

*FULL TEXT OF DON CHIPP'S RESIGNATION SPEECH TO THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 24, 1977*

I wish to announce to the House that I have resigned from the Liberal Party of Australia as from today. I believe I have conformed with the courtesies demanded of such a decision. I have informed you, sir, the Leader of my Party, the Right Honourable the Prime Minister (Mr. Malcolm Fraser), the Victorian State President of the Liberal Party of Australia and the Chairman of the Hotham Electoral committee of the Liberal Party. It naturally follows that I shall not be presenting myself as a candidate for the Liberal Party of Australia at the new House of Representatives election.

I shall continue to represent the Division of Hotham in this House for the duration of this parliament or until such earlier time as circumstances may demand. Although I am proud of the high personal vote I receive from the electors of Hotham, I recognize that I am here by virtue of my former membership of the Liberal Party and therefore believe it is proper that I should generally give my vote in support of the Government in the business before the House and in the conduct of the business of the House.

However, I will exercise the right - which is already held by all members of the Liberal Party - to vote against the Government on any issue which a member believes to be not in the best interests of the country or his constituents. I extend my gratitude to the many friends and members of the Liberal Party in Hotham who have loyally supported me over the years and given me the privilege of serving in the House.

I hope that my friends and colleagues in the Parliamentary Liberal Party will understand my reasons in taking this decision and that the personal friendships and relationships that I have made and enjoyed over the years will not be impaired by my action. I note in passing that notwithstanding the tag of 'rebel' that some people have chosen to put upon me, I have never exercised that right of voting against my Party in my 16 years in this place. In fact, I think it is fair to me to place on record that during the 15-month term of this Government, I have been publicly critical of its decisions on only five occasions. These were:

- 1. The 25% cut in overseas aid;*
- 2. The abolition of the Australian Assistance Plan which I, with the full authority of the Joint Parties had previously commended to this House as being one of the most exciting and progressive social reforms ever undertaken;*
- 3. The proposed abolition of the financial benefits for pensioners;*
- 4. The original breach of the promise to index pensions; and*
- 5. The decision to devalue the currency and once that decision was taken, the refusal to lower the tariffs so as to contain the inflationary effects of that move.*

When these give public criticisms are put against the dozens of times I have publicly supported the Government even on occasions when I did not agree with it, I believe the tag of 'rebel' is probably unfair. There have in fact been a great number of issues with which I have strongly disagreed and on most of which I have been invited by the media to criticize my Party.

I have refrained from that criticism in the interests of Party unity and with a view to assisting the Government in overcoming the massive problems it faces, many of which were inherited from the results of the gross mal-administration of the Labor Party's terms in office.

However the number of significant Government actions which conflict with my own views are now so many that **I feel that my continual membership of the Liberal Party, as it is now led, managed and structured, would be incompatible with my beliefs and would constitute an act of hypocrisy.**

Inevitably, some people will impugn on my action and ascribe to it the motive that I am taking this course because I am not in the cabinet. To that I simply state without argument that under no circumstances could I, or would I, serve as minister under the present leadership. Members of the House would know that one reaches a decision such as this - after giving 16 years of one's life to it - not without a great deal of deep thought and troubled deliberation; but as one who at least in latter years has tried to pursue a course of true liberalism I find I can no longer do that within the confines of the Party. In these circumstances I believe the only honourable thing to do is to resign. For the record I simply state my areas of contention without debating them. I cannot agree with the Government's current economic policy. Particularly, I am concerned with its failure to honour the promise to the private sector to give it stable and definite future guidelines to allow it to plan and invest for the future. I believe the private businessman, especially the small businessman, who employs the bulk of the workforce of this country, is more confused, more in the dark about the future, and less confident that he was 15 months ago. This seems to be strange behaviour for a Party that champions the cause of free enterprise.

