



# PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
ADDRESS TO THE NEW SOUTH WALES STATE CONFERENCE  
OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY  
SYDNEY - 10 JUNE 1990**

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Delegates,

Twelve months ago, when I last addressed this conference, I concluded my comments with a simple statement of fact.

I had been saying how important it was for all Australians that Labor continue working, in Government, towards our overwhelming goal: our goal, in Ben Chifley's words, of seeing that all members of the community can enjoy a decent standard of living.

I said that was a goal Labor must attain - because in Australian politics, only Labor can attain it.

And I concluded with this statement: "With your help, we will attain it".

Delegates,

With your help, we are attaining that goal.

Because with your help - your discipline, your restraint, your commitment, and your energy - we won the election last March that so many said we were bound to lose.

Australia stood at the crossroads.

The Australian people faced the starkest of choices:

- a choice between two profoundly different political programs - two utterly different visions for the future of Australia;
- a choice between the social safety net and the social trap door: Labor's determination to open further the opportunities of all Australians, and the conservatives' commitment to the reinstatement and entrenchment of privilege;

- a choice between a coherent strategy - Labor's clear way forward through the national and international challenges of our time - and the conservative recipe for industrial confrontation, health chaos and fiscal irresponsibility;
- and it was a choice between Labor's experienced and united leadership team and the temporary alliance of convenience presented by a ramshackle Coalition.

Delegates, the stakes were high - for Australia and for all Australians.

So at this, the first State Conference our Party has held since the Federal election let me say to all of you, and especially to the rank and file members, a heartfelt thanks for all your work in the lead-up to the campaign and on 24 March.

Quite simply, New South Wales was the solid rock on which the Federal victory was built.

You successfully retained every Labor seat in the State.

You beat off the challenge from the New Right in the seat of Phillip - and I pay tribute to Jeanette McHugh for a great victory.

You regained the sixth Senate seat, allowing Sue West to return once more to the Senate.

And you didn't just hold your own. You pushed on, into conservative territory where Labor had literally never ventured with success before.

I have to admit, when I made that call for "your help" this time last year, I didn't realise just how energetically and how successfully you would respond.

For that matter, neither did Charles Blunt.

For the record, Neville Newell is the first person since 1929 to take a seat off an incumbent leader of a Federal party.

And his victory in Richmond is Labor's first in this seat since Federation.

But it won't be our last.

With Harry Woods having also won a tremendous fighting victory in the seat of Page, Labor is now established on the North Coast as the party of Government.

And these victories in New South Wales, along with our extra seats in Queensland, meant that even with our disappointments in Victoria, the result of the election was beyond doubt.

The lesson is clear.

Australians will not cop the conservatives' determination to entrench privilege at the expense of ordinary men and women;

- they will not stand for empty posturing when what is required is detailed strategy and decisive action
- they will not hand the reins of power to a conservative coalition that is deaf and blind to the need to protect the Australian environment.

That was the lesson the Liberal and National Parties should have learned on 24 March.

And when the time comes in this State, Bob Carr will teach the Greiner Government the same lesson.

Because the truth is this: conservative politics is so bankrupt in New South Wales, at both the State and Federal levels, that seats hitherto not contemplated as potential Labor gains are now legitimate targets for us

- and certainly, no seat held by the National Party should be off our campaign map.

When I make my first electorate visits in New South Wales - which I will be doing in mid-August - I will be taking this message to our two new seats on the North Coast.

I'll be telling the people of Richmond and Page that the issues at stake in the Federal election will equally be at stake in the State contest.

In particular, I'll be telling them that the chasm between Labor and the Nationals on the issues of environmental protection and of quality of leadership will ensure that, in the future, victories like Richmond and Page won't be unrepeatable and won't even be seen as very remarkable.

It is nothing short of amazing to follow in the press the squabbling between the Liberals and the Nationals about which of them will pick up the fragments of the shattered conservative presence in the bush.

The Nationals started out by launching a 'provincial Australia' drive - and the Liberals are responding with a 'regional Australia' push.

The fact is, when it comes to representing the real interests of the more than 5 million Australians who live outside the major cities, it's not the Liberals or the Nationals who can do the job.

It's Labor.

For too many years, Australian politics was split down the middle, with the non-metropolitan areas treated as the gerrymandered fiefdoms of the conservative parties.

But now, Labor has a strong and growing credibility in rural and provincial Australia, which is being increasingly reflected in our numbers in the Federal Parliament.

Whether it's protecting overseas trading interests and fighting for fair access to foreign markets - or whether it's extending modern telecommunications to the people outside the capitals - or whether it's ensuring that people in provincial cities and country towns have services equivalent to their metropolitan cousins - or whether it's protecting, through Landcare, the soil on which our agricultural prosperity depends - you'll find it's Labor doing the hard work to build a secure future for rural and regional Australia.

Delegates,

We all know that this is Stephen Loosley's last State Conference as General Secretary of this branch.

As one of the architects of our 1990 victory, he deserves our praise and thanks on that score alone.

But a more complete record of the last 13 years he has served the Party - the last seven of them as Secretary - includes many more achievements.

At a time when the Federal Party has been operating with an unparalleled degree of co-operation among the factions, it has been appropriate, too, that Stephen Loosley has brought a certain degree of glasnost to the running of the New South Wales branch.

He has brought increased professionalism to the operation of the Party machine.

Perhaps his greatest material contribution has been conceiving and executing the idea of the New South Wales branch acquiring its own offices. I'm told that one of the key elements in the brief Steve gave to the real estate agents was that it had to be a property in Sussex Street - which reflects his keen interest in Labor's history and traditions.

