



## PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP**

**THE INAUGURAL SIR EDWARD "WEARY" DUNLOP ASIALINK LECTURE  
MELBOURNE, 8 DECEMBER 1993**

It is a great privilege to be asked to deliver this address - I cannot imagine a greater privilege.

"Weary" Dunlop was an Australian of phenomenal achievement.

If his work as a surgeon and teacher were all that distinguished his life, an annual lecture and much more to preserve his memory, would be warranted.

If the sole criterion was his contribution as architect and overseer of schemes for the betterment of his country and the welfare of its people, he would rank among the great Australians.

If he was known only as a pioneer of Australia's friendship with the countries of Asia, we would be justified in honouring his life's work this way.

Talking about his work in Asia in one of his last interviews he remarked that he was "a bit ahead of Keating."

I unequivocally dips my lid. It is a galvanising thing to know that we are, in some way, building on the work of Weary Dunlop.

Would that we all shared his vision.

Would that we all might have half his courage, half his reason, half his powers of leadership.

These among others were the qualities which lifted Weary Dunlop into the ranks of the immortals.

In my days at school we read about the epic feats of Sturt and Eyre and Stuart, the heroic philanthropy of Caroline Chisholm, the remarkable feats of Mawson in Antarctica, and the Anzacs at Gallipoli - and we wondered how men and women could be so brave, resourceful and resilient. These were giants.

We should have also been reading about Weary Dunlop - even so soon after the war we should have been reading about him.

And our children should be reading about him now.

For to read about Weary Dunlop in World War II, to read his diaries, to hear him interviewed in the last years of his life - is to hear a story every bit as awe-inspiring as any in our past. It is perhaps the most inspiring story in our history.

As many of you probably know, the story began in the bush. Ernest Edward Dunlop was a son of the soil, raised at a place called Sheepwash Creek in north-eastern Victoria. He was educated at State schools in Stewarton and Benalla, and I would hazard a guess that the heroes of his basic education were the same as those of my generation.

Gallipoli loomed large. Four members of his family had gone to the First World War.

The Australia of Dunlop's youth, of course, was very different. A new nation, Australia looked at the world through the prism of empire. Our economy, our foreign relations, our defence were all dependent on Britain. Our people were overwhelmingly of British and Irish extraction.

This Australia was an outpost of the British empire, separated from the civilisation we held to be the highest by what we saw as an amorphous and potentially hostile mass of humanity to our near north - but which we called the Far East.

"White Australia" kept the potential threat at bay - "White Australia" and the might of the British Empire.

It stood to reason that Australians looked to Britain for their cultural, if not their spiritual, values. Not because they were less Australian, it seems to me, but because to share in the British heritage was one of the most agreeable things about being Australian.

It conferred considerable advantages on us - among them the chance for young men of promise to further their education and careers in an agreeably ancient yet familiar culture.

Weary Dunlop was in London doing post-graduate study when the Second World War broke out. As he said himself, he couldn't wait to get into the Army, and somehow he contrived - to this country's everlasting benefit - to get into the Australian Army.

He served in the Australian Army Medical Corps with the Second AIF in Palestine, Egypt, Greece and Crete.

By the time he sailed for the war in south-east Asia, he had already experienced more than an average share of hardship and danger; including service with the Sixth Australian Division during the siege of Tobruk; and he had already demonstrated his great physical strength and his capacity to apply his wonderful skills under conditions of extreme stress - including his skills of leadership.

He arrived in Java in February 1942. Singapore - the bastion of Britain's Far East defences and Australia's security - had fallen to the Japanese. Three weeks later, Weary Dunlop and his unit were captured at Bandung.

The prisoners very soon were made aware that they were in the hands of a ruthless enemy. Almost as quickly they became aware that in Weary Dunlop they had a leader of equivalent bravery.

As the hospital in Bandung was being broken up and the sick and wounded forced to march, Dunlop protested, pointing to one man who, as he described him, was "blind with a shattered face, amputated hands and a broken leg". When the Japanese commander indicated to his guard that the man was to be bayoneted, Weary Dunlop, to use his own word, "interposed" his body.

In the next three years, Weary Dunlop ceaselessly "interposed" his body between hope and despair, reason and insanity, pride and humiliation - life and death. He was the principal reason for the survival of thousands of men. Enduring the same hardships - the illness, the torture, the terror and squalor - he was leader, doctor and inspiration.

As one of his fellow prisoners wrote later:

When despair and death reached for us, he stood fast, his only thought our well-being. Faced with guards who had the power of life and death, ignoble tyrants who hated us, he was a lighthouse of sanity in a universe of madness and suffering.

