



# PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
ADDRESS TO LABOR PARTY DINNER, GREEK CLUB, WEST END  
BRISBANE, 16 MAY 1994**

## **E&OE PROOF COPY**

Thank you very much indeed for that tremendously warm welcome. And, thank you Wayne, Roisin (Goss) for coming along tonight, and the Lord Mayor, Jim Sorley, and Mary Phillips and our official guests, and all of you, thank you for a tremendous welcome and tremendous enthusiasm. And, I can tell you, quite sincerely, that it was in this room, this crowd, two years ago, more than at any other time in the period that I had been Prime Minister, that I got more cheer and more zest and more support than in any other place.

I was doing it hard at the time, and I needed a kick along, and I had had a good couple of days in North Queensland and I came down here to one of the best dinners I have ever been to, and certainly then, the best of my time as Prime Minister. And, I would say this, there is no State branch of the Labor Party that can put a show together like the Queensland Labor Party.

And I say that as a New South Welshman, I will be reminded of this when I go home, but as Mike (Kaiser) said earlier, it is a test of the Labor Party's strength and vitality, that with a weeks notice there is just on 1000 people. And, if it were not for the capacity there would be more than a thousand. I thank Mike and the Party and Wayne for suggesting it, and Mike for arranging it, and for all of you who have come, thank you very much indeed.

I am particularly indebted to Wayne for his very kind words of introduction, and it is true to say that he and I had a very good day, I think, where we went to a school here in Brisbane and we were involved with the teaching of Chinese in a class room, and Wayne and I sat down at our desks in the classroom while the class around us spoke Chinese. And, I thought what a marvellous thing it is that a Labor Government in Queensland can lead the country on this concentration on Asian languages, with now more than

100,000 kids from Queensland learning an Asian language, and be the forerunner of this nationally. As you probably know, Wayne proposed this at the Council of Australian Governments, that the Commonwealth should join the States in a national Asian languages program, which will teach Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Indonesian in the first instance. And, for this to succeed as a policy would tremendously change the nature of Australian education and our capacity to relate to our part of the world. At any rate, we have done it. And, the Commonwealth Government has committed funds to it and as time goes on we are going to commit more and it will be a great Labor initiative, but a Labor initiative that started here in Queensland with Wayne Goss, and congratulations Wayne on that.

But, as Wayne has said, we have done many things together, and I said to him today, you would have to go back half a century to find two people holding our office to be members of the Labor Party, Labor Prime Minister and Labor Premier of Queensland together in a Queensland school and doing things for the nation and for Queensland. Wayne was kind enough to mention the collaborative program that we have decided on between us, and we announced in the Budget to claim back that part of the Daintree, that wonderful rainforest area of Australia, of Queensland, so that it remains as part of the national estate forever and always, for our children. And, he mentioned the National Training Authority, and let me just say this, that we have made some very big decisions in education to support the University system federally was probably one of the important ones. To pick up retention rates in secondary schools was another. But, no doubt, the third leg of those important decisions will be the development of our vocational education system, of Technical and Further Education into a national system. And I was able to announce for the Commonwealth's part our commitment to be in that in the One Nation program in 1992, but it would not have been possible without the support of Wayne Goss and the Government of Queensland. And it is absolutely right and fitting that the headquarters of the National Training Authority which will see the renaissance of vocational education in Australia changing the Cinderella status of TAFE into a full partner of Australian education, it is right that that headquarters should be here in Brisbane.

But, after all, that is what Labor Governments are for, isn't it? I mean, here it is, a lot of our kids who don't make it beyond secondary school to university for one reason or another, often who drop out, we want them now to be part of a better education system, with a much closer focus to the work place and that's what TAFE will be. And, so that is a great initiative, I think, between the Commonwealth and Queensland Government, indeed the Australian States in general. But, Wayne had a tremendously important role, and had a key role in that, and Australian children will be forever in his debt.

