



PRIME MINISTER

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
JOHN CURTIN MEMORIAL BREAKFAST
FREMANTLE - 16 NOVEMBER 1986

Colleagues, Distinguished Visitors and Guests, Friends All:

There is a quite superb combination of features associated with this occasion.

We meet in this historic port-city of Fremantle - the western gateway of Australia.

For generations this was the landfall for hundreds of thousands of immigrants to Australia - this nation of immigrants.

And especially in the 40s and 50s - the great years of the post-war immigration program which transformed modern Australia.

It is a city linked for all time with the name and the memory of John Curtin.

As such, it has a special place in the history of the Australian Labor Party. John Curtin - our greatest Prime Minister, always acknowledged his debt to the people of Fremantle. They stood by him in his very difficult personal years before his war-time leadership of Australia. And he always refused offers of a safer seat in the East, even when his national burden would have given him every justification for doing so.

So we are in a place rich in history, and particularly rich and meaningful in its historical Labor associations.

But Fremantle today - at this particular time - is probably the last place in Australia to be preoccupied with its past - its great past.

Now it is the venue for this great international sporting event.

I certainly won't say the Americas Cup has put Fremantle on the map. It's always been too important to Australia - and indeed the region - for that to be said.

But it is true that this remarkable event puts Fremantle in the world spotlight, in a way that we could hardly have anticipated three and a half years ago.

And we are delighted to have with us today representatives of the syndicates which, by their skill and prowess and sportsmanship, are all making such a contribution to the success, interest and excitement of this unique international event.

It would be hardly any use my saying that I am remotely impartial as to the final outcome.

It is all very well to try to live up to certain standards of statesmanship and international diplomacy.

But, as Billy Hughes said when asked why he had belonged to every Australian political party except the old Country Party, now the National Party: "Brother, you have to draw the line somewhere".

But within that qualification, I do say to all of our visitors - the best of luck and good sailing.

Of course the very greatest of John Curtin's achievements as war-time Prime Minister was the forging of the American-Australian alliance. That was fundamental to our survival as a nation. It remains the sheet-anchor of our international and defence position.

And I suppose it is a measure of the underlying strength of the friendship - the partnership - Curtin built more than 40 years ago, that it has survived the pressures of recent times.

And although the Member for Fremantle and the Minister for Trade, John Dawkins, is, of course, here today, I am not talking about his area of concern - some problems we have with certain of the trade policies of the United States.

I mean the really serious problem we have in the smooth sailing of our relations.

I mean the New York Yacht Club.

But I am sure whatever takes place in the skirmishes before and even during the great battle of Fremantle itself in February - and whoever ultimately has the honour to be the challenger - the friendship will survive - just as it has survived the battle of Newport three years ago.

I wouldn't want our overseas visitors to get the impression that, as a nation, we are in some way obsessed or preoccupied with the Americas Cup.

That would be a distortion.

It is true that we are a great sporting nation. It is true that we are proud of our sporting tradition. And it is true that all Australians shared in Australia II's triumph at Newport.

But we do have a mature sense of perspective about these things.

Nevertheless there is a reason why the Americas Cup Challenge takes on a special significance - a symbolic significance - for Australia, at this critical juncture in our nation's affairs.

There is no need for any of us to hide the fact that we are passing through times of great difficulty and unprecedented complexity, in our economic affairs. These are facts.

Given leadership, Australians do not run away from the facts.

We didn't under Curtin in war-time.

And we are not running away now.

Just a minute ago, I hinted, very lightly, on a major cause of our current problems - the international trade situation, and specifically, the disastrous downturn in the terms of trade, the fall in prices for many of our major exports - the commodities which particularly underpin the economy of this great state of Western Australia and make possible its tremendous contribution to the national economy and the standard of living of all Australians.

But there is another aspect to our current difficulties, which the downturn in the terms of trade has brought into the sharpest possible focus.

If the immediate cause of the problems is the fall in commodity prices, this has simply pointed up a more fundamental problem in Australia.

That is a legacy of three decades of lost opportunities.

We have to recover those lost opportunities. We have to have a fundamental reappraisal and a basic restructuring of the Australian economy.

And what we, as a Government, are proposing to the people of this nation is a fundamental restructuring of the nation's economy, and the use of the nation's resources.

That is the real challenge we face as a nation today.

And, by far the most valuable, by far the most important of the resources of our nation are our human resources - the intelligence, skill, vigour and competitiveness of our people.

And these are all qualities which were demonstrated so vividly in the work - the teamwork - which brought the victory at Newport and brought the Cup Challenge to Fremantle.

And it is in that sense I say that there is a special symbolism for Australia about the Challenge.

I don't mean who wins. I mean something much more important - the combination of Australian skills, initiative, drive, enthusiasm, determination and teamwork which brought the Cup to Fremantle in the first place.

Because it is on the basis of these qualities - these Australian qualities - that we are going to win our way through our present economic difficulties.

As I have said on previous occasions: in certain respects, the kind of difficulties we now face represent the same kind of challenge that we faced in the war - the challenge John Curtin faced as leader of this nation during the war.

And I haven't been saying that as some sort of rhetorical flourish or just because my admiration for John Curtin is boundless.

I say it because the kind of response required from the Australian people, in these times, is parallel to the kind of steadiness and steadfastness which was required in the war.

And I do believe that is especially true for those of us, as members and supporters who make up the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Labor Movement, which John Curtin led, and which I have the immense privilege to lead as his successor, 40 years on.

There is one reason of commanding importance why the response of the Labor Party and the Labor Movement is crucial.

And it relates directly to our wider goals and objectives, as a Party and a Movement - our vision for Australia.

Because the fundamental fact is this:

Without the reforms in financial, fiscal, trade, industrial and technology policies upon which our Government has embarked, there could only be stagnation and decline in Australian living standards. There would inevitably be a crippling in our ability as a nation to pay for the great social programs and reforms which lie at the heart of our Labor aims and aspirations for our people.

In the years ahead, the success of these policies will require the same sort of co-operation between governments, business and unions - and the whole community - which has been the basis of recovery and success since 1983 -

- the creation of 670,000 new jobs;
- the achievement of economic growth of just under 5% a year in the last three years, compared with minus growth in the final years of our predecessors;
- a restoration of business profitability to the levels of the 1960s;
- the halving of industrial disputation;
- and now, most important of all for the longer term future, the restoration of our international competitiveness.

These are some of the achievements of three years of co-operation between governments, business and unions in this country.

But I repeat: the work we have now embarked upon to restructure the Australian economy and to regenerate Australian industry is not only the most important and far reaching of all our reforms.

It is the absolute condition, the indispensable condition for the achievement of all our other reforms and the fuller achievement of our vision of an even better life for all Australians - a more fruitful life, a more rewarding life, a more secure life for the individuals, families, groups and communities which make up the diverse and rich mosaic of Australia.

And I make no apologies at all for invoking the spirit of John Curtin, as our guide, both in principles and in action, to the approach we bring to the task ahead, in our work for the welfare of the people of this great country.

And I certainly make no apology for that, in this place, in this city, at this time, on this occasion - here in the West, his adopted home, here in the city which by sending him to Parliament gave Australia its greatest Prime Minister, and here in this exciting place at this exciting time - at this time of the Great Challenge indeed.
