

MARCH 1987

ADDRESS TO DARWIN YCLP

BY

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"BRANCHES - TIME FOR REVITALISATION"

IN 1983 WHEN I LAST HAD SERIOUS CAUSE TO ANALYSE THE FORTUNES OF THE PARTY THE CLP ORGANISATION COMPRISED 13 BRANCHES. TODAY THERE ARE 21 BRANCHES WITH A MEMBERSHIP IN THE ORDER OF 700.

IN 1983, FOLLOWING THE LANDSLIDE VICTORY AT THE DECEMBER ELECTION I WROTE:

"THE CLP ORGANISATION (THEREFORE) IS GOING TO BE FACED WITH A UNIQUE SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND A GREAT DEAL OF PRESSURE TO MAINTAIN LET ALONE IMPROVE UPON THE CURRENT LEVEL OF SUPPORT. THE SWING OF THE POLITICAL PENDULUM ALONE WILL MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN ITS CURRENT POSITION. THE CLP NEEDS, ABOVE ALL, A NEW MENTAL, PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH AS WELL AS A DETAILED REAPPRAISAL OF SOME OF ITS METHODS".

TO BE MOST EFFECTIVE, INDIVIDUALS NEED TO BE ORGANISED INTO GROUPS SO THAT THEIR TALENTS AND EXPERTISE CAN BE BEST UTILISED AND CO-ORDINATED. HENCE THE NEED FOR BRANCHES.

BRANCHES ARE THE BASIS OF THE ORGANISATION FROM WHICH THE PARTY DRAWS ITS STRENGTH. THE PARTY BRANCHES ARE THE KEY UNITS IN BUILDING NOT JUST THE PARTY'S MEMBERSHIP BUT ALSO IN DEVELOPING POLICY, PROVIDING MANPOWER AND IN RAISING FINANCE.



THE CLP HAS ALWAYS EMPHASISED THE VALUE OF A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE BRANCH SYSTEM.

FOR THE PARTY TO MEET ITS OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENT ITS PLANS IT NEEDS TO HAVE AN EXPANDED FINANCIAL BASE WHICH IN TURN MEANS A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CLP WILL ONLY INCREASE AND CAN ONLY BE MAINTAINED IF WE MAKE THAT MEMBERSHIP MORE WORTHWHILE AND PURPOSEFUL.

- . WE NEED A WIDER PARTICIPATION OF OUR SUPPORTERS AT ALL LEVELS OF THE PARTY.
- . WE NEED TO REVITALISE PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND THE BRANCHES BY PROVIDING INCENTIVES AND STIMULATING INTEREST.

A HEALTHY BRANCH STRUCTURE IS A PREREQUISITE FOR POLITICAL SUCCESS. FOR THE PARTY TO MAINTAIN GOVERNMENT IT REQUIRES ACTIVE, VIGOROUS, COMMUNITY BASED BRANCHES.

THE REPORT OF THE LIBERAL PARTY COMMITTEE OF REVIEW IN 1983 (BETTER KNOWN AS THE VALDER REPORT) RECOGNISED THE NEED FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY TO BE REVITALISED. VALDER SUGGESTED THAT LOW MEMBERSHIP WAS DUE TO LACK OF INCENTIVE. HE MADE AN OBSERVATION WHICH IS AS TRUE OF THE CLP AS IT IS OF THE LIBERALS AND THAT IS THAT BRANCH MEETINGS ARE IN THE MAIN DULL AND BORING. FRANKLY YOU HAVE TO BE TOTALLY DEDICATED AND COMMITTED TO ATTEND YOUR AVERAGE CLP BRANCH MEETING.



AND THAT ESSENTIALLY IS THE NUB OF THE PROBLEM. BRANCH EXECUTIVES, AND INDEED BRANCH MEMBERSHIP GENERALLY, NEED TO REMIND THEMSELVES FROM TIME TO TIME WHAT IS THE REASON FOR THEIR EXISTENCE. THEY EXIST TO:

- . PROMOTE THE CLP, ITS PHILOSOPHIES AND ITS POLICIES
- . ASSIST IN THE FUNDING OF THE CLP ORGANISATION THROUGH FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES
- . PROVIDE MANPOWER TO ASSIST IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
- . PROVIDE A TWO WAY FLOW OF IDEAS, COMMUNICATIONS AND PERSONNEL WITH THE WIDER ELECTORATE AND THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE.