He will be missed by you in Sydney - but that loss is Canberra's gain. His skills make him a very welcome member of the Federal team. Labor already has a huge lead over the conservatives in terms of the quality of our Senate representation and Senator Loosley will be no mean addition to that equation.

#### Delegates

The 1990 election was a tough contest and it was a hard won victory.

But the verdict, at the end of the counting, was clear-cut.

And our mandate for the fourth term is unambiguous.

Don't fall into the trap of believing that we won this election by default - that we fell over the line because the other mob was so pathetic.

They were pretty pathetic. But we won this on our own merits - by demonstrating to the people of Australia that our strategy for the future of this country represents the only effective and credible way forward.

Now that the Australian people have given us the privilege of a fourth term in Government, it's up to us to live up to their expectations.

We sought a clear mandate for continued economic reform - and that's what we have been given.

I can assure you, and through you the people of Australia, that this renewed mandate will not be wasted or frittered away.

The first major decision of the fourth term was the election of a new Ministry - one I believe is superbly equipped for the task ahead.

The Ministry is already working towards meeting our election pledges - including our massive expansion of access and availability of child care, and our new 'clever country' program of Cooperative Research Centres.

The two new ministers from NSW - Peter Baldwin and Robert Tickner - along with my Parliamentary Secretary Ross Free, are already making impressive contributions in their areas.

We are now about to begin the cycle of preparations for our first fourth-term Budget. In this context let me give you a very explicit assurance that the Government's willingness and capacity to take the hard decisions in the national interest are as keen and far-sighted as ever.

You have probably heard me use those words "hard decisions" more often than you would like.

They certainly crop up fairly frequently in the vocabulary of Government these days.

All I can say by way of apology or explanation is that Governments that only take "easy decisions" end up running themselves, and the country, into the wall.

If Australia learned any lesson from the nearly-three decades of disastrous conservative rule that preceded 1983, it was that squibbing the tough decisions, neglecting the structural requirements of the economy, papering over the weaknesses, just spells hardship down the track, and requires a decent government to come along and put things right.

We inherited not so much an economy as an industrial museum - with nineteenth century exhibits like steep tariff barriers, uncompetitive work practices, antiquated capital investment.

Our historic role is to build an Australia that for once lives up to the potential of its people

- with an economy that is competitive in our region and the rest of the world,
- and a society that is sufficiently prosperous and fair to ensure - I've already quoted Chifley's words - a decent standard of living for all.

We've done the job well, precisely because we have taken hard decisions.

There are more hard decisions coming up, and they will require, as in the past, careful negotiation and accommodation.

And by talking about this current round of decisions, I don't want to be misunderstood as saying that once we've got them out of the way, then the future will be plain sailing.

What we must all understand is that economic reform is a constant process. What's needed is a continued willingness to adapt - because the nature of a dynamic economy is its very capacity for repeated phases of change, its inbuilt flexibility that responds to the challenges of today and, then, the challenges that are now unforeseen or only emerging.

The Labor movement is uniquely strong because we are involved with, and because we understand, the workplaces where the success or failure of the Australian economy is determined every shift - of every day - of every working week.

And this Labor Government is uniquely committed to the task: so that when we embark on change, it is comprehensive change for the lasting benefit of the whole nation - not tinkering to skew the system in favour of this or that vested interest.

So for the fourth term, there are more hard decisions and tough negotiations ahead; but there will, as a result, be further progress in the creation of a competitive, prosperous and fair Australia.

And let me draw the contrast between us and our opponents on this critical, absolutely central, issue.

In all the agonised post-mortems that our opponents have conducted to discover why they have lost four elections in a row, one thing only has become manifestly clear.

It is that this new-look Opposition has come no closer to relevant and effective policies for Australia's future than the old-guard it has replaced.

They're certainly no closer on health.

They're no closer on economic policy - Dr Hewson spent most of last year and all of this year predicting a recession and when the latest figures proved him wrong once more, he declared instead that we were going through "a patchy period of flatness, where some sectors are doing quite well"!

They're even further away from getting a fair and effective taxation policy. Not content with being belted by the electorate for wanting to abolish our capital gains tax, Dr Hewson and his tattered Shadow Treasurer still seem to be toying around with the remnants of their unthought-through notions of a consumption tax.

There were recently some well publicised airing of differences on our side of politics.

But at least the public knows that the only debates on our side are about the real issues: the nature of the problems facing our country and the most effective way of tackling them.

These debates within Caucus and Cabinet constitute the only real focus of debate about policy in Parliament House - we are still the intellectual engine room for the reform of the Australian economy, as we have been since 1983.

The conservatives remain what they always have been: an irrelevance. All we hear from them, as we have since 1983, is a noise made by those who don't yet understand what the national challenges are - let alone how to formulate a relevant and effective solution.

Delegates,

We have been given a priceless opportunity by the Australian people - the opportunity to impress on the Australia of the next century the imprint of progressive, compassionate and effective Labor reforms.

That is why the mandate we have been given for a fourth term in office is such a precious one.

My Government will meet the challenge. We will continue to formulate and implement the comprehensive reforms that have been our hallmark since 1983.

And that way we will ensure that we are laying the right foundations for the Australia of the twenty-first century - the Australia that is now starting to take shape - the Australia that the schoolkids of today will inherit.

It is to open those kids' horizons today - and to expand their opportunities as adults in the Australia of the future - that our reforms in this fourth term must ultimately be directed.

If we spend the next three years well - and we will - then it will be those kids who become the long-term beneficiaries of our fourth term in office.

And that is why this is such a precious mandate and such a heavy responsibility.

Let me close as I did twelve months ago: "With your help," we will fulfil that mandate and shoulder that responsibility.

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