Let me just say something about Mabo. Now, Mabo, we had a long rocky road with Mabo. But, as we got down towards the hard part, and that's rounding up the constituencies to support it, keeping some of the States in there, Wayne Goss and the Government of Queensland were the key to

keeping the State response to Mabo together. And, I can assure you that we wouldn't have a Mabo Bill today, or one that we have today, without the support of the Government of Queensland, of Wayne Goss in particular, and his pivotal role in keeping the States into the collective support we had for the Mabo legislation.

Now, that is something only a Labor Government would do, and we did have the support of some conservative States, and they were there because they believed in something better. But, the great leap forward in property and cultural law which Mabo was wouldn't have happened without the Labor Party. It wouldn't have happened without the 1993 election, it wouldn't have happened without a Labor Government here in Queensland. So, these are some of the great collaborative things we have been able to do together, and there is much more to do. Queensland is either now leading Australia in growth, sometimes it is in front, at other times Western Australia is, most of the time Queensland is. And, it is because of that leadership that I think Australia is now back to strong rates of economic growth with a State like Queensland tugging the national economy along.

So, I am delighted to be here. Glad to have had Wayne's company today in this important thing we were articulating in Asian education, but most particularly, above all that, in a collaborative partnership and working arrangement between two Labor Governments of substance, of quality and of sincerity. So, thank you, Wayne, and thank you for having me in Queensland.

Well, I said it was two years ago since I last spoke to you. And I think it was here in this room that Labor's journey to victory in 1993 really started to role. Because it was here that I said, that the difference between the Labor Party and its opponents was a matter of heart. It was here that I first said, if some group drops back we will lean out our caring arm and pull them up. And, I suppose it is appropriate, it is fitting and it is probably right, that I should come back here two years later, one election later, to talk about the White Paper, Working Nation, the device we have constructed to pull the unemployed up with the rest of us.

Only a Labor Government would conceive such a plan, and only a Labor Government could execute one. And, I first articulated that view about unemployment then, it very much separated us from our conservative opponents and set the tone for the balance of the Parliament. So, this night two years ago was a turning point in Labor's re-election in 1993. And, wherein John Hewson replied, "when the Prime Ministers talks", he said, "about pulling people up, doesn't he realise he will drag the rest of us down." And, that set the tone. But, the fact is, we have done what we said we would. We kept the promise and we kept the faith. Faith in ourselves, faith in Australians and faith in Australia, faith in the enduring values of our traditions as a country, of fairness of egalitarianism, of a fair go, and a capacity for tolerance, and a great capacity for change. And, perhaps it is the last, which is as important as any of the other, and that is the capacity to change. For

change we have. Change as a nation we have. Australian's, I think, are entitled to be proud of the change of the last ten years. For we have made big economic and social changes in Australia to ensure our economic future and to change from an inward looking country to an outward looking confident society going out to trade with the rest of the world.

It has been our lot, as Labor people, as a Labor Government with now eleven years in office to fashion Australia in an image of the Labor Party. Modern, progressive, caring, to become a country which is economically strong and robust, and efficient and dynamic, and which at the same time is socially cohesive. In many respects the White Paper which I had the privilege of announcing a week ago said it all, it was a declaration that division and exclusivity was not for Australia. That we were not going to bust our traditions in favour of a dog eat dog society, of a prosperous majority, with an underclass of people to maintain it, of a low wage, low productivity culture, with an army of working poor never freed of the tyranny of poverty and debt. And, I made this point a week ago in the House of Representatives, for those people on the conservative side of politics who believe the only solution is to push labour rates down for those who are low paid, or those at the bottom end of the work force, or indeed for even those in the middle of the workforce, And I made the point, there is not any distinction in social terms between someone who is nominally employed on a most meagre wage, who lives below the poverty line, who permanently lives in debt, than someone who is nominally unemployed receiving unemployment benefit. Because that is not the sort of society we want.