AS I STATED EARLIER YOUR AVERAGE BRANCH MEETING IS DULL AND BORING. THEY CONCENTRATE TOO MUCH ON ROUTINE ADMINISTRATION AND OVER LONG REPORTS. BRANCHES AND THE WAY THEY CONDUCT BUSINESS ARE THEMSELVES THE BIGGEST DISINCENTIVE. YOUR AVERAGE BRANCH MEETING IS MORE LIKELY TO DRIVE MEMBERS AWAY THAN TO ATTRACT THEM.

TO ATTRACT BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY RETAIN MEMBERS BRANCH MEMBERS NEED TO PROVIDE INCENTIVES. BRANCHES SHOULD EXPERIMENT WITH MEETING STRUCTURES, TRY DIFFERENT FORMATS, BE INNOVATIVE. EXPERIMENT. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THE EXPERIMENT FAILS. TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

BRANCHES SHOULD PROVIDE INCENTIVES AND STIMULATE INTEREST. MEETINGS NEED TO BE MORE INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING. BRANCHES NEED TO DEVELOP BALANCED PROGRAMMES.



BRANCHES SHOULD BE THE REAL POWER BASE OF THE PARTY. PARTY MEMBERS ARE ENTITLED TO BE INVOLVED, ACTIVE, PRODUCTIVE AND POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL. BRANCHES ARE THE PRIMARY AVENUE THROUGH WHICH THESE DESIRES CAN AND SHOULD BE REALISED.

BRANCH MEMBERS NEED TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN SUB COMMITTEES. ACTIVE SUB COMMITTEES WHICH COVER VITAL AREAS OF CONCERN (EG. MEMBERSHIP, POLICY, ELECTORAL REVIEW), NOT ONLY SPREADS THE WORK LOAD BUT ENABLES BRANCH MEMBERS TO FEEL INVOLVED AND TO CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY IN PARTY ACTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE STRATEGY EMPLOYED DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF DEVOLVING AS MUCH RESPONSIBILITY TO THE BRANCHES AS POSSIBLE PAID OFF. THE SAME PRINCIPLE IS BEING APPLIED IN THE DAY TO DAY ADMINISTRATION OF THE PARTY.

FOR A PARTY WHICH BELIEVES IN COMPETITION WE APPEAR TO HAVE IGNORED THE REALITY THAT WE HAVE TO COMPETE WITH MANY OTHER ORGANISATIONS WHICH, QUITE FRANKLY, HAVE MORE TO OFFER IN TERMS OF ENJOYMENT, ENTERTAINMENT, FULFILMENT AND PARTICIPATION.

BRANCHES NEED TO PROMOTE THEIR ACTIVITIES BY GIVING SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS.

A SMALL POPULATION DISPERSED IN A NUMBER OF CENTRES OF VARYING SIZE MAKE IT IMPERATIVE THAT BRANCHES ARE DEVELOPED AND MAINTAINED IN AS MANY AREAS OF THE TERRITORY AS POSSIBLE.



IN SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT BRANCH LIAISON IS IMPORTANT. FOR THE PARTY AS A WHOLE TO FEEL SOME SENSE OF BELONGING, SOME SENSE OF UNITY, CLOSE LIAISON IS ESSENTIAL. THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE INTER BRANCH ACTIVITY, LIAISON AND COMMUNICATION. INTER BRANCH ACTIVITY ONCE A COMMON FEATURE OF CLP ACTIVITIES NOW SEEMS A THING OF THE PAST.

I BELIEVE THE BRANCH SYSTEM AFFORDS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PARTY TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP; NOT JUST A TRAINING GROUND FOR FUTURE, POTENTIAL PARLIAMENTARIANS BUT ALSO FOR FUTURE LEADERS OF THE PARTY. THE MONTHLY BRANCH MEETING PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP SKILLS IN MEETING PROCEDURE AND CHAIRMANSHIP AS WELL AS IN DEBATING. THE SECRETARIAT AND I ARE LOOKING AT WAYS OF DEVELOPING "WORKSHOPS" (SIMILAR TO THE SUCCESSFUL SCRUTINEER SCHOOLS) IN THIS REGARD.

CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO A MINIMUM SIZE OF BRANCHES. FOR EXAMPLE URBAN BRANCHES SHOULD HAVE A CONSTITUTIONAL MINIMUM MEMBERSHIP OF 20 WHILE RURAL BRANCHES SHOULD HAVE A MINIMUM OF 10. ANY BRANCH WHICH FALLS BELOW ITS MINIMUM NUMBER LOSES ITS RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS. THOSE THAT EXCEED THEIR MEMBERSHIP TARGETS WOULD BE RECOMPENSED BY PROPORTIONAL RIGHTS OR ENTITLEMENTS.



