

Address to Menzies Research Centre, 'The Forgotten People' 75th Anniversary Dinner

PRIME MINISTER:

Alan, former Prime Minister John Howard, Janette Howard, Tony Abbott, my many ministerial colleagues and Parliamentary colleagues, dear friends, admirers of Robert Menzies one and all – and above all, Heather. I was reading again, the letter your father wrote to you. His wit and his affection for you and his love for you, the dedication he showed over all those years, inspire us today. So we're so honoured that you're here with us tonight.

Menzies gave these radio talks in 1942 and the most famous one, the 'Forgotten People' which we shall shortly hear, was given on this day, this evening, 75 years ago.

This was a time that Churchill described as the 'hinge of fate', 1942. It was as though one catastrophe was being piled onto another. Pearl Harbour had been bombed, the pride of the American Navy had been sunk or disabled, save its aircraft carriers mercifully. Singapore had fallen. 22,000 Australian soldiers were prisoners of the Japanese. Those that weren't, were in the most part in the Middle East.

The Japanese seemed as irresistible and just two weeks before Menzies gave this broadcast which we'll hear tonight, there was the Battle of the Coral Sea. For the first time, the hinge of fate started to turn. Australians and Americans of the United States Navy and the Royal Australian Navy, serving together under a joint command, succeeded in turning back the Japanese.

So on this day 75 years ago, Australians could begin coolly to consider, in the absence of bravado, that the tide had turned. This speech we're going to hear tonight of Menzies' is not the first. But more than any other, it summoned up all of his characteristically eloquent and principled vision for Australia beyond the war.

Liberal democracies in those years seemed caught between the hammer of fascism and the anvil of communism, each offering the vision of the mighty all-knowing State. So as Menzies spoke in the broadcast, and in the other 36 broadcasts he did so with the sound reason of a generous and liberal mind.

He spoke up for the foot soldiers in Edmund Burke's small platoons, equally forgotten in the boardrooms of the mighty corporations and in the back rooms of the Trades Hall.

With a common sense that resonates right up today, indeed this very night, he dismissed those who try to wage a hate-filled class war and divide Australians and turn them on each other. He steered resolutely to the centre

ground and put his faith in the good will, the common sense and the enterprise of his fellow Australians.

Menzies believed, as we his successors believe today, that the task of government is not as Labor would say, to tell Australians what is best but rather to enable them to do their best.

To increase their opportunities. Expand their horizons. So that they can pursue their dreams for themselves and for their children – like the Scottish ploughman and the Scottish farmer of whom we will hear in just a moment.

Menzies had not long lost the Prime Ministership. Politically this was his wilderness period, but there is no rancour or bitterness in his broadcasts. He is as calm as he is considered, as elegant as he is erudite.

His humour shines through. In one broadcast, asked whether so much war and destruction showed Christianity has failed, he suggests we should try practising it first.

He resisted populism when state premiers were condemned for challenging in the courts the federal takeover of income tax, he defended their constitutional right to do so and spoke up for the rule of law.

Security under the law, in Erskine's phrase he said: "is not something precariously dependent upon the whim of a mob. It is that security to which a man may confidently and calmly appeal, even though every other's hand may be against him. The law's greatest benefits are for the minority man; the individual".

And when he introduced as Prime Minister in the previous year, the national security bill that gave sweeping powers to the Government to control the economy, he did so with this sober warning;

"The greatest tragedy that could overcome a country, would be for it to fight a successful war in defence of liberty and lose its own liberty in the process."

In April 1942 – before the Battle of the Coral Sea – Menzies in another broadcast spoke about hatred. He decried a government campaign that he felt was designed to encourage Australians to hate the Japanese. This is what he said;

"It is an offence to an honest citizen to imagine that the cold, evil and repulsive spirit of racial hatred must be substituted for honest and brave indignation, if his greatest effort is to be obtained."

"Peace may be all sorts of things – a real end of war, a mere exhaustion, an armed interlude before the next struggle. But it will only be by a profound stirring in the hearts of men that we shall reach goodwill."

"In short, when this war is over, we all hope to live in a better world in which both Germans and Japanese – violently purged of their lust for material power – will be able to live and move in amity with ourselves."

What does it say about the character of a man that could write such generous words in such hard days?

And as John Howard has described as one of his greatest achievement in government, the 1957 Commerce Treaty with Japan. An extraordinary act of reconciliation.

In another broadcast he talked reassuringly about our new American ally, a complement to our unbreakable bond with Britain, not a threat.

“Now, I am like you,” said Menzies, “dyed-in-the-wool British, and have a firm belief that the courage, humour, tenacity and resourcefulness of our own race never shone more brightly than now.”

“But it is a great thing for us to have such allies as these Americans.”

