



# PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
PARLIAMENTARY DINNER FOR PRIME MINISTER RYZHKOV  
CANBERRA - 14 FEBRUARY 1990**

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Prime Minister Ryzhkov and Madam Ryzhkova  
Parliamentary Colleagues  
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and the people of Australia, let me say, Mr Prime Minister, how pleased and honoured we feel that, at this historic time in the affairs of your own nation and of the world, you have journeyed to Australia for this visit.

The relationship between our two countries has matured in a dramatic way in recent years, and in a way that can only be to the lasting benefit of the people of Australia and of the Soviet Union.

Your visit will strengthen that relationship even further, Mr Prime Minister. Let me assure you that you and Madam Ryzhkova are most welcome guests to Canberra and to Australia.

I trust the warmth of our welcome to you, and our constructive and frank dialogue with you, have shown how well Australians understand the magnitude of the changes you are working in the Soviet Union, and how positively we are responding to them.

The Australian Government stands ready to expand and diversify our bilateral relationship; the Australian corporate sector is eager to build commercial links; and the Australian people are keen to build the foundations of friendship.

I recall with pleasure the stimulating discussions I held in 1987 in Canberra with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, and later in Moscow with Mikhail Gorbachev, you, and your colleagues - talks which built a genuine and personal trust and confidence between us.

In those talks in Moscow, we reviewed your programs of perestroika and glasnost, and we discussed the welcome progress that had been made in arms control, the reduction of regional tensions, the opening up of economic opportunities, and the steady improvement in Soviet human rights.

It seemed then, in 1987, that your nation had already achieved very significant changes, in both its domestic and international policies.

How modest that conclusion seems now, as we meet again just two years later!

Both within the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe the pace of reform has been, simply, breathtaking. You have not only reshaped the face of your own region, but fundamentally transformed the very landscape of the world order that has been familiar since the end of the Second World War.

We have seen the wall between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, for so long a symbol of the division of Europe, come down. We have seen the democratic aspirations of Eastern Europe met - and, with the tragic exception of Romania, we have seen them met peacefully. We have seen Communist Parties in the GDR, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia agree to compete in multi-party elections for newly resurgent Parliaments.

And we have seen the Soviet leadership respond to these watershed changes with wisdom and propriety.

We recently announced a range of diplomatic, financial and other measures designed to assist the countries of Eastern Europe develop their new democratic systems - a practical response by our heads and hands that matches the sense of joy we feel in our hearts at this enlargement of political and economic freedoms in nations where they had been denied for so long.

Within the Soviet Union itself, we have seen only last week the historic decision to clear the way for competitive and open elections and, by extension, for a more competitive and open society.

I shall never forget, on my last day in Moscow, hearing the news that a number of refusenik cases that I had raised with the Soviet Government had been sympathetically and promptly resolved. It is a matter of very great personal satisfaction that the Soviet Union's positive response to human rights issues has been carried through and that, in particular, our two countries have established such a close and constructive dialogue on this issue.

The Human Contacts agreement that we will sign tomorrow will bring to a successful conclusion our negotiations that commenced at a time when there had been little discussion of such matters between the Soviet Union and the West.

Mr Prime Minister, at the dinner that you hosted for me in Moscow, I observed that over the last 40 years the world had slowly and steadily built for itself a nuclear scaffold. I said that if for any reason humanity should ever have to stand on that scaffold and look its executioner in the face, we would see ourselves.

The task before us was to dismantle that scaffold - and to do so without destroying our own security in the process.

It is, Mr Prime Minister, with the profoundest sense of admiration and respect that we congratulate your Government for working with the United States to undertake that critical task.

We do today live in a safer and a more secure world. The scaffold is far from dismantled, to be sure, but we now have greater confidence it will not be used.

So in all these ways the landscape of the world order has indeed been transformed.

Mr Prime Minister, there is, nor should be, no sense of condescension in our welcome to the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In no country in history has the evolution to democratic institutions and practices been without trauma. As you know we have, in consultation with you, been steadfast and constant in stressing these values and the need for their embrace if the legitimate aspirations of people are to be satisfied. That these processes are so committedly under way is for us a matter of undiluted joy and our commitment to be involved with you in these processes is total.

I want to say to you quite clearly tonight that the Australian Government welcomes and supports the economic and political changes within the Soviet Union that have been so important to this transformation.

We admire the courage and vision that the leadership of the Soviet Union has displayed in implementing these reforms.

