

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
ARTS POLICY LAUNCH, PLAYHOUSE VICTORIAN ARTS CENTRE,
MELBOURNE, 17 FEBRUARY 1996

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Thank you indeed. One has always got to think laterally. There are cures!! You know, through that dreadful experience of the 1993 election campaign when the Huns and Visigoths were out there before us nothing so brightened me up or cheered me up as the support you gave me and us in 1993 and I think you have done it again. I can't tell you how moved I was by your reception of Annita and me and the things that Wendy (Harmer) and Jacki (Weaver) and Hugo (Weaving) have said about the Labor Party and also about me and my colleagues. Fred Astaire once said '... if I had a tear drop, I could just cry'. But, I could have done one better than Fred, I could have cried without one.

At any rate we are all here, I think, celebrating the same thing. This is not so much a celebration of 13 years of Labor and what it has done for the arts, but as much a celebration of what the arts mean to everyone of us. To all of you, who are part of the arts in this country or who support them, to me, to my colleagues, to all of us who know just how important it is.

I think, that it was one of the things that Wendy said that, I think, I was very happy to hear and that is that now in this country people appreciate the arts as though they are entirely central to our life. Entirely central to our national life, not just some thing off on a tangent on the side, but a manifestation of the way we are. And that they are not just something the government gives grants to or has bodies for or supports companies of, but that they are, of their essence, central to the way we are. Because, I think, all of us feel that it is only in a free society, it is only in a truly democratic one that has got good values in that space and intellectual freedom does the richness bubble to the top and we get the distilled essence of ourselves and the celebration of what we are and what we have become.

Those words that Jefferson once used and wrote in that great American document about human happiness - life, liberty and human happiness - human happiness is the core and central objective of government. There can be no manifestation of human happiness if our mood is crestfallen, if we are downcast, if we are subjugated, if we are intimidated, if our creativity and our expression is not allowed to move, we will never see the manifestation in what we call the arts.

So, when we see a country that has vitality and vibrance in the arts we know that we are truly making it as a society. That we have got that happiness there and that we have got that creativity and that space that a deep democracy does give everybody. I think that is what we are really celebrating. We are celebrating all of that and we are celebrating the manifestation of it in celebrating the arts.

My opponents say of me "you only want to give things back to the arts, you only want to pay back the arts." I say too right I do, and I will never repay them. I will never repay them. When I say 'I' I mean it in the plural. We will never repay them because you can't recompense, in monetary terms, something which is central to the spirit of the nation and it is about a celebration of the spirit and the understanding of the spiritualism of the arts is the reason we will never repay them. We will try and we may do some things better than others, but we will never repay them because of their essence that richness and spirituality is something that comes from people, from institutions, it comes from their up spiritedness, their good naturedness, it doesn't come because of a government cheque. I am an indefatigable warrior for the arts and I always will be. And we will resist our opponents when they attack us.

But I think the proof of the importance of the arts is there with our Aboriginal people who were here before all of us. For against the ravages of 40,000 years dance and music and history and religion and story telling kept them together as a civilisation, as a community and even withstood the ravages of the rest of us. That is where I think our lesson is and if we can do, as a society, as they have done with that sense of belief in themselves, in ourselves and pride in ourselves as they have then our arts in this country will have succeeded.

I don't know of any country that has been so singularly blessed as we have. To think that just four times our life time ago there was this large continent inhabited by this old people who have now bequeathed us, shared this with us, is one of the great perhaps accidents of history, one of the great benefactions of history. We are now appreciating, I think, what a great benefaction is as population growth and the pressures of modern life change the way people live in the world we - just the 18 million of us - have inherited this vast continent. We have got a chance to do something with it, we have taken the great change in the post war years, the greatest risk but the greatest reward of our time here and that was the post war migration policy and as a consequence we now celebrate our diversity, our strength, we rejoice in the vitality it has given us. It has made us new. This diverse nation, this vibrant group on this continent with this old society, in this old place, in this country we love has a chance to make us, as a nation state, unique in the world.

Now for the first time in our history, we are living with other peoples around us as we have never lived before. I often, when you look at the Liberals and their subliminal messages about the good old days of the 1950s and 1960s, the days of the monoculture, the days when all around us, when the sun might have been shining on Australia and on Britain, maybe, and on the United States and on Canada but there wasn't much sun shining on Burma or on Indonesia or on Indochina, on Vietnam or on China itself. I mean these were dark days with the Burmese in their utter subjugation. The Indonesians and their desperate poverty. The Vietnamese fighting back the yoke of colonialism and the Chinese trying to organise themselves into a nation with some bounty. Now we look around us and we find their freedom emerging,

their income growth rising, their pride in themselves, the celebration of their cultures and their invitation to us to join them. For the first time in our life time, the sun is really shining brightly on the whole world, not just on a couple of places. That is what is on offer to us. To be part of that because what is happening around us in east Asia is a phenomenon without precedence in human history.