“We are together now for the urgent saving of the safety of the world.”

“When that task is over, I hope we shall remain together for the keeping of that safety for ever and ever.”

In anticipation, perhaps of what was to become the ANZUS Treaty and the bedrock of our security ever since.

The last of his broadcasts was in November 1942 and it was on the importance of good humour which he analysed as between the Irish, Scots, English and French. He also noted that the Germans lacked humour entirely, but his conclusion on the importance of humour generally and in politics, was entirely consistent with his liberal values of individualism.

“The real explanation,” Menzies said, “of the sovereign importance of humour is that it is an individual thing.”

“No Government department regulates or distributes it.”

“It is neither rationalised nor nationalised, nor socialised, nor organised, nor finalised.”

“No politics based upon gloomy fanaticism can succeed with us, for to our eternal salvation, we shall always laugh at the wrong time – which will probably turn out to be the right time.”

Thank you very much.

[ENDS]

The Tories offer pensioners nothing but insecurity – Debbie Abrahams

Labour is today (Tuesday 23 May) challenging the Tories to come clean on their plans for older people, after they caused confusion with their failed attempt to 'clarify' their social care policy.

Labour is calling on Theresa May to guarantee pensioners won't be hit with further cuts to universal benefits or further hits to their incomes.

The challenge comes as Labour warns that, having broken their promise on social care already and announced plans to means test Winter Fuel Payments, hitting up to ten million pensioners, the Tories could next come for other benefits, including free bus passes and TV licences.

Debbie Abrahams, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, said:

"The Tories have plunged pensioners into insecurity. Their manifesto promised to take away winter fuel allowances; it ditched the security of the triple lock; and proposed making people pay for essential care with their homes.

"Yesterday, they attempted to back away from their plans, but only raised more questions about what they were going to do instead. They could offer no reassurance to worried pensioners.

"Given the gaping hole in the Tory plans, and the dumping of their existing promises, the risk is now that the Tories could have other nasty surprises for pensioners up their sleeves. There's a real possibility that other hard earned benefits like bus passes and free TV licenses could be next."

"The promises in the Tory manifesto are clearly no longer worth the paper they're written on. So we are today calling for Theresa May to come clean, set out what exactly she's planning and rule out definitively further attacks on pensioners' living standards.

"You can't trust the Tories to protect pensioners. They offer only insecurity."

ENDS

Background:

“Nothing has changed” – the Tories promise insecurity for pensioners

We have a crisis in social care under the Tories:

- o The Tories have starved the system of money, taking £4.6 billion out of social care between 2010 and 2015.
- o The number of people receiving state funded social care fell by over a quarter under the Tories.
- o This year care firms have ended contracts with 95 councils, warning they are unable to deliver services on the amount they are being paid^[i].
- o There are now 1.2 million older people (1 in 8) with unmet care needs in England.
- o There is a currently a funding gap of £600 million for 2017/18, which will rise to £2.1bn by 2019/20.^[ii]

To help address the Tory social care crisis, Labour has promised to invest £8bn into social care in the next parliament, including an immediate £1bn.

“Our first urgent task will be to address the immediate funding crisis. We will increase the social care budgets by a further £8 billion over the lifetime of the next Parliament, including an additional £1 billion for the first year.”

The Labour Party Manifesto 2017

The Tories haven't promised to match this funding. Instead they came forward with a plan which originally said that they would cap care costs and would help pay for it by means testing Winter Fuel Payments.

“So we will means test Winter Fuel Payments, focusing assistance on the least well-off pensioners, who are most at risk of fuel poverty. The money released will be transferred directly to health and social care, helping to provide dignity and care to the most vulnerable pensioners and reassurance to their families.”

The Conservative Party Manifesto 2017

“we will introduce a single capital floor, set at £100,000, more than four times the current means test threshold.

This will ensure that, no matter how large the cost of care turns out to be, people will always retain at least £100,000 of their savings and assets, including value in the family home.”

The Conservative Party Manifesto 2017

· They explicitly rejected the policy of having a cap as proposed by Andrew Dilnot.

Jeremy Hunt: At the moment if you end up going into a care home, you could get down to £23,000 and now we’re quadrupling that amount. And what is the alternative? I think this is the important thing because I know you had Sir Andrew Dilnot on earlier. If you have that cap that was his proposal...

Nick Robinson: Excuse me, it was your proposal in your last manifesto. You promised to implement it; you passed a law to implement it. You then said let’s delay it a few years. So let’s not slop it off to Sir Andrew Dilnot, this was a Tory manifesto promise.

JH:
Yes, and we couldn’t be being clearer.

NR:
You’re dropping it.

JH:
Yes, and not only are we dropping it but we are dropping it ahead of a general election and we’re being completely explicit in our manifesto that we’re dropping it. We’re dropping it because we’ve looked again at this proposal and we don’t think it’s fair.

