



PRIME MINISTER

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE AUSTRALIAN
LABOR PARTY STATE COUNCIL, SYDNEY, 1 MAY 1983

Let me just say something briefly about what we have done in the very short time that we've been in office. And then I want to contrast that with the alternative which has been offered to the people of Australia, something which has been starkly highlighted by the events of this past week.

Now, it's often been said we didn't go into the election of the 5th of March with some hastily concocted program or philosophy or view of the nature of the crisis confronting this country and what had to be done about it. We had carefully thought through and had clearly perceived the essential nature of the problem confronting this country. It wasn't to be understood just in terms of inadequate economic theories that had been applied the past seven years. Nor was it to be perceived simply in terms of the inadequacy of a Prime Minister and the people around him. Essentially it had to be seen in terms of a country, of magnificent resources, having been more divided with a greater degree of confrontation imposed upon it than at any time in its history. And we knew that it was impossible for this country to start the task of reconciliation, of recovery and reconstruction unless the people would start to be brought together under a Government which saw that the need was for the people to have a common perception of their problems and on the basis of that common perception to start to act together.

We understood that you could call upon the vast reserves of decency within the Australian people and within its organisations; a compassion for those in this community in need and none more obviously in need than the vast and growing army of unemployed. And so it was with that message, it was with that understanding, that we went to the people and the people of Australia responded to our understanding. And we didn't wait one single day after we were commissioned in office to start to give effect to our understanding which had been responded to by the Australian people. For as I promised during the campaign the first thing we would do on the first day of government was to issue the invitations to the National Economic Summit Conference. And this I did on the first day. I signed the letters to all people who were going to come to that great conference. We didn't simply sit idly by and wait for them to turn up on the 11th of April but a great deal of work went into the preparation of that Summit and I pay tribute to the trade union movement, the great employer organisations and individual employers, to other groups, including ACOSS, the Local Government Association of Australia, the federal associations and also, may I say, particularly those often maligned people, the public servants and bureaucrats who responded - some of them who perhaps had had a degree of scepticism about what

we were about - but all together they combined in advance to ensure that the basis of success would be provided. We undertook an historic decision prior to the actual Summit being convened. We said as a Party committed to the dissemination of knowledge and of information as a basis of proper understanding and as a basis of proper decision making that we were going to tear the veil away from the secrecy which consistently had been held tightly over the sources of guarded information under the seven years of conservative government. And we made available in advance of the Summit, to all the people that were going to be there, and then to the media, what had hitherto been regarded as the confidential preserve of government. Now that's no way to run a government and to get a cohesive society together. So we made the information available in a way which has universally acknowledged as unprecedented in the history of this country and in a sense which is matched in very few other countries of the world. And we will continue to do that because we believe that we have no monopoly of wisdom. We certainly have no monopoly of experience to bring to bear upon the problems of our country. We believe we are well equipped to deal with them but we certainly believe that if we are going to get the best out of the trade union movement and out of the employers and out of the welfare organisations and out of the representatives of the third tier of government - local government - of the professional associations: if we are going to get the best out of them and they are going to give their best to us then they are entitled to have available to them the same degree of information that we have got. And so what we did in preparation for the Summit will continue after the Summit. And I believe that this, of itself, is an historic watershed in the processes of government and in the way in which society is treated by its elected government. And as we continue to give effect to that so will the quality of government and the quality of our society improve.

And so the Summit was held on the basis of that historically unprecedented dissemination of relevant information.

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On Thursday in Sydney, in the second week after the Summit, we held a meeting with Paul Keating and Chris Hurford and Jo Dawkins in respect of the housing industry. Because what had emerged at the Summit was that there was a large degree of consensus amongst the ... employers, the building and construction employers, amongst the trade unions, amongst the various areas of government that one particular segment that we could move on to get the economy moving, to lift the level of activity, to start to create more jobs, within the housing industry. So that meeting was held last Thursday and on the basis of that and on the reports that have been given to me I know that in this coming period of time, in the third week I think of May, when we bring down our economic statement, there will as a result of what occurred at the Summit be presented to the Parliament a specific program of action around housing which will be directed towards what we want, that is lifting activity and providing more jobs.

