Austerity Speech by John Curtin

3/10/1942 (JCPML00408/10, Records of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation)

John Curtin used radio to deliver important messages to Australians during World War II. One of these was about austerity. Below is the URL and a transcript of Curtin’s speech. What do the underlined terms mean? What do you think the Prime Minister is trying to say?


It is imperative for the safety of Australia that we observe the obligations imposed by the Austerity Campaign. A relentless and ruthless enemy challenges our right to live freely in this continent. The enemy has been bred in the ways of austerity for many years in preparation for the ugly aggression that now confronts us.

In the days of peace the Japanese were forced to live as people already engaged in total war. From this regimented austerity has come the deadly strength, precision and efficiency of the war machine now launched against us. We can meet this menace only if each of us as individuals becomes conscious of the high price that victory is going to demand. A price, not only in lives and sorrowing homes, not only in money, but in every phase of our national life. We have to turn every energy and every resource of the nation to the purposes of war. We can do this only if we live the simple lives of people who realise, clearly realise, they are fighting for their existence. That is why austerity is as much a condition of the mind and the soul as the material manifestation of a determined effort to do everything necessary for victory.

Each of us must freely and voluntarily abandon all those distractions, luxuries and purchases that unnecessarily employ manpower, materials, machinery, plant and capital that could be utilised in the war effort. We all have a positive responsibility of seeing that we do our share to ensure that the money needed to defend our homes is made available to the Government of the country.

For that reason, every individual in the community should endeavour to become the proud possessor of at least one bond in the £100,000,000 Austerity Loan. Our attitude must be such that if we do not possess such a bond our own consciences will rebuke us.

At your gathering here today, I ask you, in the name of Australia, to resolve that what you have shall be Australian, to help save Australia.