

THE I.P.A.

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC

289 Flinders Lane,



REVIEW

AFFAIRS — VICTORIA

Melbourne — Victoria

Vol. IV

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1950

No. 1

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Editorial

THE ELECTION

For free enterprise in Australia, December 10, 1949, marks a day of hope and opportunity, but not a final and triumphant culmination.

A PART from the damage which the socialist policy of the Labour Party might have inflicted on the physical form of business through nationalisation, controls and heavy taxation, its most serious aspect would have been its effect on the spirit of enterprise. For the fruitful and productive expression of that spirit, confidence is the prime essential, and there can be no doubt that, among large sections of business, confidence in the political philosophy and immediate programme of the Labour Party is conspicuously lacking. The return of a Liberal-Country Party administration will, on the other hand, be a tonic to the jaded nerves of business interests, stretched almost to breaking point by the long period of office of a government not notably sympathetic to their point of view.

It would be wrong, however, to conceive of the election result as a once-for-all rejection of socialisation. In addition to the broad issue of socialism, a decisive influence on the outcome was the inexorable swing of the pendulum of political opinion against a party which had held office for eight long years, the natural public desire for fresh faces and fresh ideas at the seat of government. To these factors should be added the influence of the deep fear of the people of the revolutionary project of bank nationalisation, and, also, perhaps, of a growing public irritation with the remote and sometimes autocratic control exercised by the Canberra officialdom.



An excess of jubilation or confidence on the part of the opponents of socialism, would, at this stage, not merely be in the worst of bad taste but would be the height of unwisdom. It is well to bear in mind that, despite the great swing in the allocation of seats between the parties, the margin between the aggregate votes cast for the victors, and those cast for the defeated, was thin indeed.* Let no one think that we have heard the last of socialism in this country. The campaign against the influence and spread of socialistic ideas must not be relaxed for a moment. In the past, when non-socialist parties have controlled the reins of government, there has been an undeniable tendency on the part of those opposed to socialism to become less vigilant in their opposition. This tendency, which is natural enough, should be vigorously resisted.

The I.P.A. has always held that the ultimate overthrow of socialism cannot be achieved by negative, standstill, defensive tactics, but only by pressing forward with new progressive ideas in all branches of the free enterprise economy—in labour relations, in management and administration, in production and finance, and in the important sphere of public enlightenment on the working of the economic mechanism. *We have held, also, that, in the final summing up, the fate of free liberal enterprise will be decided not at the political level by politicians, but at the business level by businessmen themselves.* So long as business is big-minded and generous in its attitude, displays a sympathetic and constructive understanding of the other man's problems, and is as untiring in its pursuit of the public good as it is (and should be) in pursuit of its own profit, so long will it command the respect and support of the Australian people.

The victory of December 10 should be regarded not as a final verdict, but as a heaven-sent opportunity for free enterprise to build greater than in the past by contributing constructively to the solution of those national problems which vitally affect the welfare of all Australians, and by striving unremittingly for sound human relationships in industry. Otherwise it could prove to be a brief respite from the threat of socialism, and the reaction, if it came, would be shattering and devastating in the extreme.

*Of the Liberal and Country Parties' majority of 27 seats, 20 were won by less than 1000 votes.