I said the other day at the Policy Launch, you just might recall that the industrial revolution created so much wealth in Britain the British built abbeys to themselves across the English countryside and it came from somewhere between 10 and 20 million people. In the United States when the Fricks and the Carnegies and the Rockefellers put their fortunes together and built the great businesses of America and the railroads opened up the country and the mines created the wealth and the mansions were built all along Fifth Avenue and in Baltimore and in Pennsylvania, right through the United States, it was done of a population of somewhere between 40 and 70 million. Just imagine what is going to happen with 2.5 billion people, with economies growing at 8 and 10 per cent a year. The revolution, the production of wealth, the flux that is going to come from that will have no precedence in human history. The emergence of China into the world economy - all 1.2 billion of them - knows no historic precedence and we are right in the middle of it. Right in the centre and we have got a gilt edged invitation to come to the party, to be part of the life of this.

But, imagine going there without a strategy. Imagine going there without a sense of yourself. Imagine having the great inheritance of this continent and this people and going there uncertainly. Going there almost as though you shouldn't be there. That is why it is entirely central, it is fundamental to our future - both economically, socially, culturally - that we know who we are and that we celebrate who we are and we express ourselves and why it is important that we define ourselves and why the arts do these things for us. Why it is important to have an Australian as our head of state, because we can't go as some derivative society with the head of state the monarch of another country and present ourselves as a unique people.

Yet, the Liberal Party says that the republic is a distraction. They say that I use it only to get away from the big issues. But when I say hang on we said we would produce 500,000 jobs and we have produced 713, 000. We said we would make the economy again, we have grown faster than any other western world economy, we have done it with three per cent inflation. What do you think I am distracting from?

The other day when I said we would put a plebiscite to the Australian people to ask them the question: do they want an Australian as the Australian head of state? John Howard, quick as a flash, came out and said it was cheap populism. To ask each Australian what their opinion is he says is cheap, but to have 300 people boxed up in a room appointed by him in some convention is democratic. So, they attacked the notion that we should know who we are and that we could only proceed if we are completely certain of our identity

and our strength and that we celebrate ourselves and that we take something to this great change in the world and that we are part of it.

The arts is not just something for our quiet enjoyment. It is not just something that governments do because it is the right thing to do. It is entirely meaningful about the sort of country we are, the kind of democracy we have, why we should invest in our creativity because without it, we will wander around as waifs in a world of opportunity when it is really ours to claim.

We are now back, again, talking about these things. We are talking about the importance of these things. The importance of the arts, its importance to the country and what the Government has done for them.

I know three years ago that people thought that the arts were gravely threatened. We had Fightback, we had John Hewson. They thought in the deprivation of the economy, with a recession and high unemployment we were dead meat and so instead of being subtle, they were unsubtle. They said how about this, a Goods and Services Tax, we will rip up Medicare, we will cut \$10 billion out of the social wage, we will knock around the ABC, we will gut the arts, what do you reckon about that? People gave them the answer at the end. A lot of artists, I think, thought the game is really up for grabs here. We are going to have to tuck in and defend the things we believe in. But, in some respects, there was a boyish naivety shall we say about John Hewson. You know, rushing in there with a document seeking a mandate, in many respects quite an honourable thing to do. Seeking support for the model he believed in.

But, in some respects, this election is far more dangerous for the people who have belief in this country, who have faith in it. Because now you have a campaign organised by cynics. You know, the warped intellect of Staley, that absolute canister of cynicism in Robb their Federal Secretary and a Federal Leader in John Howard who just wants to be himself and they won't let him. He said 'look, I want to do the things I I want to cut wages.' No, no you can't, no, no, John you can't do that. 'But that Medicare, I want to rip it up'. And they say 'no, not yet John, not yet, not yet.' He went out there and they put him in the forest and he said 'I thought we got rid of all of these'. They have made him into another person and he is unhappy about it. He is waiting to break out. He is waiting to break out. But when he does, all of their cynicism about Australia, their belief in other places really, the fact that they don't have much faith in us - they have always seen us as some sort of derivative place that they can get a quid from, make a buck from, live the comfortable life from, perched in some good suburb, or on some harbour foreshore and taking the occasional trips back to the places that they really have their commitments to.

This is the sort of thing they will try and do and yet we say, look, for years we have been saying these things: universal health is good, trees are good, wages are good, the Arbitration Commission is good, the arts are good and they don't believe us. They don't believe us.

And here he is like Indiana Jones in some exotic place, in places he has never trod - Medicare, industrial relations, forests, the environment - discovering it all for the first time and we are supposed to be grateful, say, we have humanised them, we are grateful.

I am sure when I came on here today I thought this was the set from 'Future Directions', you remember that thing which was published. But that is them, isn't it? I mean that is them. In a sense, they define the rest of us by being around. We don't mind them being around, we only mind them being in charge.

