

**PRIME MINISTER**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERYCHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
VICTORIAN ALP CONFERENCE
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You have done me a great honour by presenting me with this badge representing my forty years as a member of the Australian Labor Party.

Forty years ago I was a student at the University of Western Australia and became the foundation President of the University ALP Club.

The decision to join the Party was probably the easiest political decision I have ever made. I had parents who had instilled in me a deep sense of the social values which the Labor Party represented. I had an uncle who was a Labor member of the Western Australian State Parliament, who went on to become Premier. And I had before me the example of that great Western Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin.

John Curtin had led the nation through the supreme challenge of war and his successor Ben Chifley was setting about rebuilding and reorganising the Australian nation to meet the challenge of peacetime.

So in that decade of unprecedented challenges for the nation, Labor was providing leaders of strength and wisdom; Labor was providing and successfully applying policies of relevance and farsighted vision; and, accordingly, Labor was repeatedly receiving from the Australian people their support and their trust to manage the responsibilities of Federal Government.

And not just the Federal Government. In August 1947 Labor had just lost office in Western Australia but was still in office in four other States - including of course Victoria, under the capable leadership of Premier John Cain.

Forty years later, Labor again holds office throughout the nation - in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. We are again implementing relevant and vital policies, again providing leadership and, as July 11 proved most decisively, we are again receiving the trust of the people.

That victory last month confirmed for me, in the deepest and most personal sense, the faith that first inspired me to join the ALP forty years ago.

It gave me new hope that our work as a Party and a Government will inspire young people today to share our ideals and vision and hard work, by joining our ranks as members.

This is the first major address I have given since that election. It is appropriate, and indeed I deeply wish to take this opportunity to express publicly my gratitude to all those Party members who devoted their efforts to the task of returning the Government.

It is particularly fitting that I pay this tribute in Victoria - for any analysis of the voting figures reveals that Victoria contributed hugely to our success on July 11.

In the House of Representatives, Victoria registered the highest two-party preferred vote for Labor of any State in the nation; and in the Senate too, Victoria registered Labor's highest vote of any State.

Parts of Melbourne and of rural Victoria which the conservatives once counted among the jewels in the crown of Liberalism we have now won and held at three successive elections - and that is a tribute to your hard work and dedication and to that of our branch officials over the years.

It's a particular tribute to the work of our outgoing President, Gerry Hand, who has been an effective and popular leader of the State branch. I will of course be working closely with Gerry over the next few years in his new capacity as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and I know that he is leaving the Branch in safe hands under the Presidency of Geoff Bird.

But even more important than the partisan fruits of victory is the meaning of our success on July 11 for the whole nation.

July 11 was not only a victory for the Australian Labor Party but a victory for the whole Australian nation.

The choice on July 11 was a choice between moving forward, together as a nation, to fulfil our great potential, or sacrificing that potential and sliding backwards into the past.

It was a choice between equipping the nation for the task of reconstruction or sacrificing the gains we had already made on the altar of the politics of greed and division.

By refusing to be bribed, by choosing instead the realistic path of hard work towards the goal of economic reconstruction and job security, the Australian people again demonstrated their faith that Labor has the capacity to formulate and implement policies for the lasting prosperity of all Australians.

In demonstrating that faith, the Australian people have also offered Labor an historically important mandate.

Our opponents are busily peddling the myth that the election outcome was purely a verdict on their own disunity.

It is certainly true that their profound divisions and their disastrous policy prescriptions completely invalidated the conservatives' claims to assume the responsibilities of office.

But let us not forget the basic fact of July 11 - we won the election and we won it on our own merits.

We won it because of our unity and strength.

We won it because of our superior campaign effort.

We won it, most importantly of all, because we had proven we had the answers to the real challenges facing the nation.

So the Third Term is not about resting on our laurels, or allowing our reforming spirit to flag, or pretending that the work we began during our first two terms is complete.

We asked the Australian people to stick together and to see it through.

They responded, with the clearest affirmation, and gave us their mandate to finish the task we have begun.

It is a mandate to work to the best of our abilities refashioning our economic structures, meeting the challenges of the new world economic environment, maximising jobs growth and securing our prosperity for the future.

It is a mandate to ensure to the best of our abilities the fairness and compassion of Australian society by applying equitably to the whole community the benefits we reap from creating a stronger and more competitive economy.

And it is a mandate to provide to the best of our abilities the stable, strong, competent and united government which the Australian people expect of us and which they fully deserve.

So looking ahead to the next three years of government, we have a full and a testing agenda of reform.

During the campaign I outlined the next steps we must take to improve our national productivity and competitiveness, to eliminate our economic weaknesses and to exploit to the full our potential strengths.

I said we needed to continue to improve the performance of specific industries by means such as derogulating the airline industry and crude oil marketing; by boosting tourism, value-added processing of farm and mineral products, and high tech manufacture of communications and computer equipment; and by ensuring spin-offs from our submarine and frigate construction programs.

I said we needed to improve our individual performances - improving work and management practices, upgrading our research skills, removing unnecessary regulations which hamper our productive effort, amalgamating unions.

I said we needed to continue our export drive, especially to tie ourselves in further to the dynamic growth of our immediate region.

And I said that as a special priority we would further address the training and education needs of our greatest resource - the Australian people. Labor has been the pioneer in this task of national reconstruction. While the Liberals elevated government by neglect to an art form, Labor recognised that our terms of trade crisis demanded urgent solutions - and that those solutions could only be applied if Australians were to work together.