And we want you, and your nation, to succeed in your endeavours to maintain the pace and direction of these reforms.

Where you succeed in creating a more open and peaceful society, and in integrating your economy with the world, we stand to gain as well.

Where you lower tensions at the superpower level, and where you pursue a constructive Soviet foreign policy, we stand to enjoy a more stable environment in the world and in our own region.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; your creative and positive contribution to the resolution of the longstanding Namibian problems; the role you are playing in Cambodia, including your support for Australia's proposal for United Nations involvement in a settlement of the tragic conflict there; reductions in your force levels along the Sino-Soviet border and in Cam Ranh Bay - all these are very welcome developments.

The emergence of a more favourable and stable global environment has now exerted a positive influence even on the South African regime, as is evident with the release, at last, of Nelson Mandela.

In the same way, where you succeed in making progress in arms control and disarmament, we stand to make progress towards other goals we regard as important, such as the elimination of chemical weapons. We were grateful for your support for the Government Industry Conference Against Chemical Weapons that was held in Canberra last year.

And very importantly, where you succeed in opening the Soviet economy and making it more efficient, we stand to gain mutual benefit from the outcome.

We are keen to explore whatever avenues exist now or in the future for the peaceful development of commercial links between us.

Today we discussed a number of areas where Australia, with our strong agricultural and resource base and effective transport and communications infrastructure, can offer you the benefit of our experience and expertise.

One particular area, which I have raised with President Gorbachev as well, is our expertise in the handling, storage and long-distance transport of food - an area where improvements would bring direct benefits to Soviet agricultural producers and consumers.

I am delighted too that we will sign tomorrow fisheries and commodities agreements - business-like agreements that represent a very significant broadening of our commercial relationship, for our long term mutual benefit.

Many other opportunities exist for economic and trading links between our two countries, particularly through joint ventures. In Melbourne yesterday you were briefed on one of these - the very promising aluminium proposal involving Comalco and the Soviet Ministry of Metallurgy.

Australia can also help realise President Gorbachev's vision for the accelerated development of the Soviet Far East. In July, a number of Australian companies will be mounting a major trade exhibition in Vladivostock, to show that Australian goods and services have much to contribute there.

Mr Prime Minister, our conclusion of agreements on environmental protection and nuclear safeguards will open the prospect of further constructive cooperation between us.

I very much welcomed President Gorbachev's recent speech at the Global Forum on Environment and Development For Survival, especially his positive references to the Antarctic.

Australia has been strongly advocating the banning of mining in Antarctica and the preservation of this magnificent and wild continent as a natural reserve and land of science. I welcome what you said today about our shared concerns for the protection of this environment.

Mr Prime Minister,

On my way to visit Leningrad and Moscow in 1987, I made a stop-over in Singapore, where I had been invited to deliver the annual Singapore Lecture. I spoke on that occasion about the developments underway in this most dynamic of regions, the Asia-Pacific region, including the new diplomacy being practiced in the region by the Soviet Union.

I said that Australia would welcome a constructive involvement by the USSR in political and economic developments in the region.

Let me tell you that on my return home, that expression was criticised by some who saw it as an excessively generous interpretation of Soviet intentions.

Of course today my assessment has been not only vindicated by events, but almost overtaken by them.

It has shown again that the vigour and creativity of Soviet policy making has stretched, and then frequently exceeded, the expectations even of those of us in the West who perceived early the magnitude of your reform ambitions - while thoroughly exploding the preconceptions of those who insisted on judging you according to the yardstick of the 1950s, 60s or 70s.

Not too many years ago, a visit to Australia by a Soviet Prime Minister would have been an unlikely event. It certainly would not have been conducted with the constructive spirit, the frankness and the warmth that has characterised your visit.

As we proceed through the 1990s, Australia and the Soviet Union will have much to gain from contacts such as this; we will have many avenues for consultation and cooperation to explore.

I hope you will take back to President Gorbachev a message of hope from the Australian people - a message of our great admiration and respect for what he, you and your colleagues have achieved and are endeavouring to achieve.

And I trust you, Mr Prime Minister, will be fortified by that message and by what we have shown you during this visit - just as we are immensely encouraged by the prospects for the future that you represent.

For this is indeed a time of historic opportunity, in which leaders of historic vision are truly making the world a better place.

That is why, fundamentally, we support you and why we want you to succeed.

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