy sources which the Australian government's decision will greatly assist is likely to impose enormous burdens and risks on future people for nuclear waste disposal as long as 200,000 years in the future on conservative estimates. There are clear alternatives to its use. The moral position of Australia, as an important supplier of this material, may be likened to that of an arms or heroin peddler - obtaining a comfortable existence for itself at the expense of enormous costs to other people. Just as in the case of the arms or heroin dealer, the moral responsibility of the supplier cannot be evaded by the pretence that the moral decision is entirely that of his customer.

V. & R. Routley

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