Throughout the life of the Hawke Government, the political and industrial wings of the Labor movement have cooperated in the task of restructuring the economy - especially through the mechanism of the Accord.

The most recent example of this cooperation is the ACTU report "Australian Reconstructed".

I do not necessarily endorse every single proposal in that document. But I believe it is a sophisticated and welcome addition to the national debate about the key issues the nation must resolve.

And it certainly deserves an equally sophisticated response, rather than some of the ill-considered knee-jerk reactions we have witnessed. I will be making a more detailed response to this report when I address the ACTU Congress next month.

Delegates.

We won the election because the Australian people were prepared to put in the hard work necessary to achieve the goal of reconstruction - and they accepted that Labor had the only realistic plan to meet that goal.

But we won also because the Australian people accepted that Labor has the proven capacity to reap the benefits of reconstruction to build a fairer and more compassionate society.

We promised voters a new Family Package to assist battling families meet the costs of raising children.

As we promised, that Package will be introduced from later this year - which means we will be building towards our goal of eliminating child poverty in Australia by 1990.

We are also applying the lessons of reconstruction to our public service.

In the days immediately following the election, I announced the most significant restructuring ever undertaken of the departmental structures of our public service.

Labor's Ministry is now better equipped to manage the increasing complexity and interrelationship of Government policies in these challenging times.

I said often enough during the election campaign that the outgoing Ministry was the best any Prime Minister could have had.

As a result of the restructuring of the departments, and the election of a new Ministry by Caucus, the high standards set by those Ministers will be maintained and surpassed.

Victorian Ministers have a major role in the line up for the Third Term. Anyone who lists the names of the previous Victorian Ministers Button, Evans, Willis, Howe, Jones, Duffy, and Holding, and adds the name of Joan Child, the Speaker of the House, and then adds the names of the new Ministers Staples, Ray and Hand, and our new Whip Barry Cunningham, must realise that the Party in this State exercises an enormous influence on the affairs of the nation.

Let me also thank in public the outgoing Victorian Minister Gordon Scholes who has been a loyal and diligent worker for the Party in many capacities over many years.

Delegates.

As we make progress in this task of reconstruction, the forums of our Party and the members of our branches have a very considerable role to play.

The Party has always been and remains the engine room of this Government's success, both in selecting candidates for office and in debating and formulating policies.

In the months ahead, as we lead up to our next Federal Conference in June next year, the Party will again be involved in a major debate, concerning our policy on public ownership.

When this issue was raised in March, I said we would not sell off Government assets such as Australian Airlines in contravention of the platform of our Party.

That remains the case today. The Party Platform will not be hijacked.

But I believe the time has come for the Party to embark on a comprehensive debate of the issue of public ownership.

The principle of public ownership has a long and in many ways a distinguished history in our Party.

For many years, Labor Governments have accepted that principle as an appropriate means of advancing their goals in a wide range of economic activities.

Of course no one here will suggest that public ownership has no role to play in the Australian economy. This Government must and will continue to apply resources to achieve essential goals through public ownership.

But equally we are obliged as a Government to ensure that our resources are not being misdirected.

That obligation arises because we are a Government and a Party of reform. As such we must ask ourselves whether the solutions of yesterday are still the best way of achieving our goals.

And the obligation arises because we are a Government and a Party deeply committed to social progress and equity. As such we should ask ourselves whether public resources are being efficiently directed towards achieving those goals.

We are obliged, in short, because we are a party of principle, not a party of dogma.

Our Platform is not and must not be immutable.

When I joined the party 40 years ago, one of the most time-honored planks of our platform was that which committed us to a White Australia.

I make that analogy purely to point out that we can only go forward as a Party if we hold our principles not as items of blind faith but as relevant and effective means to achieve our goals.

In the public ownership debate the two tests we must apply are these:

First, does public ownership of a given enterprise mean that significant functions are undertaken that would not be if the private sector had the responsibility for funding, owning and operating the enterprise?

If the answer is 'no', then, second, what are the disadvantages and advantages of retaining public ownership of that enterprise, as opposed to transferring it to the private sector

In other words, the question should be not 'Why should we sell a given enterprise?' but 'Why should we continue to tie up our resources in it?'

I do not want now, to develop those questions or arguments.

Indeed, I make it clear that my own thinking on this whole issue, and on the future of specific enterprises, is not yet finalised.

But I do know that the time has come for the Party to open up a rational, mature and intelligent debate on these questions - and to do that on the sensible basis of acknowledging honestly to each other that no-one has a monopoly of wisdom or integrity on the issue.

Delegates.

Our victory on July 11 was not achieved by any one person or group within the ALP but by all of us. So the task ahead of us must be the task of us all.

We have won a great victory but we must not be lulled into complacency. There is a great job ahead of us.

It will call upon our deepest resources of ingenuity and determination, and our finest traditions of cooperation and fairness, to complete the task successfully.

We are in a position not only to govern the nation successfully throughout our historic third term but also to win reelection when we again seek the peoples' mandate.

If together we exercise our responsibility, if co-operatively and constructively we meet this challenge, then Labor is poised to be the Party to take this great nation, transformed and revitalised, into the 21st Century - a shining example of a people successfully committed to social equity and economic efficiency.

And, finally, we will be a Party and a nation which will have played a role far beyond our numerical significance in moving to create a world more at peace, and, with the realistic expectation of being able to divert its resources increasingly from the destruction and possible obliteration of mankind towards the elimination of the scourges of poverty, malnutrition and infant mortality which so tragically characterise the condition of too much of the human race.