We don't want an army of working poor in Australia. We want Australia to be a high wage, high productivity society. Built on education, built on skills, built on research and development, built on product innovation, built on access to international markets, with pride in ourselves and what we produce. That is the sort of society we want. We don't want to go for the low paid jobs, the jobs which Australian's have now changed themselves and their country over a decade to escape to a higher standard of living and better levels of employment. So, the White Paper is a land mark in our development, not just for what it does, but for the beacon it lights which says, "this is the way that Australia is going". It is very much a declaration of where we are. And, we came to this fork in the road in 1993 when the Coalition argued the case for the economic rationalists, hard lined, dog-eat-dog case, and we argued the case for social inclusion and social cohesiveness and economic progress based on the common effort of the whole of the Australian nation. And, we believe and we state, we declare, that when we have come to that fork with a decision that people made in 1993, that this is the way that Australia is going to go. That we have marked ourselves out as a country that will not take the underclass route, that will not say to half a million people, "sorry you missed out, too bad, bad luck". We don't believe that we can maintain the traditions of egalitarianism and fairness if we say to those people, sorry you are the buffer at the end of the station. You are the people that take the brunt of the load of economic change, while the rest of us toddle off into employment and to prosperity.

Now, that has got to be a conscious decision. The country has got to get up and say, no, we are not going down the Thatcher path. We are not going to have the working poor, as there was in Reagan's America. We are not having it. And the White Paper said, "No! Not for Labor and not for Australia".

So, our creed has to be economic change - always changing - economic strength, social unity, fairness and a premium on human happiness, human respect and human regard. And the day we move off those things is the day that we forsake the great traditions of this country and the great traditions of the Labor Party. So, the White Paper is no surprise it is simply an articulation of those things, at a time when we have seen economic stress turn 350,000 people who have been unemployed for one year or more into that part of the labour market where there is no demand for them. And, that is why we have made the change. But, one of the important things is we have done all this, this huge package which is not just novel in Australian terms, but novel in world terms, we have done all this within a disciplined fiscal framework. A Budget which sits with the best in the world.

So, let there be no doubt that Labor in this Epoch keeps a first class set of books. The first Budget surplus is now history, and now a Budget to consolidate the recovery. And, that is the thing that always gets under the skin of the Torys. That Labor can run the show. And, what did the Budget reveal? As I said, a Budget to consolidate the recovery, and some recovery, 4.5 per cent GDP growth, the fastest of any substantial western world economy, two and a quarter per cent inflation, 3 per cent employment growth or just under a quarter of a million extra jobs, and a deficit of under 1 per cent of GDP by 1996-97 as low as any other country in the world outside of West Germany.

And the Liberals and the National Party, they could have spat chips. As Ralph Willis was reading the forecast out, "growth and low inflation", the heads slumped down, and they thought it would all be theirs. The same John Hewson who was predicting a double dip recession, and a depression, and a currency crisis in the course of the election campaign, wanted to be now out there claiming Labor's work as his own. And, could you imagine it? If it was a Liberal Treasurer standing up there claiming 4.5 per cent GDP growth, two and a quarter per cent inflation, 3 per cent employment growth and the deficit coming down to under 1 per cent GDP. They would have been, honestly, they would have been casting little gilt statues to them in some of these business organisations. You can imagine the claims, you know, the role that Dr Hewson would have played in taking the accolades for this. But, what was he left to debate? The difference between 4 per cent and 4.5 per cent. That was the big debate on Budget night, 4 per cent or 4.5 per cent. With the western world growth average at 1 per cent, at one, and up to 4.5 per cent, and they are saying, "oh no, no, 4.5 per cent is too much, it should be 4 per cent". This is the same economy that was going to be in a recession. And, the fact is, are they bitter, are they bitter. All semblance of equanimity is

gone, for a while you see, after we had won a few elections, well, you know, the born to rule gang, they were out of office and out of sorts. But a couple of parliaments regrouping that see five election losses on the trot, five election wins for Labor on the trot and all the fun has gone out of it.

