Last week, Federal Parliament debated a statement by the Treasurer, Mr. Snedden, on the Australian economy, and I took the opportunity to speak in his support.

Much has been written and said about the state of our economy in recent months, and today I shall discuss some aspects of it.

First, employment. Under successive Liberal-Country Party Governments Australia has experienced a period of full employment quite unparalleled in our history and, for that matter, in the history of many other countries. Of course, we recognise there is a problem of unemployment - we have responded to it by lifting the unemployment benefits substantially and by providing State Governments with grants now totalling $4.5 million a month to create employment in rural areas. This is in addition to the millions of dollars provided to the States at the last Premiers' Conference. But our unemployment rate is only a mere fraction of those in other countries. In the United States, for instance, it is 5.9 per cent, in Great Britain 5.8 per cent, and in Canada 6.2 per cent.

Turning to inflation, the Treasurer has conceded that this is a problem which is giving the Government concern. While the current rate of inflation in Australia is greater than it is in some other advanced countries, over the long term, our efforts in this area are better than those of most other nations.
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A key indicator of the wisdom of our economic management was the applause the Commonwealth received from all Premiers after the Premiers' Conference in Canberra last month. This was made more meaningful when one considers that two of the six Premiers are Labor leaders.

I turn now to the policies of the Opposition in the economic field because we must examine these if we are to have any idea of their handling of the nation's affairs if they became the Government.

First, the A.L.P. has a policy of price control. The Leader of the Opposition has a policy of price justification. How the two - the A.L.P. and its leader - would attempt to reconcile their differences over this is anyone's guess. But talking about price control, the A.L.P. would establish maximum prices, yet at the same time would support a system of arbitration establishing minimum wages. In many cases, Australia's wages tribunals take into account price levels. And so, immediately there is a basic conflict in the Opposition's two proposals - minimum wage fixing and maximum price fixing. I suggest that no economy could be operated on that basis.

The A.L.P. has a policy of a 35-hour week - a 35-hour week at a time when there are immense tasks facing us in our efforts to build a bigger, better and greater Australia.

How can we achieve this goal, how can we acquire the better standard of living we all seek, with a 35-hour working week? The Treasurer has indicated that the increased
costs to the total Australian community resulting from a 35-hour week would be about $2600 million a year. I can recall only a few months ago telling you about the 35-hour week's impact specifically on rural communities - how it would reduce the net income of woolgrowers by 40 per cent and that of dairy farmers by 37 per cent. And yet the A.L.P. is pledged to impose this on the community - a community which I believe generally rejects such a measure as a real threat to our economic progress and well-being.

At the rural level, Dr. Patterson is perhaps the only person in the A.L.P. with any knowledge of rural affairs. Yet last year, he was publicly supporting assistance to primary industries while his A.L.P. colleagues were busily resolving at their Federal Conference to withdraw Government support from them. In Dr. Patterson's own words, if the A.L.P. caucus followed the conference decision, "it means we will have to vote against the Wheat Stabilisation Bill, Dairy Industry, the various wool commitments, and the Australian Wool Commission". These are the words of Dr. Patterson, the only expert in the A.L.P. on rural affairs. Yet he was excluded from the A.L.P. conference at Launceston where policy was framed.

My main point in this is that past experience has shown that the Parliamentary Leaders of the A.L.P. will always give way to the pressure from the left-wing dominated A.L.P. organisation. Recent evidence has shown that Dr. Patterson hasn't a chance. He will be virtually a
voice in the wilderness. If Labor ever becomes the Government we can fully expect no help for rural subsidies. Mr. Whitlam proved this for us last year when, within 36 hours, he was forced by union pressure on his Parliamentary caucus to reverse his announced intention to include fines under certain circumstances on striking workers.

Summing up, the Australian economy has a basic underlying strength. The 35-hour week and withdrawal of rural subsidies are not the devices to which a responsible Government, concerned with steady growth in the nation's economy, will resort.