

Sent 5/7

BROADCAST:

3HA Sunday, 2 July, 1972
3YB Thursday, 6 July, 1972
3LK Tuesday, 4 July, 1972

When I was visiting Warrnambool High School a few days ago, a group of students handed me a petition signed by several hundred people protesting against the French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

It is often said that young people these days are more aware of current issues than their parents and grandparents were at their age. The action of those Warrnambool students demonstrated more than just an awareness of issues. It showed a deep concern which is born of that awareness, a concern which I applaud.

Let me come to the particular matter with which they were concerned. There seems to be a misconception that the Australian Government has been slow to react to the French tests, as if we had only just discovered they were being held.

In fact, we have been active in protesting against this kind of occurrence for a decade. As far back as 1963, a treaty for a partial ban on nuclear tests banned tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. We took our stand against nuclear tests when we ratified that treaty.

Coming to the present time, let me make it quite clear that the Commonwealth Government wanted the current series of tests abandoned and we made the first protest this year to France on March 29. That's right. We were the first country this year to protest against the current French tests in the Pacific. The trouble is that it is only recently that the whole affair has become a public issue.

Then as recently as last month, the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. Marshall, and our Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon, sent a joint message to the conference of the committee on disarmament in Geneva protesting at the French tests. In the course of that message, they said France had taken the decision to proceed with such tests

contrary to the appeals made to it by many Pacific countries, contrary to the urging of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and contrary to the recent call by the Stockholm Conference which has especially condemned those tests carried out in the atmosphere.

I quote from the message of the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers:

"The Australian and New Zealand Governments, reflecting the grave concern felt throughout their communities and conscious that the problem of atmospheric testing in their region is part only of a broader problem; recalling their support at the UN General Assembly November 1971 for resolution 2828 (c) which stressed the urgency of bringing to a halt all nuclear weapon testing in all environments by all States; call jointly on the conference of the Committee on Disarmament to continue to accord high priority to the question of the urgent need for the suspension of such tests and the formulation of a comprehensive test ban treaty." That's the end of the quote.

Having said all that and to allay unnecessary fears, I should say that Australia has a network of observer stations providing information on radio active fall-out for the Atomic Weapons Test Committee. All the information shows that there is no harmful effect on the Australian population. I don't say this in any way to weaken the Australian Government's objections to the tests, but to counter any unreasonable concern people might have about the tests from press reports.

Let me say a word about health. The present national health scheme has been evolved by the Commonwealth to suit Australian conditions and is based on many years of practical experience. It is not an impersonal, nationalised arrangement, like the so-called

"free" schemes in some other countries in which the patient can so easily be lost in the machine.

Consider the advantages. Our scheme is voluntary - you don't have to join it. You can choose any doctor, or change to any doctor if you want to, and women know how vital this freedom of choice can be.

The amount of the doctor's bill you have to pay, whether for surgery or home visits, is limited. Where doctors participate under the common fee plan, your cost is 80 cents for a surgery visit and \$1.20 for a home visit. The doctor, too, has freedom. He is not compelled to accept a quota of patients under a salaried or nationalised health scheme, and he can fix his own fee, although with notable exceptions, especially with some sections in New South Wales, the medical profession does cooperate.

The Commonwealth has ensured that medical and hospital insurance is not an unreasonable burden on low income earners. Families whose incomes are below \$51.50 a week have all their contributions to medical and hospital funds paid for. For those with family incomes below \$54.50, the Commonwealth pays two thirds of the contributions, and one third for those with a family income below \$57.50.

There's also a \$5 limit on operations where the common fee applies.

The overriding truth is that the Commonwealth's scheme is working and working well. It is constantly being examined and improved for the benefit of the Australian people. So I urge you to think carefully about the matter before you give unthinking support to something labelled "free health" but which in reality could turn out to be a very expensive experiment in nationalised

medicine without real benefit to you. We want a scheme that works and doesn't cost the earth, because, as you know, in the end it is always the taxpayer who pays the bill.

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For further information: Collin Myers
Tel. Canberra 73 3261