All semblance of equanimity is gone whatsoever. And there it was last year, where we beat them fair and square in a national election where they had their best funded campaign ever, where they articulated with massive media coverage their program... we won the election, we beat them overwhelmingly, we brought in our Budget as the elected government and they said, "All Labor governments are illegitimate, this Budget is our business," and they went on then to lead us a merry dance in the Senate. Not within a year of the government taking office. Now, this year our White Paper and Budget are met with a scowling reassertion of the principles of Fightback!. After, it got too much for them, the general support of the business community, of the media, of the public, in the end rather than saying, "Well, OK, it's not a bad budget and they're good outcomes and let's fashion a policy around it...", no, no, they went back to saying, "Look, hang on, we are reasserting the principles of Fightback!." The sort of, sullen contempt came out and out came the old policy.

So, two weeks ago at the retreat it was all social inclusion. Fightback! was dead and buried. Well, inclusion lasted just about two weeks. Now, this week, it's back to what they do best - exclusion. Exclusive. See, they always regard themselves as exclusive and their supporters as exclusive, so the whole notion of inclusion is alien to them. It's only the Labor party that believes in inclusion. And, so, they were deciding - I said John Hewson couldn't have been more obvious if he put on a toupee and a moustache - and he was out there talking about inclusion, well it lasted two weeks when Peter Reith blew the whistle on them on the weekend and he said, "Fightback! was as good a package after the election just as it was a good package before the election." Oh, it was a terrific package, Peter, terrific package. But there was more.... he said, "Fightback! should form the framework of the Opposition's next election policy." And, yesterday, Dr Hewson agreed with him. He said, this is Hewson, he said, "An awful lot of what we've said in health, family assistance, the aged, veterans, immigration, you name it," he said, "will go forward in a refined form to the next election. Well, presumably they're the same veterans Dr Hewson said were beneath his abilities, the same immigration that led him to say multiculturalism was absolutely a fundamental mistake.

But, he's returning to Fightback! Like Wiley C. Coyote, he's returning to the scene of the accident. He said, "The essential philosophy of Fightback! has to be preserved" - like the coyote waiting for the anvil to drop from the sky. But, they are an unhappy lot, these days, our opponents. No, they are - no, they are an unhappy lot. They've got positively no regard for one another. And, we saw over the weekend Hewson and Peacock reported as referring to Howard as 'The Rodent' and Kennett referring to Costello as, 'Dog'. Not 'The Dog', just plain, 'Dog'. And, of course, Bronwyn, who enjoys almost universal

contempt in the party, well she's had a rough couple of weeks and after we'd presented the White Paper I was cruising down the corridor of my office and I heard this great roar of laughter come from the office... and I put my head in just as the camera was panning away from Bronwyn's press conference. There she was talking to the camera, all by herself. You know, how the budgie talks to itself in the mirror. There she was, up, talking to herself.

Oh no, well you laugh.... John Hewson was up there yesterday at his family conference and I always remember something Jack Lang said to me, and of course whenever I mention Jack Lang they always hate it, because they hate the memory of Lang, you know... he said to me, "Look, I'll tell you this, Paul, never be worried about the skyrockets of politics. At first a shower of sparks and then a dead stick falls to earth." And I thought, in fact, the fireworks analogy fits this lot well. And some of you are old enough to remember cracker night... and I've seen this bunch sitting on the front bench, crackers, as crackers, with Hewson the skyrocket and Howard, Howard always such promise. He always reminded me of that thing called the flower pot. Now, I don't know if any of you remember the flower pot but that was the one where it always promised a dazzling performance. And you'd light it up and it had multi-colours and it did a show for you but, often, when you lit it up it went fffftt, you know, a bit of a spark.... and there was a bit of a show and then there'd be a bit more and a bit more, then, finally, it fell away to nothing. And that's really, basically, very typical of his contribution.

