



## PRIME MINISTER

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE HON P J KEATING MP, TO A FUNDRAISING DINNER FOR  
PETER DUNCAN MP, CAMPANIA CLUB, MODBURY NORTH, ADELAIDE  
28 JULY 1992

JUNE

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Thank you very much Peter (Duncan), Julie, my Cabinet colleague Neal Blewett, distinguished parliamentary colleagues in Federal and State Parliament, distinguished members of local government, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, there are a few of them here too.

Well it's lovely to be here and its nice to be here with Peter. It's always a measure of a colleague when you go to his or her electorate to see how much real and support they have and how much genuine affection with which they are held, and if tonight's 700-odd is any demonstration of that then Peter Duncan is held in pretty high regard.

And that great humanity of him comes through, and that's why he has got so much support. I'm glad I've had his support as he is glad he's said to have supported me. I didn't win by many so I needed it. So thank you Peter, thank you for the faith, and I hope I won't let you down.

When I was coming here tonight I said to my staff, who will be there? They said the Left will be there, and I said I'm a bit of a 'Leftie' myself so I'll get on alright with them. I said all the Left Wing things we've done like capital gains taxes, fringe benefits taxes, occupational super, I've been in all those. And they said there's a few Poms there too, and I said I'll be OK with them too, it's only the ones in tabloids that I have a problem with. It's not the local ones, they know what I'm saying. And apart from that, they said there are a good supporters of the Labor Party and other people in the community who are interested in public life and interested in a fair go. And I said, in that case we'll do well.

I am very pleased to be in this part of Adelaide and it's nice to be back in South Australia once more. Peter said I'll be coming to South Australia more, and it's true I will because Australia these days does have some disparity in prosperity between States, and that's why it is important to get around the States. South Australia has its share of troubles which are not exclusively of its own making, just the way in which the nation has changed. And it is important, I think, for all of us in national politics to come through you to understand about the place and to try to focus things the right way.

I think the most important thing for us to know is that Australia and Australians have a great opportunity in the world. That's the most important thing to know. Not many people, in fact we are unique in the sense that we have a continent to ourselves. No other nation on earth has a continent to themselves. And not just any continent, but the oldest continent. The oldest continent where we came to a place with the oldest civilisation. The High Court, in a very landmark decision a week or two ago, made that clear when they rebuked the doctrine of Terra Nullius. That this was an unclaimed place when the British arrived.

And we know that we are in a subtle country, an old country, where the residences of the country changed the way we all are and make us unique. Even though we may have European antecedents, we are a unique country because of the way in which Australia is unique. And most of us in the Labor Party know that we'll never come to terms fully with this country until we come to terms with the original Australians, the Aborigines.

One of my staff was in a group that climbed the Himalayas and somebody said to him 'you don't have mountains like this in Australia'. He said, 'no, ours are fifty times older than this and they've since worn down'. And that's a fact - this is an old place and the subtleties of the landscape and the nature of the place have changed us and made us unique, uniquely Australian. We're not British, we're not Dutch, we're not Italian, we're not Lebanese, we're not Vietnamese, we're not Chinese, we are Australians.

And it is time for us to declare that we are Australians, to make that declaration. It's psychologically important to us the more often we make it. And it's economically important.

Our colleagues in the Coalition parties believe that talk about our nationalism, our Australianess, is a distraction, they say, from the economic facts and economic life. But there are enough facts around to know that there can be no distraction from the recession and unemployment and other things.

It is important to know, and important to our economics, to our future, to our trading future, to assert ourselves economically as we assert ourselves psychologically and nationally. It's an important link to make.

The great national spirit of one hundred years ago in another recession, in 1890, put the Australian Labor Party together and drove the forces of our Federation. And that nationalism, that high-spiritedness of Australia, ran until it was snuffed out in the first World war. And in that great radical act, where so many young Australians went and fought, and 60 000 in 4 million died, that radical act was then by our conservative opponents wrapped in the flag and turned into a conservative thing. And it has remained a conservative thing, and the great nationhood and nationalism of the period died with it.