Nothing I can say tonight could possibly describe the horrors inflicted on Australian, British and allied prisoners of war on the Burma-Thailand Railway - or the estimated 200,000 labourers from Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam who were press ganged into service.

As one who went through it said - the survivors often did not talk about it simply because it was "indescribable".

The best account by far, of course, was written by Weary himself. The detailed diaries he kept were themselves an amazing testament to his strength and devotion to duty.

And that it was forty years before he got around to publishing them is equally a testament to his humility - and no doubt to his determination to get on with life.

Weary Dunlop's great qualities were universal - physical strength, intelligence and insight, courage, persistence and, above all, boundless love for his fellow man.

Yet much in his character and the values he brought to the appalling human trial on the Burma-Thailand railway we recognise as unmistakably Australian. And he was unmistakably Australian.

It was the military history of his own country which inspired him, indeed the military history of his own district and his own family. He went to war in London dressed in the uniform of the First AIF, and it was as if he was filled with the same spirit.

There is the same familiarity in his pragmatism and the astounding capacity for improvisation he displayed in the camps of Thailand - from the saline drips he devised for cholera victims to his tax on fellow officers to raise revenue for food and medical supplies.

As his diaries reveal, he took to the struggle not just stoic courage but, in the best Australian tradition, an unflinching sense of humour and irony.

In terrible necessity he saw the need for discipline but he also knew that authority should be earned.

He recognised that the key to survival in adversity was willingness to share the hardship, that reliance on each other was essential. He knew the value of mateship.

Strong as he was, he did not despise the weakness of others. He knew that if not all were of equal capacity, all were equal in suffering - and all equally deserving help.

We do not have to believe that these are uniquely Australian insights into human nature, or uniquely Australian qualities, to see in them a continuation of the values associated with the Australian legend including the legend of Anzac. We can see in Weary Dunlop, and Australians' admiration of him, an affirmation of our values, an embodiment of our best traditions.

But the legend did not stop him. He did not live the remainder of his life in defence of the past, but in doing all he could to ensure that Australia had a future.

Although he had every reason to do so, he did not let the evil he experienced destroy his faith in the capacity of human beings for good.

The war did not close his mind to human possibility, it opened it.

He did not live weighed down with hatred for Japan, nor buoyed by satisfaction with his own heritage and culture.

Weary Dunlop was tortured, beaten, three times sentenced to execution. He spent every day attempting to save the victims of insane cruelty. He wrote in his diary on May 9 1943 that the sight of men "broken into emaciated, pitiful wrecks, bloated with beriberi, terribly reduced with pellagra, dysentery and malaria and covered with disgusting sores" produced in him a "searing hatred" of the Japanese.

Yet he overcame his hatred. He opened his heart - and his household - to his old enemies, and widened his perspective even so far, I understand, as to adopt elements of their philosophy and culture.

He did not see his experience in Asia as confirmation of Australia's old prejudice towards these countries, but as proof of our necessity to understand and engage with them - not as colonisers but as colleagues.

The war convinced him that our future depended on learning to live in Asia, and he never doubted that we could do this and be enriched by it, and still carry on those best traditions which he exemplified.

As one fellow POW, Tom Uren, said; "Weary Dunlop continued to grow as a human being all his life".

That is one more reason why the story of Weary Dunlop should be known to all Australians.

He embraced change, he encouraged it, he believed in the possible - for all his love of Australia (and indeed of Britain) he imagined a different Australia.

I cannot even begin to do justice to Weary Dunlop's activity after the war. To read the startling entry in Who's Who, rather like the Diaries, is to wonder if in fact we are all made of the same clay.

He was pre-eminently a surgeon. The first Surgeon appointed to the Royal Melbourne Hospital after the war, Honorary Surgeon to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, Consultant Surgeon to the Peter MacCallum Clinic, special surgeon to the Repatriation Department, the second Australian to become Vice President of the International Society of Surgeons, and in 1969 leader of the Australian surgical team in Vietnam.

He pioneered surgery in the oesophagus, mouth and throat; but as Les Tanner, whose larynx Weary Dunlop removed, pointed out this year, he was among the last of the "all-over" surgeons - meaning he could operate on your toe or your head and everything in between.

And of course he was an "all-over" man; a patron, vice-president, committeeman and member of countless organisations in the public interest beyond the scope of medicine - not least among them the association of ex-POWs and their relatives.

He was a pioneer, of course, of the Colombo Plan, an adviser to Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. He lectured in countries throughout the region. He was President of the Australian-Asian Society.