I am very critical of the lack of consultation between the Government and the Trade Union movement. It would be cruel and unfair to ask the worker to be the sole bearer of the cost of reducing inflation; but wages are too high and taxes are too high to provide incentives for increased productivity by both workers and management. Interest rates are devastating especially to the young, and yet no attempt at real, sensible and sensitive discussion between the Prime Minister and the President of the A.C.T.U. has been made. In fact the Prime Minister has refused to enter such discussions instead while the economy continues to slump, these two leaders seem to be continued in a public slanging match while the economy continues to deteriorate and the responsible blue and white collar Australian workers and management suffer. I confess to a very deep concern about the intransigence of the Prime Minister in bringing in the Industrial Relations Bureau legislation at this - a time of remarkable industrial peace and at a time when it is being vigorously opposed by both employees and employers alike.

I have been grossly disappointed with the attitude of the Government on uranium mining. Notwithstanding the repeated requests by the Fox report for a full parliamentary debate we have had two hours only on it and it is now off the notice paper. I am grateful to the Leader of the House (Mr. Sinclair) for giving me an understanding this morning that the matter will be restored to the notice paper.

The last straw on this issue was the action of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Anthony) in launching a pro-uranium book simultaneously with a statement by the Ambassador of Japan advocating the mining of Australian uranium. The breach of our promise to continue the Australian Assistance Plan; wage indexation; the value of the currency; the Social Welfare Commission; increased research on solar energy are matters which have disturbed me greatly.

Further, an incredible attitude towards Timor, an overt and capricious provocation of Russia, an almost pathetic reliance on the non-proliferation treaty which the Fox Report described as giving only an 'illusion of protection'; the absence of strong cabinet action to overcome the bureaucratic bungling and red tape affecting human beings seeking refuge from Indo-China are some other matters which have left me deeply concerned.

On the other hand, I draw no comfort from the current attitudes and policies of the A.L.P. although the state of the world economy contributed in some way to Australia's economic problems during its three years of office its mismanagement of the economy resulting in the unique situation of causing unemployment to increase simultaneously with inflation was near catastrophic. I would be a little encouraged if I believed that it has learned some lessons from its errors but that does not seem to be the case. It is still motivated by events of the past, still obsessed with its socialist ideas and a hatred of private enterprise, and dominated by the shadowy faces in the trade union movement. In opposition its performance has been little short of ludicrous in questioning and probing the Government on the real issues that affect the country.

I draw no comfort at all from the public opinion polls which indicate a Labor Government is possible - if not probably - in the near future. I find it almost unbelievable that the leader of the opposition (Mr. E.G. Whitlam) a man who led his Party to its most humiliating defeat in history just 15 months ago - now ranks about equally in popularity and respect with the Prime Minister. Does this mean that the people of Australia hold both men and both parties in relatively low esteem?

In conclusion may I say that I have become disenchanted with party politics as they are practiced in this country and with the pressure groups which have an undue influence on the major parties. The National Country Party properly represents the interests of a small sectional group - some of the rural community - but improperly in my view, and unduly, influences national policies quite out of proportion to the small group it represents.

The Labor Party is dominated by the vested interests of trade unions. The Liberal Party, although properly concerned with the vital role of private enterprise seems too preoccupied with the wants of what is euphemistically known as 'big business' to the sacrifice and detriment of medium and small-size businesses who form the backbone of our industrial and commercial sectors.

The parties seem to polarize on almost every issue, sometimes seemingly just for the sake of it, and I wonder whether the ordinary voter is not becoming sick and tired of the vested interests which unduly influence the present political patterns and yearn for the emergence of a third political force, representing the middle of the road policies which would owe allegiance to no outside pressure group.

Perhaps it may be the right time to test that proposition. That move will have to come from those people in Australia who believe in the encouragement of free enterprise, who believe it has not had a 'fair go' from interfering Governments who regularly change, without warning, the conditions under which they operate. It must come from people who believe in true justice for the workforce and compassion for those in need but who believe that actions must be taken to prevent social problems from occurring rather than trying to cure them and hide them once they have arrived. But above all, it may come from those people who are disgusted with those politicians and political parties who indulge mainly in cheap political point scoring in the endless pursuit of votes at any price and from people who want their parliament to identify the real and significant problems of the future and to take action now which will make the country a good, safe and sound place for future generations.