Then, of course we had the '20s under the conservatives, the '30s in the recession, the '40s largely in the War, the Rip Van Winkle years of Menzies until the end of the '60s, and then the do-nothing years of Fraser, and then finally a chance under Labor to get back to those goals and threads. To get back to the sense of Australia being a nation and claiming the place as being a unique place, a derivative of no other place, and a place where we can make our way in the world and hold our head up in the world.

Now it is an accident of history that a largely European country has been developed in the bottom of Asia. That's now changing as we see people from the Middle East, and from the Asia-Pacific coming to our shores and being part of our community. But the fact is the we are now in a unique position to make Australia part of the Asia-Pacific, part of the fastest growing region of the world, and truly define our place in the neighbourhood.

Because at least now we are saying to people in Asia we want to be here, we want to be part of you, we want to part of our local community. We don't want to fly over you to Los Angeles, or fly over to you in London, or pay lip service to the region, we want to be part of it. And they are basically welcoming us with open arms.

So this is our great chance to find our place in the region, in the neighbourhood, to be part of it, to be relevant, and to share in the wealth and growth of this very prosperous area. That more than anything else is what will change the face of Australia, change the face of South Australia, and change the face of Adelaide. That single fact.

Now I know, and you all know, that the most important thing for us now is to get back to recovery. Because the Labor Party has never believed that unemployment is a residual that drops out of the policies. This is not the British conservative government, it's not the US Republicans, it's certainly not the Liberal Party of Australia. We don't believe the unemployed are the people at the end of the queue, the shock absorbers who take the shock out of the system to protect the economic viability of everybody else.

And we know that this kind of society cannot tick over with unemployment rates of 10 per cent, or 10 per cent plus, or higher in some places. And so we want to get back to remaking Australia so we can have product growth and better rates of employment.

But that can only happen by looking forward. It won't happen by looking backwards, as John Howard would have us do - looking back to the dead-end jobs, looking back to the 1950s where he thought things were fine. Well they might have been, but they won't provide the increments to growth and wealth that we have today.

The things that are going to put us up the international scale are technological change and education. And it is to that with which this Government has committed itself - to open Australia up, to make it internationally competitive, find Australia doing the interesting, novel things, which add value to products and let us find places and niches around the world, which give us that external orientation that we never had. That is, selling the most valuable resource of all - the creativity of our people. And not the resources which Malcolm Fraser had ready for us in the mineral boom of the late 1970s, because that was just another mound of minerals that somebody found. Or, not another paddock full of wheat, or even wool, as important as those things are, but the most important resource of all - our creativity and, of course, our children.

In 1983, three children in ten completed secondary school. Seven in ten were left untrained. That's how much regard the Liberal and National Parties had for Australia's youth. They were happy to see seven in ten spill out of school on the labour market untrained. That retention rate today is not eight in ten - eight in ten children now complete secondary school. And between the middle 1980s and now this Government added 122 000 places to universities, we've created the equivalent of twelve new universities, or added 50 per cent extra places to tertiary education. So that as those kids stay on in school, 35-40 per cent of them go onto tertiary education.

And now as a result of our One Nation statement, we are working on building up the system that sits below that - technical and further education, or TAFE. So that the six to seven out of ten who come out of secondary school and don't go to university are not cascading into shopping mall plazas, railway stations, or somewhere, but they are cascading into training and education. So if we want to move Australia up the international division of labour, we move it up with education, creativity, and skills.

And that's the sort of society we're trying to build. One that has a focus on research and development, product innovation, staffed by a clever workforce with creativity and ideas. Selling those ideas around the world which will make Australia a better place. And not staying in the industrial museum, the industrial archaeology, which the Liberal and National Parties left us in the late '70s and the early 1980s.

... and the Opposition's policy is basically to let the unemployed carry the weight of the recession and the recovery so that those who are in comfortable positions can carry on.