Ladies and gentlemen

In a speech in Seattle a couple of weeks ago President Clinton summed up the change in the countries of Asia - and in our perceptions of them - by saying that the "dominoes have become dynamos".

Weary Dunlop recognised the potential for this long ago. In 1954 he said:

The people in these emerging nations are going toward what they want. They have their star to win, and they let nothing stand in their way. It uplifts you to find that spirit.

In 1993, we in Australia are coming to terms with the reality of their astounding success.

Not that Asia has dawned on us all of a sudden. It is often forgotten that Australia's relations with the region go back to the very beginning of post-colonial Asia - from our support for Indonesia's independence movement through our participation in the defence of Malaysia during confrontation, to our involvement in the Colombo Plan.

Far-sighted people like Weary Dunlop and Richard Casey and a handful of others knew where Australia's interests lay and worked hard to build up the trading, institutional and cultural links as the countries of Asia grew.

From soon after the end of the war with Japan, Australia played a vital role in the economic reconstruction of its former enemy by providing the necessary raw materials and minerals. Thus the ground was laid for the enormously beneficial trade relationship we now have with Japan.

Some deep personal friendships and institutional and commercial associations were forged which underpin the close government relations and people-to-people contacts we have today.

And I might say that we have to a very large degree repeated this experience with the industrial miracle in the Republic of Korea.

In the last decade, the growth of our trade and other ties with Asia, including South-East Asia has dramatically accelerated.

A decade ago, 46 per cent of our exports went to Asia. That figure has now reached 60 per cent. Over the same decade our exports to South-East Asia have grown by 400 per cent.

We have seen a remarkable expansion in people-to-people relationships. In 1980 just over 315,000 Australians visited Asian countries. In 1992 the number had grown to 780,000.

110,000 people from Asian countries visited Australia in 1979. In 1992-93 the figure was 1.2 million - 650,000 of them from Japan.

I've already made several references to "Asia" tonight. It is a convenient term but, of course, it is also a misleading one. It should not blind us to the great cultural, social and other differences within the region. It is a term we use in full knowledge of this diversity.

In this general regard, I think we can say that we have seen substantial advances in the process of cultural understanding.

One measure of this, among many, is language learning. In 1982, 15 per cent of Australian Year 12 students learning languages other than English were learning Asian languages. Today that figure has nearly doubled.

Another recent development is Australian Television International which is now projecting images of Australia to 15 countries of the region and fostering an understanding of Australia that goes way beyond the old stereotypes.

I might say that this service also provides an unparalleled opportunity for Australian business to reach an increasingly sophisticated market through a quality English language medium.

The sponsors of this lecture, Asialink, are another example of the efforts being made to heighten cultural understanding.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Asialink for the work they are doing - and in particular tonight commend them for the establishment of the Dunlop Asia Awards Fund. I should also commend the Bückland Foundation for their initial contribution of \$50,000. And I take the opportunity to announce that the Commonwealth Government will at least match it.

The Dunlop Fellowships will go some way towards creating a generation of Australians who look to Asia for stimulus, much as earlier generations looked to Britain and Europe.

As I said, we are witnessing continuing development, a steady progress, not a sudden revolution. Yet in the past two years, there is no doubt that progress has been suddenly more rapid, our activity suddenly more intense; and, I believe, comprehension of the opportunities and imperatives which the region represents has become suddenly more general among Australians.

We have seen developments of considerable substance - far more developments and far more substance, I venture to say, than we have ever achieved in such a short time before.

- . We have established a Ministerial Forum with Indonesia, a structure which has enabled us to increase co-operation across a whole range of government business.
- . We have helped to create the ASEAN Regional Forum, a new institution for the discussion of security issues in an area formerly suspicious of multilateral approaches to security.
- . We have seen the successful conclusion of the Cambodian peace effort in which Indonesia and Australia played such an important catalytic role.
- . Our relationship with Japan has developed new dimensions and depth of co-operation. I have had three separate meetings with the Japanese Prime Minister in that period.
- . Most importantly, APEC has continued to develop, and we saw last month in Seattle the remarkable meeting - without any officials present - of a group of leaders representing forty per cent of the world's population and fifty per cent of its production to discuss the challenges facing the region.

The role of leaders in these developments is vital, because through their actions they inevitably set the direction and symbolise national choices.

I have made it a priority to do what I can to set a pattern of contact with the leaders of our region.