Then there's McLachlan, our establishment friend, who was supposed to have come to Canberra and really gone off with a big bang. I always think of him as the bunger, you know, the big red bungers... The strong silent type capable of the big bang, you light it up, everyone stands back and then the wick sort of goes down... and everyone's waiting... and they keep on waiting... and that's it, it doesn't go off. And then there's Bronwyn, she reminds me of the catherine wheel. We used to nail them to the fence and they'd go off and they'd take off, spreadeagle the kids, burn the dog, run up a tree and then fizzle out going round in circles. So, that's them. Bitter, burnt out and accident prone.

Nevertheless, we can never be complacent about them. And we won't be. Because, as Mike said and as Wayne alluded to, we have a generational change on our hands. Our party, our great party, has been in office now over a decade, federally and we are seeing a great generational change and a great new set of challenges. And, even if the Coalition is not up to it, even if they don't understand, even if they've learned nothing from their hard hearted cynical politics that doesn't deflect us from our challenge and the challenge to rejuvenate and to change as we go. And the enthusiasm, I think it's worth saying, that the enthusiasm of our Cabinet has got to be seen to be believed. The pride in the work, the commitment of people to the joint effort, the group effort, and the zing at meetings of the Cabinet and the committees is a tremendous reminder of the capacity of the Labor party to rise to the occasion. And I look at people like the Attorney General here from Queensland, Michael Lavarch, 31, the Attorney General, 31. You know,

Michael Lee, 35, holding down that huge job in the Arts and Communications, John Faulkner, all these new people have just joined the Cabinet recently. John Faulkner, Laurie Brereton, Carmen Lawrence, Peter Baldwin, Bob McMullan - a tremendous group of new participants in the Cabinet process and mixed with the experience of people who've distinguished themselves over the years like Ralph Willis is doing now, as Treasurer, Kim Beazley, Gareth Evans, Brian Howe, Simon Crean, Robert Ray, Peter Cook, Nick Bolkus and Bob Collins. In terms of that mix of experience and commitment and the new members with so much promise and hope and generosity, then Labor is in for a very good time of being able to meet the challenges which come along. And that, coupled with the tremendous competence of our backbench and our ministry.

And, I think one of the things I'd like to report to you is that I think that we are seeing, now, a corporatism and an understanding in our caucus to measure up to the task of managing this recovery and taking on the new challenges in a way I saw it shaping up in the 1983-84 caucus which carried us right through the 1980s. So, this is a tremendously good thing for the country, for our party and for the government. It is a tremendously good thing to see not just a competent Cabinet and a competent Ministry but another group of people who can fill their positions and who are prepared to commit themselves to the work of the caucus and to the backbench, in a unified team effort. I've never seen more policy unity in Canberra than now, I've never seen a greater pulling together, I've never seen Labor any better than it is at this time. And, this is a great thing.

But, we have challenges and Wayne mentioned a couple of them in his opening remarks. One of them is, of course, the Asia-Pacific. We've got to create structures not just in Australia but create structures for Australia, outside of Australia. And we're doing this in bilateral relationships with countries, we're doing it in APEC which is a trans Asian-Pacific body, we're doing it in the development of the ASEAN regional forum, we're doing it right around the world. But, we're doing it most particularly in this part of the world and that job will always need constant work, it will always need constant attention. And, we're going to be giving it that work and constant attention.