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Now what have the events of this past week shown in terms of the alternative which is available to us, the alternative which is offered by the Liberal Party under Andrew Peacock. We have just been through the events of the Constitutional Convention in Adelaide. I had some cause to talk about this on Friday night to your colleagues at the great gathering we had of the Labor Party in Victoria to celebrate the events of the 5th of March.

I said what the events of this last week have shown was how tragically inadequate is that alternative which is now shaping up under the leadership of Mr Peacock. Because there in Adelaide you had this Constitutional Convention which had what task? It had the task of saying what are we as a community going to do in terms of providing the people of Australia today and the future citizens of Australia tomorrow - what are we going to do

about providing them with a constitutional instrument which will be relevant to their needs as they go towards the end of the twentieth century and try and put themselves in the proper position to launch in to the twenty-first century. We were concerned with the future and your Labor Party, through your Labor governments representing the overwhelming majority of the people of Australia, we played it according to the rules.

We went there with the capacity, if we'd wanted to, to load the delegations of the federal government and of the governments of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, but we didn't, we played the rules. And so the composition of the national delegation and of the delegations in those four states were even numbers of government and of opposition. We didn't use the power that was available to us, if we'd wanted to, to break the rules and to break the conventions. But what did those two remaining bastions of conservatism, Queensland and Tasmania do? They broke the rules. They couldn't look to the future, they are obsessed with preserving the past. And so the delegation from Queensland was nine out of twelve from government. And our colleagues from Queensland, I guess understandably too, they weren't going to be part of that charade. And so the Queensland delegation was nine. Tasmania did the same thing - not an even number that we, the government, the Labor Party, no. And so because we'd played the rules, we played it fair, square, dinkum - because we'd done it and we've got the national government and four out of the six state governments - we were in a minority because they'd loaded the numbers against us.

Now Andrew Peacock had the opportunity after the people of Australia had spoken and spoken so clearly on the 5th of March that they wanted political parties concerned with the problems of the present in terms of the hopes of the future - he had the great opportunity in this last week in Adelaide, to face up to that challenge and meet the desires and aspirations of the Australian people. What did he do and what did those around him do? They desperately sought refuge in the past. And as I said on Friday night in Melbourne speaking to your Melbourne colleagues, we saw the emergence of the new raj, in Australian politics, Robin, Andrew and Joh.

There he is, not merely squeezed in between Robin Gray and Joh Bjelke-Peterson, but eagerly taking over from Joh Bjelke-Peterson, the most reactionary motions and reactionary philosophy. He even goes to the extent of turning back on what they were saying in the campaign just a few weeks ago about the need for contemporaneous elections of the Senate and the House of Representatives. They know that's not now on. He took over Joh Bjelke-Peterson's motion. Now here were we trying to decide responsibly - let's concern ourselves with the present.

Let's see how this instrument which was drawn up a century ago amongst six reluctant colonies - let's see without being unduly radical - let's see how we can improve that instrument to deal with the present and the foreseeable future problems of Australia. But we were frustrated because what we wanted to do was frustrated on party lines where we clearly had the political majority but because we played the rules (inaudible) and these people, as I've said, wanted to preserve the privileges and the relics of the past for the benefit of a minority of people in this country against the interests of the vast majority. They ganged up having broken all the conventions again, reviving and demonstrating to the people of Australia that what happened in 1975 was no accident. The people of Australia should be very very careful that if they don't want to bring back the basic divisiveness of 1975 they must learn - because in Adelaide this week the conservatives of Australia, now under the new raj, with Andrew Peacock there between Robin and Joh have shown that constitutional conventions and decency and fair play mean nothing to them. What they did in November 1975 they repeated again in Adelaide this last week. And those are the true alternatives that have now been starkly revealed by the politics of 1983.

A party, the Labor Party, which has said we don't have all wisdom, a party which has gone out to the people of Australia and said we want to join with you so that we can deal with the present and with the future and we're doing it constructively and co-operatively. Against that you have now the conservatives of this country now led by Peacock are like preservers of the past. They learn nothing, they forget nothing. And this party is a party of conservatism who strut around and talk about the necessity to adhere to the principles of law and order and of the decencies and conventions of our society. When the opportunities arose trampled them underfoot and have prevented the people of Australia having the opportunities they should have had in this past week to address themselves constructively and co-operatively to those problems.