I am pleased to say tonight that at the invitation of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai I shall visit Thailand next year. During that visit I will have the opportunity to pay my respect to over 1300 of Weary Dunlop's Australian comrades who are buried at Kanchanaburi Cemetery. I hope also to be present at the opening of the Australian built and funded Friendship Bridge over the Mekong River between Thailand and Laos.

Forging a new presence in our region has not been plain sailing, of course, nor will it ever be. Countries have different interests to pursue and different ways of pursuing them.

I want to say something very briefly about the current difficulty we are experiencing in the relationship with the Government of Malaysia.

The difficulty began because of the reply I gave to a question from a journalist at a doorstep press conference in Seattle.

That answer, as I have said, was not intended to cause offence and I regret that offence has been taken.

For more than 30 years we have had a close and mutually beneficial relationship with Malaysia. More than 100,000 Malaysian students have been educated here; we have a very balanced trade relationship; 85,000 Australians were born in Malaysia.

We have always been committed to the security and development of Malaysia and the Five Power Defence Arrangement is a demonstration of the fact that we are committed in the most fundamental way.

The Australian Government wants to preserve the interests we share and the friendship between our two countries and our two peoples. We want to work in harmony with the Malaysian Government.

But any relationship of substance and value requires commitment from both sides. For our part we are committed. We are willing to put in the effort necessary to keep the channels of communication open.

We have been putting in that effort at Ministerial level with the visits of Senators Cook and Ray to Malaysia within the last two days and with the contact today between our two foreign ministers.

Ladies and gentlemen

There is now, I am sure, widespread recognition not only that our future lies in the Asia-Pacific, but that we can play a dynamic and rewarding role in the regional community.

Eighteen months ago when I gave an address to the Asia-Australia Institute in Sydney, there were still some loud protests decrying our ambitions. We heard them sporadically throughout the year. It was as if we were advocating the abolition of Shakespeare and cricket.

Ladies and gentlemen

Soon after I took office as Prime Minister I made this point in my first major speech on Australia's foreign policy.

I said - and I think it bears repeating now - that we go to Asia "as we are".

Not with the ghost of empire about us. Not as a vicar of Europe or as a US deputy. But unambivalently. Sure of who we are and what we stand for. If we are to be taken seriously, believed, trusted, that is the only way to go.

Claims that the Government is attempting to turn Australia into an "Asian country" are based on a misunderstanding both of my own approach and the direction of government policy.

This is something I want to be understood very clearly because it is at the core of my view of Australia and of the Government's approach to relations with our neighbourhood.

Put simply, Australia is not and can never be an "Asian nation" any more than we can - or want to be - European or North American or African.

We can only be Australian and can only relate to our friends and neighbours as Australian.

This is not an expression of self-satisfaction. Nor is it an assertion of our mores over those of any other country.

But we want to draw on all the distinctive strengths of our history and our contemporary democratic, pluralist culture - the rich and ancient culture of indigenous Australians, the energy, bravery and resilience of our early European settlers and the institutions they created, and all the creativity and drive which comes from the people of 150 nations who now make their home in Australia.

And we want, in particular, to draw on the talents and experience of those immigrants - now almost half our total intake - who come here from Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen

In perhaps the most profound change of our history, the monocultural Australia of Weary Dunlop's youth has become a multicultural Australia; and the multicultural mix includes a large number of people from Asian countries who just a generation ago were excluded as a matter of policy.

In a change hardly less profound, the Australian economy has been transformed into one which is much more diverse, much more competitive, much less regulated and much more capable of succeeding in the modern world.

Accompanying this process, and essential to it, a new business culture is emerging with the emphasis on cleverness, comparative advantage, excellence and exports. It is no accident that exports have risen from 14 per cent of GDP in 1982 to 20 per cent in 1992.

At the same time, we have seen an extraordinary revolution in the culture of Australian workplaces, from perennial and habitual conflict to co-operation and creativity.

In many ways, as a consequence of these changes, we are now seeing the greatest change of all - the integration of Australia into its own region.

The past ten years have given me the greatest faith in the willingness and capacity of Australians to respond to the need for change. Properly managed, change should not be a problem for us. Our values and institutions are strong enough - our people sufficiently resourceful. Resourceful enough to make me think that, if anything, we should set ourselves more challenges than we have been prepared to in the past.

Far from representing a threat to Australia's democratic and cultural traditions, I am convinced that our capacity for change is enlarged by living up to them. In fact I am convinced the only way to successfully manage change is by pulling the threads of our common values - and our common interest - together.

We will not, for instance, make ourselves more competitive by leaving marginalised large sections of the population - whether they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or the unemployed.