BBC Radio Four: Today, 18 May 2017

· Despite a chorus of disapproval in response to their plans, Theresa May herself defended the policy just this weekend.

“You have a situation where two widows are living side by side in homes of the same value. One of them [has] saved up all their life and has over £23,000 in savings, now finds that they need care in a home and has to pay for that because they are above the current threshold.

Then there is [the widow] next door who has perhaps lived the good life and doesn't have those savings and gets in for free. And I think we are equalising home and residential calculations and setting the threshold four times higher at £100,000.

'We are being fair to those who have saved over time.'

Theresa

May, The Times, 20 May 2017

· Now they've changed their minds, but they can't provide detail about what their plan will mean. And they have announced no extra money for social care.

· This is not just a chaotic change of direction, it's a repeat of a broken promise. In their 2015 Manifesto, the Tories promised to introduce a cap on charges.

"We will cap charges for residential social care from April 2016 and also allow deferred

payment agreements, so no one has to sell their home."

Conservative Party Manifesto 2015, Page 65

· Only weeks after the 2015 general election, they broke their promise and announced that the cap on charges for residential social care would be delayed until 2020.

"we have taken the difficult decision to delay the introduction of the cap on care costs system until April 2020."

Written Statement: Care Costs, Lord Prior of Brampton, 17 July 2015

The Tories have broken their promise before, how can they be trusted not to do so again?

What will the Tories do to fill the gap?

The Tory reversal leaves a substantial black hole in the Tory manifesto. To date there is no detail on how the cap will operate, at what level it will be set, who it will apply to and, crucially, how the Tories will deal with the funding gap in social care which must be filled to give the system the stability it needs.

- The Tories also have a £2bn black hole in their plans caused by their reversal on NICs earlier this year.

- After the U-turn on NICs Hammond said that he would address the £2bn black hole in the forthcoming Autumn Budget which would be 'broadly fiscally neutral'. The £2bn would come from either higher taxes or more cuts elsewhere.

As a result of the decision I have announced today, the spring Budget is no longer broadly fiscally neutral, but I am committed to addressing that issue in the autumn. The intention remains to balance the measures that we are delivering between spending and taxation.

*Philip
Hammond, 15 March 2017*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-03-15/debates/8C87BBE6-1F11-44F8-A01E-1D99ECBD0ACA/Class4NationalInsuranceContributions?highlight=broadly%20fiscally%20neutral#contribution-A24CFA97-B0EC-4B6D-8C7F-DC88B51F6250>

- Today's U-turn, and Hammond's commitment to a 'broadly fiscally neutral' Autumn Budget, means we can expect either post-election tax rises or further cuts to vital public services under a Tory government.

- The Tories already pose a threat to pensioners with their plans to cut Winter Fuel Payments for up to 10 million pensioners.

- o Scrap the Triple Lock on state pensions after 2020.

- o Cut Winter Fuel Payments for up to 10 million pensioners.

- o Raise the State Pension age for up to 34 million workers.

- **That threat could now get even greater, as the Tories may look to**

means-test other pensioner benefits such as free bus passes and free TV licences.

- The Tory Manifesto's wording only commits Theresa May to maintaining the existence of current benefits throughout the duration of the parliament.

"We will maintain all other pensioner benefits, including free bus passes, eye tests, prescriptions and TV licences, for the duration of this parliament."

Conservative Party Manifesto, 2017

- This potentially leaves the door open to the introduction of new means-testing and plans to phase out, reduce, or end benefits after that parliament.

- More than 4 million over 75s receive a free TV licences and 9 million pensioners receive a free bus pass in England alone.

- Theresa May has refused to rule out cutting other universal pensioner benefits. Just two days before the publication of the Conservative Manifesto, Theresa May refused to give a straight answer when asked to commit to keeping free bus passes.

Robert Peston: Thomas is concerned you might take away bus passes from pensioners and the disabled?

Theresa May: Well, again, there may be a number of questions that will come in which are issues that will be addressed when we publish our manifesto later this week. I'd rather wait until we publish that package in the manifesto for people to see what we're going to do.

ITV News Facebook Live, 15 May 2017

Other senior Tories have in the past opposed universal pensioner benefits

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Damian Green has described free bus passes as a "bribe" saying they "take the prize for sheer

all-encompassing pointlessness”.

“Many Chancellors have indulged in pre-election bribes, some effective, some ineffective and some straightforwardly cynical, but to offer free off-peak bus passes for pensioners takes the prize for sheer all-encompassing pointlessness in the large areas of the country where there will be no one to receive the bribe that the Chancellor is trying to give them.”

