

17 February 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT OFFICIAL LUNCHEON
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND**

E & OE

Well, thank you very much Prime Minister; to Mrs Bolger; to Mr Winston Peters, the Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand; to Helen Clark, the Leader of the Opposition; your Eminence; other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a very special pleasure for me to be here today. Jim Bolger and I have known each other for a long time. He was, in fact, the first leader of an overseas country to speak to me after the change of government in Australia. And we've met on a number of occasions, first in Australia and subsequently at two overseas gatherings since the change of government in my country.

And I want to echo everything that Jim had to say about the easy naturalness of the relationship between our two countries, our two peoples and our two societies.

There are very deep and intricate bonds of history and tradition and culture and shared experience and common values which bring our two countries together. It is not, of course, a relationship embedded entirely in nostalgia and in the past. In fact, what gives the relationship added moment in the 1990s is that it is a modern, contemporary relationship built upon the shared interests of the two countries in the Asia-Pacific region, a recognition that we have to work together in that region if we are to realise our full potential. And also our common experiences over the past decade with economic reform.

As the Prime Minister of New Zealand said, both of our societies and economies have something of a history in tariff barriers and industry protection. The idea that you could build fortress economies, secure against the competitive incursions of the rest of the world, now those illusions have been swept away in both Australia and New Zealand. And there are many people in Australia who admire greatly the strides

towards opening up the New Zealand economy which have occurred over the last 10 or 15 years. And New Zealand richly deserves the reputation that it earned from many around the world as being something of a role model of necessary economic reform against the background of very great challenge and very great difficulty.

I have followed that change with great interest. Some might say that we are now, in Australia, beginning to implement some of the reforms that were implemented in New Zealand in the 1980s. Whilst that may not be an entirely fair observation to make, it is fair to say that in one crucial area in which I've taken a very deep interest over a long period of time - that is industrial relations reform - we passed legislation through our Parliament at the end of last year which largely implemented the policy that we took to the last election. And whilst it is dissimilar from your legislation in some respects, the central thrust of giving more authority to employers and employees at the workplace level to make their own bargains, getting rid of compulsory unionism, restoring effective secondary boycott legislation, allowing the emergence of enterprise unions, all of those things are very similar to what you have implemented.

And, of course, it's not only in economics that things have changed. For the first time ever in the history of Australian and New Zealand sporting contests, the Bledislo Cup will not be played at Ballimore or the Sydney sports stadium, it will be played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. And that in itself holds out the tantalising prospect that the world record crowd to watching a rugby union encounter between two great rugby playing nations will in fact be established in the home and the birth place of Australian Rules football. It is one of those - I mean, bear in the mind that they have the world record rugby league crowd, which was 87 000 in the match between Australia and Great Britain. So, things have changed also on the sporting field.

The Prime Minister mentioned our shared interest in the Asia-Pacific region. The world has changed very much so far as our associations are concerned. Australia sees her economic future very much bound up with the most dynamic economic part of the world. And the commitment of my Government is just as deep and just as genuine and just as intense as the commitment of the Hawke and Keating Government's and indeed the Fraser Government before that towards deepening our relationships with the nations of the Asia-Pacific region.

But as I've frequently said since becoming Australian Prime Minister, we do not need to choose between our history and our geography. And there is nothing in the necessity and the desirability of our close association with the nations of the Asia-Pacific region that dictates for a moment that we should lessen those ties between Australia and the nations of Europe and the nations of North America which continue to be of such relevance, not only in a culture and historical sense but also in an economic and a trade sense.

We do, in Australia, place a very significant emphasis on what I call the defence investment. In our first budget, against the background of having to make cuts in other areas, we quarantined the defence budget from any expenditure cuts. And that same approach will apply to our forthcoming budget which will be brought down in May. We regard that strong investment in defence as being a very important element of the influence that we can project in the region. It is also an important concomitant

to the association between Australia and the United States, an association which at all levels has been very greatly strengthened and reinvigorated since the change of government.

I share the Prime Minister's remarks about the importance of the CDR relationship between Australia and New Zealand. It is a relationship which imposes obligations on both of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, the most important thing about our relationship is, of course, the values and beliefs that as societies we share in common. Australia and New Zealand are two of only eight nations which have been continuously democratic for the whole of the 20th Century. And that in itself is a remarkable tribute to our two societies and it is a remarkable tribute to the foresight of those who put together the constitutional instruments that govern our two societies. And it is a reminder that as we face the world together, not always agreeing on everything but fundamentally sharing the same goals and the same objectives, that we do so from the vantage point of having been reliably informed democracies for a very long period of time.

Our problems domestically are very similar. Our opportunities domestically and internationally are also very similar. And the links that bind us together at a people-to-people level are of course too numerous even to begin to mention at a gathering such as this.

I want to say, Jim, I have enjoyed the opportunity of spending many hours talking to you in an informal and relaxed fashion about the problems and the challenges of contemporary government in our two countries. In the international exchanges between leaders of countries there is nothing more valuable than the chance in a relaxed and informal fashion to talk at length, as both of us did on Saturday night, about the challenges of the Native Title legislation in Australia and the experience of New Zealand in a comparable area. Of course the historical and legal basis of the relationship between the indigenous people of New Zealand and the rest of the New Zealand community is different from the relationship historically and legally between the indigenous people of Australia and the rest of the Australian community. But that doesn't alter the fact that in my country I'm seeking an outcome that delivers two things; it delivers justice and it delivers predicability and certainty to all of those who are involved. And I've found both in that area and the many other areas that we have touched upon a great source of advice and shared experiences from the discussions that we have held.

So in all of those ways it has been for me, Mr Prime Minister, a very valuable experience. Of course as an amateur political scientist as well as a practicing politician, I observe with some interest your new political system. I will continue to observe it with immense interest because it does represent a very interesting and significant departure, but nonetheless one that the New Zealand people have embraced and one which I know those who participate in the system will use and exercise in the way in which it should be. And I think all of us can gain inevitably from the experience of others. I don't contemplate such a change in Australia. But then we have States and we have a Federal Senate. So we have our own sort of differences already without taking upon ourselves other differences. But whatever the method of delivering the

democratic will of the New Zealand people is or whatever delivering the democratic will of the Australian people may be, nothing can alter the fact that we are ongoing and thorough going democracies in the best sense of the word.

But most importantly for this occasion I bring you the good wishes, the very warm good wishes, of the Australian people to this gathering. It is the most natural thing in the world for Australians and New Zealanders to be friendly. It has an easy informal intimacy, the relationship between Australia and New Zealand. But as Dr Johnson bade us to do, we should always keep our friendship whether they are at a personal level or at a national level, we should always keep our friendships in good repair. We should never take a natural alliance for granted. We should never presume to draw upon the stored good will of past common experiences to maintain momentum indefinitely into the future. We should always find new ways of expressing the affection we have for each other without in any way demeaning the old and traditional affiliations. And I think that is what we are doing in our relationship, particularly in the shared experience of learning effectively to compete in a globalised world economy, learning to take on the best of the rest of the world and to hold our own and learning to share the experiences that competitive endeavour brings.

And to you, Jim and Joan, may I personally thank you very warmly for the great hospitality that you've extended to me and to my Party. We have enjoyed it greatly. And we shall take back to Australia some very pleasant recollections of the past couple of days. It has been immensely enjoyable. And I hope it has made a small contribution to further strengthening the already deep ties of association and affection between our two countries and our two societies. Thank you.