I might say *inter alia* that that is why the Government took up the challenge of Mabo: difficult and temporarily divisive as the issue has been, the long term interests of Australia can only be served by delivering to indigenous Australians recognition of the truth and the basis for justice.

Australia will be stronger for tackling this 200 year old problem. We will be stronger for knowing that we have taken up the challenge; stronger for the unity it will ultimately bring; stronger for the international respect and, who knows, greater self-esteem it will bring.

The need to make us a stronger, more cohesive, more inclusive nation - not to say one which is more productive and efficient - is also why we have taken on the task of regional development. And why we are conducting the most intensive investigation in our history of the causes of unemployment and the means of creating jobs. Our standard of living, our decent values, do not have to be lost in the course of international or regional competitiveness.

Unemployment will not make us more competitive any more than will running down our health services, or cutting away our social security net, or making access to education less egalitarian, or undermining in any way the policy manifestations of our tradition of the fair go. If we want change we have to guarantee these things - above all, we have to find ways to solve the problem of unemployment.

Paradoxical as it may sound to the more simple-minded economic rationalists, the cause of competitiveness is best served by a spirit of co-operation. To learn the lesson of cooperation and the value of pooling our strength we need only go to Weary Dunlop's diaries. But we should not have to go to them. That lesson has always been the same - we will be much stronger for having a sense of common purpose, of shared national goals.

There can be no greater national goal than helping to create a vibrant Asia-Pacific community, thriving on its economic dynamism and its cultural and ethnic diversity.

A community whose members acknowledge and appreciate each other's differences while sharing a sense of common economic and security interests, and a common destiny. A community with a small "c" as I have always said. A community with a shared sense of possibility, a shared idea of the future.

Ladies and gentlemen

Until recently, the diversity of the Asia-Pacific was overlaid by the fault-lines of the Cold War and by wars which pitted neighbours against each other and cut across common interests and complementarities.

Now the outlook is very different. Now it is reasonable to imagine a great self-creating, self-defining regional community of nations. Now it is possible as never before to see the complementarities that exist in the region and the opportunities for co-operation.

That is what the leaders of the region saw in Seattle.

That is why APEC is so important. APEC is a framework for a new Asia-Pacific era. It recognises the benefits of diversity in the region. It gives expression to the sense of community which has emerged unplanned by governments. And it offers a way to maintain the momentum of co-operation and to ensure that we make the most of the opportunities now within our grasp.

For Australia, APEC is the expression of our greatest challenge. We want to engage with the region: to learn from it, react with it, give something to it.

APEC is no abstraction. It is not the preserve of politics and business.

It is important to every Australian and to future generations of Australians.

Because APEC will make it easier for Australian companies to do business in the region, APEC can underpin growth in the regional economy and in the Australian economy and thus create employment - worthwhile, fulfilling employment.

Our economic integration with the region, like our integration with the global economy, is an essential prerequisite of economic growth and our standard of living.

It is a guarantee that Australians of the next generation - the Australians of the Pacific Century - will live in a country at the leading edge, where the innovation and opportunities are.

At the Seattle meeting it was agreed to develop a common non-binding set of investment principles, as a first step towards an eventual investment agreement.

The meeting agreed to work on improving regional co-operation in areas such as standards which will reduce the costs of business, remove obstacles to exports and encourage trade flows.

Recognising that continuing prosperity in the region must be driven by the private sector, the meeting agreed to establish a Pacific Business Forum; and recognising also that small and medium businesses are the source of much of the region's dynamism, they agreed that such businesses will be brought into APEC discussions.

The meeting agreed to establish an APEC education program which will foster people-to-people and cultural links. The program will develop regional co-operation and higher education, promote study of key regional economic issues, improve workers' skills, enhance labour mobility and foster mutual understanding of regional diversity.

All these initiatives widen the horizon for Australia. Business, trade and employment opportunities present themselves. A world of great cultural richness and diversity is open to us - a world in which Australia, calling on its traditional and newly evolving strengths, can play a creative and rewarding part and, in so doing, deliver prosperity and security to the Australians of the 21st century.

Ladies and gentlemen

I said earlier in this address that I believe the life of Weary Dunlop should be required reading for every young Australian.

In his story there is an irresistible greatness, an irresistible lesson for our times.

The greatness stemmed from those universal qualities of courage and resourcefulness and love for humanity which he had in such astonishing abundance.

The lesson is that we should be open to change. The lesson is that we can be true to ourselves and yet open to others, that we can be bold and confident without being parochial and intolerant. The lesson is that, relying on each other, we can take on the most daunting challenges and succeed.