I said today in another place, that if we take the view that the Federal Director of the Liberal Party articulated this morning on television, supporting his leader John Hewson, that people on unemployment benefits should go off them after 9 months and find accommodation in the St Vincent de Paul Society, or the Smith Family, or any other similar organisation - the voluntary agencies which are already stretched to capacity - the notion that somebody with a spouse and children, or a single person, should find themselves after 9 months cut off from support by the government, stigmatise the unemployed, and basically told they're on their own, they can go down to the soup kitchen, or they can go down to some other voluntary agency to get some basic modicum of assistance, or if they don't have accommodation to huddle under a carton, as you the people huddling all around the United States looking for warmth in the winter, we'll have a Los Angeles on our hands in this country at some stage. That it, the social strife which has racked the United States is basically generated by poverty.

And in the Labor Party, we won't sign up to those sort of policies. We're not going to tip the unemployed off unemployment benefits after 9 months. We're not going to be running heartless policies like that. We're not going to let the unfortunate carry the stigma and shock of economic policies and economic adjustment. Yet they are the policies of the Coalition.

And then on top of that they want to introduce a 15 per cent consumption tax, which is a very large level of tax, when one considers that the average rate of income tax in this country is just over 23 per cent, is an enormous addition to the burden of taxation in Australia. And as the Governor of the Central Bank said during the week, it will add 6 to 7 percentage points to inflation. It will take our inflation rate to the record low levels of 1 1/2 per cent where we have it at the moment, to around 7 or 8 or maybe 9 per cent once more. And with it will go interest rates as well, and guess who pays the piper - the low and middle paid people who will see a transfer of wealth from them to the higher paid.

These are the policies of unfairness which our colleagues in the Coalition are offering Australia. That is, if you're not basically well-off you are a bludger, if you're unemployed it's your fault, if you go down looking for the job search allowance or unemployment benefits then you are only sponging on the system, that you are basically to be swatted off the system after 9 months.

On medicine, Dr Hewson stood up a couple of weeks ago at the AMA and said we'll let the AMA set the common fee, not the government, the doctors. He's opposed to all of the unions except the doctors union, where he'll let the AMA set the fees for medical consultations.

Then he'll cut Medicare to pieces and say you can privately insure yourself. And you'll go and privately insure yourself, which will cost about \$22-23 a week extra for the average family so that doctors can charge what they like, and charge what the traffic will bear under a privately insured system.

And we'll end up with a position like the United States, where if you're in an accident or you're critically ill, you'll go up to a hospital door but if you don't have the blue cross card in your pocket they don't admit you. They just turn you back, sick, sore, or sorry. That's Dr Hewson's Australia.

These are the spiteful policies of the current coalition. These are the policies which would make Menzies and Malcolm Fraser look like Bolsheviks. Who would roll in their graves at this approach to say that if you can't help yourself you're kicked out. If structural change has made you unemployed, you're stigmatised and you bear the burden of it, if you're sick you can only get medical protection if you can afford it, and if your children want a place in university it's OK if you pay it for them full fees and then there's a place for you, but beyond that, if you're a child of the low paid or middle paid, there's no place for you in universities or other forms of training unless you pay full fees.

They call it opportunity to succeed, freedom to achieve. Freedom to achieve providing your parents have got \$12 000 to \$15 000 for a university place per year. That's an income of \$30 000 before tax to put one child through one university course for one year.

And let me take their industrial relation policies. They're now saying they'll let federal awards expire. They will let the industrial relations system turn down, so that an employee cannot band together with his or her brothers or sisters and make an industrial agreement with an employer as a union, but only can we see negotiations, says Dr Hewson, between an individual person and their employer. That is, no role for unions. And we'll all have to say, what hope in the end does an individual person have with an employer? The whole balance of society which has come from the right to organise, and collaborate in industrial negotiation would disappear.

And to add insult to injury they want all the federal awards to expire, and all the conditions under them - rates of pay, conditions of employment, annual leave, sick pay - all go with them. And you only get the award back if the employer and the employee opt back into the system. But if the employer doesn't agree to opt back into the system, the award expires. So all the things that people have fought for a century - holiday, sick leave, rates of pay - go out the door and you're left tied up as an individual person with a common law contract between yourself and your employer.

This is the tough world which Dr Hewson has ready for people. Slipping back to early Thatcherite policies of the late 1970s, or the 'greed is good' policies of President Reagan's America. If you're not a millionaire, you're a bludger, you're a layabout. Well we've seen in that country the extremes widen between the wealthy and the poor, that finally the poor took to the streets of Los Angeles and said something about it.