THE LEVY (WELL INTENTIONED AND NECESSARY THOUGH IT IS) IS A DISINCENTIVE. WHAT WE NEED ARE BUILT IN INCENTIVES. VOTING POWER, I SUGGEST, IS SUCH AN INCENTIVE - AND A POWERFUL ONE AT THAT. BRANCHES THAT GO OUT AND ACTIVELY OBTAIN MEMBERS WILL KNOW THAT THEIR REWARD IS AN INCREASED SAY; GREATER CLOUT IN THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE PARTY. WHY BE SATISFIED WITH 2 CENTRAL COUNCIL DELEGATES WHEN YOU CAN HAVE FOUR?

ABOVE ALL, HOWEVER, LARGER AND MORE ACTIVE BRANCHES ARE NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT THE CONTROL OF THE PARTY DOES NOT FALL INTO THE HANDS OF A MINORITY. ALL TOO OFTEN BRANCHES ARE ACCUSED OF BEING A "CLOSED SHOP" WHICH EXIST ONLY TO PROVIDE CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS WITH A GUARANTEED POSITION ON CENTRAL COUNCIL, ANNUAL CONFERENCE OR THE VARIOUS COMMITTEES OF THE PARTY - INCLUDING MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.

DEMOCRACY IS A FRAGILE POLITICAL SYSTEM. IT REQUIRES PARTICIPATION; IT REQUIRES INVOLVEMENT FOR IT TO FLOURISH. APATHY IS ONE OF ITS GREATEST ENEMIES.

TOO OFTEN IN RECENT MONTHS I HAVE HEARD ALLEGATIONS THAT BRANCH MEETINGS AND PRESELECTION COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN STACKED. IT HAS EVEN BEEN SUGGESTED THAT CENTRAL COUNCIL HAS BEEN STACKED. HOW ON EARTH THIS CAN BE THE CASE WHEN EACH INDIVIDUAL BRANCH ELECTS ITS OWN CHAIRMAN AND DELEGATE IS BEYOND ME.

THE PARTY HAS ADEQUATE MECHANISM TO ENSURE THAT FAIR PLAY TAKES PLACE AND MOREOVER IS SEEN TO TAKE PLACE. I HAVE NO SYMPATHY NOR ANY TIME FOR THOSE WHO WHINGE BUT DO NOT AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE SAFEGUARD PROVISIONS INSTITUTED BY THE PARTY ITSELF.



SOCIETY DETERMINES ITS OWN CODE OF CONDUCT AND DESIGNS RULES FOR THE GOOD GOVERNANCE OF THAT SOCIETY. WE ELECT PARLIAMENTARIANS TO MAKE LAWS ON OUR BEHALF. FOR THE COLLECTIVE GOOD OF SOCIETY.

ANY GROUPING OF PEOPLE, BE IT COUNTRIES, COUNCILS OR CLUBS HAVE RULES BY WHICH THEY CONDUCT THEIR BUSINESS. WITHOUT THEM YOU HAVE ANARCHY.

A POLITICAL PARTY IS A GROUP OF LIKE MINDED PEOPLE AND IT TOO HAS RULES WHICH GOVERN ITS BEHAVIOUR AND ITS ACTIONS. IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RULES CONVINCE A MAJORITY OF MEMBERS TO CHANGE THEM. THAT'S DEMOCRACY.

BUT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE RULES ARE CHANGED YOU MUST ABIDE BY THE RULES AND ACCEPT THE UMPIRES DECISION.

THIS BASIC TENET APPEARS TO HAVE ESCAPED THE NOTICE OF A NUMBER OF PARTY MEMBERS. THE CURRENT DEBATE OVER THE EXPULSION OF CERTAIN MEMBERS SHOULD NOT BE DISCUSSED IN THE CONTEXT OF WITCH HUNTS, SOUR GRAPES OR PETTY SMALL MINDEDNESS. THE ISSUE IS ONE OF PARTY DISCIPLINE.

AND IT SIMPLY BOILS DOWN TO THIS. IF A PARTY CANNOT GOVERN ITSELF HOW CAN YOU THEN EXPECT THE ELECTORATE TO ALLOW IT TO GOVERN ON ITS BEHALF.