Damian

Green, House of Commons debate, Hansard, 22 March 2005, Column 810

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/vo050322/debtext/50322-27.htm>

· Senior Ministers Sajid Javid, Matthew Hancock and Liz Truss have supported the Free Enterprise Group which has previously called for free bus passes and free TV licences to be means-tested.

“Pensioners with incomes of more than £50,000 should lose their free TV licences, bus passes and winter fuel allowances to help cut the deficit, senior Tory MPs have said [...] The Free Enterprise Group numbers 39 Conservative MPs among its supporters, including the Treasury minister Sajid Javid, the skills minister Matthew Hancock, and the childcare minister Elizabeth Truss”

Telegraph, 22 November 2012,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/9694503/Wealthy-pensioners-should-lose-free-bus-pass-MPs-suggest.html>

· Former Culture Secretary John Whittingdale has previously spoken of the case for means-testing TV licences.

“I can see a case for means-testing on the same grounds of why should a rich retired person get a winter fuel payment, so why should they get a free TV licence? [...]“But these are matters for the BBC to consider. They could get rid of the free TV licence altogether if they chose to do so but they could not do it until 2020.”

John

Whittingdale, reported in The Times, ‘Free TV licences could be means tested for over 75s’, 21 May 2017

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/free-tv-licences-could-be-means-tested-for-over-75s-8ktzgbn9t>

Submersible Jiaolong to carry journalist into Mariana Trench

Jiaolong, China's manned submersible, will conduct a dive in the Mariana Trench on Tuesday, with a Xinhua News Agency journalist on board.

Its mother ship Xiangyanghong 09 set sail for the Yap and Mariana trenches, with Jiaolong and 96 scientists aboard on May 16, the beginning of the third stage of China's 38th oceanic expedition.

The ship arrived at the Mariana area Monday and started testing temperature, salinity and depth for Tuesday's dive, the first of the expedition's third stage.

Ten dives are planned for the third stage. The first is expected to reach a depth of 4,800 meters and last about nine hours.

According to Tang Jialing, chief crew member for Tuesday's operation, the dive will take place at the steeper northern slope of the Mariana's "Challenger Deep" and Jiaolong will navigate underwater for two or three kilometers.

In addition to allowing the crew to observe the seabed closely, the mission will also make videos and photograph the seafloor.

With its two mechanical arms, Jiaolong will collect samples of sea water, sediment, deep-sea life and rocks depending on the circumstances.

The mission will study the mineralogy and geochemistry of sediment and rocks in the area to raise understanding of geological activities. Research will include deep-sea microbes and other life forms, according to Tang.

After Tuesday's dive, the following four dives in the trench will reach depths of up to 6,700 meters.

According to Wu Changbin, commander of the expedition's third stage, Jiaolong will survey the abyssopelagic zone to learn more about that adaptive mechanism in extreme environments of marine life.

The 38th oceanic scientific expedition started on Feb. 6. Jiaolong made dives in the northwestern Indian Ocean and the South China Sea in the mission's first two stages.

Named after a mythical dragon, Jiaolong reached a maximum depth of 7,062 meters in the Mariana Trench in June 2012.

New technology allows shoppers to pay with their faces

Chinese shoppers will soon be able to free up their hands, thanks to new technology that enables consumers to pay with their faces.

“We have finished an experiment for facial recognition payment and it will be used in the near future,” said Chen Jidong on Monday, who is in charge of biometric identification technology at Ant Financial, the affiliate financial service of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba.

Alipay is now testing the technology. According to a video demonstrating the facial recognition payment system, shoppers can complete payment in just two steps: facial scanning and entering the last four digits of their mobile phone numbers.

While many viewers marvelled at the technology, some web users were worried about security.

Chen told Xinhua that Alipay will ask users to blink, smile, shake their heads or make other movements while using the service to differentiate real people from photos or videos.

Chen said that user authorization will be required to use facial recognition payment, but didn't give an exact date for when the service will debut.

Facial recognition payment was listed among 10 breakthrough technologies by the MIT Technology Review earlier this year.

In 2015, Alipay started using a face-detection system for customer log in. The technology has also been used by other Internet companies such as Baidu and Tencent.

Social care

I am glad the Prime Minister has confirmed that the social care policy will be set out in more detail in a Green Paper with a proper consultation, as I assumed when I first wrote about it. That was why I decided to consult through this site on the changes. She has also made clear that there will be a cap on how much social care cost someone has to pay. This means there are now two ways the proposals are more generous than current policy. There could be a £100,000 higher cut off for anyone in a care home having to spend their

own money on the fees, four times the current permitted capital sum. There could be a ceiling on how much care cost someone living in their own home has to pay, where there is none for someone with substantial savings today. The Prime Minister also confirmed that under the proposals no-one living in their own home would have to sell their home to pay the social care costs.

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