These are the sort of un-Australian policies that the Coalition are seeking to introduce into Australia. No sense of togetherness, no sense of community, no sense of inclusion, no sense of cooperation, no sense of kindness to one another, no softness in policy, no concern for the weak, the sick, the aged, or the young. Just a hard computer model that comes out the Federal Liberal Party's Fightback! proposals.

Their Federal Director today brazenly said that the taxpayer shouldn't have to put up with you if you're unemployed for 9 months. You can go to a voluntary agency, which John Hewson has been around making sure that they're equipped to look after these people. That is, they're equipped to receive you and hand out someone else's clothes, or blanket, or food, or throw you on the mercy of your family because there will be no support from the state.

They are the things we are opposed to. We want to put Australia back together. We want it to grow. I can grow and succeed to become a smarter place while we have the focus on education, upon technology, upon product innovation. But in the context of a nice society - one that looks after you when you're sick, one that looks after you when you're aged, one that looks after you when you're infirm, one that looks after you when you're young and gives you an education and a future, one that looks after you when you're in the middle of your life's work, and retrains you, or as a woman gives you a child care place to let you go and work. This is the sort of society which we believe in.

I'm always told by John Hewson that I'm wearing a Zegna suit the same as he is, and who am I to say he has crossed the tracks. So I said to him the other day in Parliament - last night in the Senate we put our hands up for occupational superannuation. We voted for the Superannuation Guarantee Charge (SGC) which will see 9 per cent paid by employers go to employees to give them a standard of living in retirement which is now twice the current age pension. All Australian working men and women. That's what we put our hand up for in the Senate last Wednesday night. I said to him, where was your hand? Your hand was down. You had the boots into ordinary working people again. They might get themselves an advantage by building up a pool of savings to provide for a decent standard of living in retirement, they might even help put together a pool of national savings which will help with investment and the current account deficit and our overseas debt. But you and the Liberal Party voted against it, as you always do.

And that's the difference between us. The boy from Welfare Avenue crossed the tracks to vote down occupational superannuation, to vote down Medicare, to vote down the right to unemployment benefits when you're unemployed, to vote down the right of education to children of working class families. These are all the things that I believe Australians will not tolerate. And that's why our party stands for the innovators in Australia and the party which will draw people together to declare for Australia proud, unique and to hold our head up in the world.

We know that we have to get the economy cracking again to get employment going. And we recognise that too many of our young people are not finding jobs. It is a problem, a real problem. We're having a national meeting with employers in a couple of weeks to get to a basis of agreement on wages, terms and conditions of employment, and training, that will help provide many thousands of new jobs for young people, particularly in that 5-19 year category.

Dr Hewson criticises us for holding a meeting behind closed doors. Well, does anybody think that the industrial practices of 40 or 50 years are going to be traded away under the glare of television cameras, that there is going to be a real discussion about these problems other than the genuine one where people can discuss things and talk genuinely to one another in private? That can only happen privately. That's what we're going to have soon. And that will also help on the employment front, particularly with young people.

So ladies and gentlemen, can I say this. I thank you very much for coming to support Peter tonight. This is the start of his campaign for the next election. And I can't say it's the start of ours because it's going to start later than this I think. But we're campaigning, in a sense, all the time. And we're campaigning for the right to make Australia an interesting country, a country with economic promise, a country where people are not left behind, be it the unemployed, the sick, the aged, or the young, but one where we take the view that everybody has the right to inclusion, and we sit down cooperatively as a society and come together and make this country a greater place than it is already, find our place in the Asia-Pacific, declare ourselves to be as we are - unique as a nation - and to take our place in the world, which will lift up the prosperity of Australians.

That's what the challenge is about. That's what we're going to be working to, and are going to be keeping those Labor principles in mind, for the greater benefit of all Australians, not just the wealthy, or the well-to-do, but all Australians, young and old alike, to give them a decent, prosperous economy, but in a society which is a soft, nice society where we care for one another, and where those great humanitarian values of Labor are not forgotten in the rush to make a quid.

That's what we stand for and that's what we're going to be fighting for.

Thank you.