I mean Peter Costello said this when we launched the first ever Cultural Policy for the country in Creative Nation - he said, 'It has got to be' - I mean he is such a berk isn't he - 'It has got to be a contradiction in terms, hasn't it? I mean a Government arts policy. It has got to be a bit of a joke, doesn't it, to run around and say at a time when everybody says you should be reducing your expenditure. Here is another \$250 million, some of it for people who are quite wealthy or getting these artist grants.'

You see it is so perceptive, isn't it? It is so perceptive. And then, of course, Mr Downer - our little curly headed mate - he said when he was the Leader, when he was a Shadow Arts Minister, 'That a Coalition Government would have the power to veto Australia Council grants'. Well there we are, cop that one. And the Council be reduced to an advisory body, advising people like Alexander Downer and Peter Costello and Tim Fischer and John Howard.

And Howard, back in the 1980s, when he was actually leading the Liberal Party on that occasion, he then announced plans to abolish the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Environment and with it the Australian Film Commission. I mean they are such a sweet little group, aren't they?

But now he is a convert. He says he is going to agree. He has ticked Creative Nation, \$250 million, he will have that. He said he is going to kick in more money - \$21 million of it actually - from that funded by the Government's Budget last year and these sorts of things.

Well we really know about them and I suppose reciting their form gives us a bit of fun, but not much joy. But let's recite some of the things, I think, we have done and tried to do with you and for you.

We have put the Arts into Cabinet and Michael Lee, our Minister, is with us today. We have also joined it up with the Department of Communications. So it is Arts and Communications because we know how central this matter is - communications, the growth of communications and how it can never be untwined from the arts.

We have bolstered the Australia Council and we have extended its brief to Hillary Macphee and Michael Lynch who are bravely turning it into the responsive and innovative organisation it should be and, I think, they are doing well.

We have set up a whole new set of important cultural institutions - the National Academy of Music, the Foundation for Culture and Humanities here in Melbourne, and there is a lot of money around in this country now - a lot of bread. You can see with that change we are going to make to the tax system on trusts. I mean how mean-spirited they are, some of these characters. If they just gave any of that sort of money to the Foundation for Culture and Humanities, the arts would get a gigantic kick along.

The National Indigenous Performing Arts Academy in Brisbane, the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia in Canberra, the National Museum of Australia, the Production Fund in Melbourne for the mini-series and the telemovies, and we have got some other things to say and I would just like to mention a few of those.

We are setting up an Independent Music Development Corporation to encourage independent production of contemporary music and develop a touring circuit for bands. Now we should do this.

We are investing another \$12.8 million in new regional cultural facilities, or in the refurbishment of existing buildings and we will establish a series of fellowships for outstanding regional arts groups, or companies, and provide funding to promote regional artists and bring them into the national audience.

We will extend copyright protection for artists working to life, plus 70 years. So it is life, plus 70 years. We will set up an Australian Copyright Office and implement arrangements for performers copyright and indigenous copyright.

And here in Melbourne - beyond the changes we have made already with the Production Fund and the National Academy of Music - on the site of Essendon Airport, we will establish a National Film and Multimedia Centre, a world-class precinct comprising film, television and multimedia development studios; contemporary music video production facilities; operating officers for local and international writers and publisher, creators and producers; and laboratories and support facilities.

Now this is a mighty site that has been reserved to us by just the development of airports in this city. It is about 340 hectares and it is 10 kilometres from the city and it offers a great opportunity and I am very pleased to announce today that Mr Jack Smorgon has agreed to Chair the new Essendon Centre Development Authority which will oversee the development.

We are giving \$4 million to establish a Youth Programming Unit in the ABC in Melbourne. We will provide another \$1.6 million through the Australia Council to establish a National Theatre of Cultural Diversity in Melbourne. And we are going to build a home for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra in Hobart.

And as we have been one of the prime movers in establishing APEC, which is now the primary piece of political architecture in the Asia-Pacific, we are going to invite the 17 other members of APEC to participate in an inaugural festival of the Asia-Pacific in Brisbane in 1997.

I think these things will tend to round out what we have been doing, what we have been able to accomplish, and we will of course be, as implied they are not only maintaining our financial commitments to the arts in general, but improving them.

But I am very pleased about those initiatives and especially with the last one, inviting the APEC countries to come here because that gets back to the point - we have got a gilt edged invitation and we will be, I think, carried along by the excitement and the growth of this region. And the opportunities we will have to enjoy their culture and they ours because we have got so much to give and we want to show people what we have got to give and as we have been pretty much the architects of this, we can be the architects of an international cultural festival of this kind and, I think, this is going to be important to us.