The other great change we embarked on in the last Parliament and this one is enterprise bargaining in the workplace: the hardest, deepest micro-economic reform in the country and of course, it's always left to the Labor government to do it. The Liberals now bemoan the centralised wage fixing system for its rigidities but it sat there all through their political history - all through the period of their governments. And, in a party which is aligned to organised labour, to the trade unions, as the Labor party has, is the party which always finds these things difficult to do, we as always, have done it. When they've shirked it, we have done it and the challenge now is to make sure that the culture of productivity, low inflation and better wages and profits is exploited by the spread of enterprise agreements and enterprise flexibility across the economy over the course of this recovery. And, as we see that change home - and it will take some seeing - but as we see it home we will



have broken the back of the last really deep and intractable microeconomic area of the economy. So, after the big macro reforms of the eighties and many of the micro reforms, in telecommunications, in land transport, in shipping, in the airlines, we're now spiriting this change home. And, that's one which we will be taking the challenge on in the course of the parliament.

The microeconomic reform agenda is never complete in any country - that is, all these little parts of the private economy and the public economy which need to be honed up and lifted in efficiency. And, I'm very pleased to say that I welcomed again, at Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Wayne's support for change at the micro level in respect of state authorities as the Commonwealth and states have, together, got to reform their own authorities, both tiers of government, to try and make this microeconomic reform a more successful one. So, whether it is in wharf authorities or grain handling or any of the other - the production of electricity or gas or water - this is another area of great national endeavour which will, again, test our abilities.

Regional development is another. We have said that we want this to be a recovery for everybody - and, to bring the regions of Australia into it. So that those people who live in provincial cities - and of course this is the most decentralised of all of the Australian states with many provincial and regional cities and towns accross the state - we want them to be part of the national recovery and the national economy. And, we've done things in Working Nation, in the White Paper, to make sure that we support the leaders of regional Australia who want to do new and good things for their communities and we give them that strategic assistance they will need to be able to do it. And put in their hands some of the financing instruments which they might use to pull their regions along. So, that remains a challenge for us.

Cultural policy - tying up the threads of our national life, is another. And we'll be releasing our cultural policy statement later in the year. But, this is an important thing about Australia's identity which Wayne mentioned earlier, about how we see ourselves and about how we see all the threads of our economic and social lives becoming part of our culture and our cultural life, perhaps, making it clear what sort of complexion it places on Australia as a society and as a country. And then, of course the republic. Because it is not just enough to say it's inevitable, if we believe in it, we have to do it. And, again, like the White Paper, this will depend on the whole country because this is something which has got to be done with understanding, where people know what they're doing, know its value, see its cultural significance and see its economic and social significance - and it's something which the Australian people will need to understand and, of course, support by referendum. So, it's got to be done with the whole country.

All of these things have got to be done with the country, all of those things I mentioned: the Asia-Pacific, enterprise bargaining, microeconomic reform, regional development, cultural policy, our identity, the republic, these are part of the forward challenges facing the government, facing Australia, facing all of us as a people and as a country. So, I am delighted with the opportunity to

talk about these things here in Brisbane at the same place that I started articulating the policy which was the beginning Labor's return to the election in 1993. And, maybe it's entirely apt that when Wayne approached me and said why don't we have a day together in Queensland talking about some of these major issues, including a dinner for the "true believers", the faithful, that I thought, well, this has been nothing but a good omen for me and, I hope, for the government. So, I hope that with the support of you people in the Queensland Labor Party we'll be able to chart a course forward, not worry about our opponents, leave them in our wake and go on to make the changes which will make this a great and powerful, but really decent and nice, place live.

The Queensland Labor party is a no nonsense show that has always kept closely in touch with the community. It's not middle-classed out of existence. It's a show which has that common touch and the earthiness which has given it great strength - and we can see this in the Queensland Government. I think that this is one of the states where Labor has seats to win and will be a key state in returning the federal Labor Government in the next election. So, thanks for having me back on this occasion, it's a long way from the election now but we've got a lot to do yet. And, as we do it I hope you people of the Labor party in Queensland can be proud of this government, proud of what we stand for, but, as important as that, know one thing, that we'll all stand together - Commonwealth Labor Government, Queensland Labor Government, Paul Keating and Wayne Goss, our ministers, our party friends and supporters, all of us, together. Thank you.

ends