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PRIME MINISTER

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**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA,
THE HON R J L HAWKE AC MP
AT A MEETING OF THE ANZAC PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
WESTMINSTER, LONDON - 22 JUNE 1989**

Mr Chairman
Distinguished Members of the Lords and Commons

I am very grateful to the ANZAC Group for this opportunity to address under its auspices this gathering of members of the Lords and Commons.

No Australian - certainly no Australian Prime Minister - could stand in this place and fail to be powerfully reminded of its meaning and significance for Australia.

It was here in 1787 that the Speech from the Throne announced the intention of the Pitt Administration to form the First Settlement. It was this Parliament which authorised the first expenditures on the infant colony of New South Wales.

The legislation which established all the basic institutions of parliamentary government and the judiciary in the Australian colonies were Acts of this Parliament at Westminster. The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia is itself an Act of this Parliament, passed on 9 July 1900 as "63 and 64 Victoria Chapter 12"; and stating in the preamble: "Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords, Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same". And it was the Statute of Westminster in 1931 which ultimately put beyond question the sovereign independence of Australia, as a dominion within the Commonwealth of Nations.

No other nation in the world has had so direct and detailed a legislative and constitutional connection with the Parliament at Westminster. Indeed, it was only in 1986 that the direct links were finally and formally severed, with the passage by the Commonwealth Parliament of the Australia Bill which terminated any powers there might still remain in this Parliament to make laws affecting Australia. Thus, after 200 years the formal connection came to an end.

But, of course, Mr Chairman, that aspect of the connection was never, even in the colonial days, the most important part of it. The really important links, the true bonds will remain as long as both our Parliaments endure. Our Parliaments are pre-eminent in the world as examples of that system of parliamentary democracy known as the Westminster system. And it was here that, over the centuries, all the great rules and institutions which underpin the system were shaped. In particular, the principle of ministerial responsibility and accountability to Parliament. It is this principle which is the essence of parliamentary democracy and distinguishes it from all other forms of democracy.

No statute of your Parliament, and no clause in our written Constitution enforces this principle. Yet it is the historic heart and constitutional core of the system.

It is a measure of the strength of parliamentary democracy and its effectiveness in fulfilling the hopes and needs and aspirations of the people of our two countries that its most fundamental feature, its very foundation should rest, in the final analysis, upon a mere convention.

Of course, what has given that principle its enduring effectiveness, in practice, is the growth of the party system within the parliamentary system - and, specifically, the development of an effective two party system.

It may be, in this television age, that the great political parties in Britain and Australia, and we, the politicians who have to operate within the system, are increasingly the target for scorn and derision - although one only has to glance at, say, a concordance of Shakespeare and look up the word "politician" to see that nothing has changed much over the last 400 years.

Be that as it may, there is no substitute for the parties in our system. You cannot have an effective parliamentary democracy without effective political parties. And whatever re-alignments may be necessary from time to time - and nothing is constant in the swirl and sweep of politics - we will only have great parliamentary democracies as long as we continue to have within Parliament, great political parties, identifiable by their policies, their discipline, allegiances and associations.

In the development of these fundamentals of the Westminster system, our two countries have followed remarkably similar paths. This has not been, in Australia, a process of mere imitation and replication. From the beginning of responsible government in the two major colonies of New South Wales and Victoria in 1856, the Australians set out to put their own mark and character on their Parliaments. Manhood suffrage, votes for women, the single vote, same-day elections, and the secret ballot were all pioneered in Australia. Notably, we formed the world's first parliamentary labor party. In exactly two year's time, we will celebrate the centenary of the Australian Labor Party, when at the first election ever contested by organised political Labor we returned 35 members to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in a House of 140.

And, of course, with the coming of Federation, with a written Constitution, drawing on elements of the American and Canadian federal systems - and in the case of the referendum provisions, on the Swiss, Australia has obviously developed its variations on the Westminster model.

Beyond these constitutional and political innovations, we have undoubtedly developed an Australian style and approach in the operations of our political institutions.

My distinguished predecessor, Sir Robert Menzies, records in his memoirs, that Winston Churchill once remarked to him: "My goodness! You do seem to play your politics with a fine 18th century vigour".

That, of course, was meant as a compliment from one who regarded the Parliaments of Wilkes and Sheridan, Burke, Pitt and Fox, as a golden age.

And it is true that our politics are tough, robust, and perhaps at times even rough, in the characteristically forthright Australian manner.

But, much more important is the tenacity with which we adhere to fundamentals of parliamentary democracy. That is the source of the continuing strength and energy of democracy in Australia.

And perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that despite the very considerable changes in the composition of the Australian population since the war, despite the new richness and diversity in our society created by communities of very different backgrounds, some with different systems of democracy, some where there is no tradition of democracy at all, despite these changes, the Australian commitment to parliamentary democracy remains as strong as ever.

There could not be a more fitting place than this to reaffirm the commitment to the Australian people to parliamentary democracy - this place from whence it sprang.

Nor could there be a more fitting time - these days when around the world, so much hope - and, in one tragic case, so much despair - is associated with the cause of democracy.

From the Elbe to the western shores of the Pacific, we have witnessed in recent years, months and weeks, stirrings of the spirit of human freedom of immense consequence for the future of the world.

In so vast a picture, in so momentous a mixture of hope and tragedy, it is difficult to discern a clear pattern, much less predict outcomes.

But one thing is clear, one constant star: totalitarianism has no answer to the unquenchable spirit of human freedom, save terror.

And in the end, that is no answer at all.

Hitler's bombs nearly destroyed the fabric of this building. The fabric of parliamentary democracy survived as strong as ever. All of Western Europe which lay under the heels of the dictators has now achieved a unity under democracy inconceivable at the outbreak of the war fifty years ago.

This twentieth century has witnessed unimaginable horrors of final anguish, terror and despair. Because in the totalitarianism can offer, I am convinced that the twentieth century will end in a wider triumph for democracy than we could have believed possible even a decade ago. And if my conviction is borne out, then it will have been due, in no small measure, to the example and exertions in the cause of democracy, for so many generations, in the Parliament of Westminster.

Again fellow-parliamentarians, thank you very much for the interest you are showing through the ANZAC Group in strengthening the relations between our two Parliaments.

I've been very pleased to learn that your Chairman has accepted the invitation of the Australian Parliament to visit Australia when he is in our part of the world in July and August. And we look forward also to the visit of the Joint Secretaries of the ANZAC Group, Neil Hamilton and Robin Corbett as guests of the Australian Parliament shortly after that.

Again, thank you for the warmth of your welcome today, and for your contribution to the objective we all share - the strengthening of the bonds, at all levels, between Britain and Australia.