Could I just say that, you know, the dear old French we have been fighting them for years over various things. But we do some good things with them too. They have been letting off nuclear weapons in the Pacific for years and we set up the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and they are now going to sign it.

We have been arguing with them about agriculture in Europe, in the Uruguay Round, for years and we basically had a victory over them there. But they are capable of some very good things as we all know. In fact, some of us rather like them. And a couple have come to my mind. One is, that when Michel Rocard first became Prime Minister, it was really a funny day. Don Russell and I - Don is with me today, you can't miss him when he comes into a crowd - Don and I were in Paris and we had this appointment to see Michel Rocard. He had been Prime Minister for six weeks, no Australian Minister had met a French Premier for, I think, ten or twelve years to this point.

And I said to Don, we have got an hour and a half and we may as well knock over the shops around the Rue de Bac and those places. And I dragged Don in and out of all these places and I said we have got a quarter of an hour to get there, we had better go.

We got in the car and we are heading for the Hotel Matignon and down the street, I can't recall its name now, the Rue de Lauren I think it is, there was a traffic jam and the time was passing, and the appointed time had arrived and I said, we are going to have to hot-foot- it. So out of the car we got, down the street we got, and we walked in the gate of the Hotel Matignon and the guard said, 'No, no, you can't pass. Who are you?' I said, well I am the Australian Finance Minister and this is my Adviser and after some trouble we got past them to a waiting Michel Rocard at the door and we sat down and we talked

about the Matignon Accords in French Polynesia and then he said to me, 'You know, the President and I want to do something for the bicentenary of the Revolution next year.' And he said, 'We thought about setting up an environmental protection agency, an international one.' And I said, well that is a noble idea, Michel, but you and I will be very old people before that ever happens.

And he said, 'Well you are a fraternal party, what about thinking of something we can do together'. And I said, well I have got an idea for you, but I am in a minority of two in my Cabinet and that is to turn Antarctica into a wilderness park. And five days later they, the French, were to sign after ten years of negotiation, the Minerals Convention in Antarctica, which would have seen all the big powers ripping it apart, mining for oil, looking for minerals, and we stopped them and we signed it as it turned out and we put Antarctica away for 50 years until we understand more about it. That is one good thing we did with them.

The other good thing is at the end of this acrimonious Uruguay Round when our friends, the Americans, put the weights on us from Hollywood, we joined with the French in refusing the Americans their wish on audio visual. And having, sort of, thrown off the colonial culture that pervaded so much of the arts in Australia for so much of our history, having succeeded in that, we were not to have then laid upon us - the culture of the United States, or worse simply caught up in the global homogenisation of culture. And that is a threat to us, it is a real threat to us. But you won't meet the threat by shying away from it, you will only join it by meeting it.

And really, I suppose, in many respects, this is what we are doing. We know it is coming. But with all of these countries around us, in APEC, in the Pacific, in Asia, they want their cultures too and we have got in APEC half the world's population, over half the world's population and 60 per cent of the world's GDP. And that means we can, basically, keep our cultural freedom if we are good at it, if we are quick enough. And if we are committed enough to the things we believe our culture, about the unique quality of it, about its peculiarly Australian characteristics and how important that is to us as a country.

So many of these institutions that I am speaking of today and the ones we have created and the ones we are using well already, and whether it is a celebration of our pigs, or our dance, or whatever it might be, it is ours and we are out there and we are going to keep it. It is important that we put, indelibly, our own stamp on the arts and that they are ours and when people see them they know they represent this unique nation, this country - Australia.

Now I have talked for too long, but I want to finish on these points. Never has there been a time when it has been more important to have belief in ourselves, to have faith in who we are and what we have created here. And to be contemplating now, looking back, or trying to embrace a group that do not want to celebrate it, don't quite understand what it is, and for the

opportunity of the greatest economic phenomenon in history, to say - as they are saying now - they don't want to be in it. They really say, we are obsessed with Asia. 'The Government is obsessive', says Downer about Asia.

They are saying, they want to make relationships stronger with our Western allies, meaning they really want the drive down Whitehall again and they want the limo on Pennsylvania Avenue. And we have all done that and that has its particular joys for the moment. In fact, when Hawkey went around to see Reagan in a big black limo, I told him it would have been easier to go in a Yellow Cab and he said, 'That is the thing about you, you have got no understanding of protocol.'

But, at any rate, this is where our conservative colleagues want to be and we like these countries, we have cultural affinities with them, we will always keep them. But our future is here, our future is in this part of the world, and our heritage is this great old place, and we will only really succeed if we celebrate it in a way which reflects upon the creativity and the democracy and the intellectual freedom we have created here and take it and transport it into the countries around us where it will be received with great joy.

This is really the role of the arts in this country, the defining role and this is what we are really here celebrating today. Not just 13 years of support by the Labor Party, but the fact that the Labor Party understands this and that you understand it and that, together, we are all part of it. Thank you for today.

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