



**PRIME MINISTER**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
JOINT LABOR COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
AND ALP EXECUTIVE DINNER  
SYDNEY - 30 NOVEMBER 1990**

I am delighted to note, Mr President, that the New South Wales Labor Council continues to demonstrate its grasp of basic industrial principles, which has been a key to its remarkable achievement over the past 120 years.

And one of those first principles is: get your claim in early, and make it as ambitious as possible.

We are here tonight to register the Council's comprehensive claim to primacy in the foundation of the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales.

And on the Churchillian principle that the best way to get a favourable verdict from History is to write it yourself, the Council has produced its own history, in the shape of this excellent little book - The Foundation of Labor - ahead of all the other publications, official and otherwise, we may expect in the course of Labor's Centenary Year.

So first, let me congratulate the Council on its initiative, its enterprise - and its justified self confidence at the bar of history.

Mr President, this is by any measure a genuinely historic occasion - not only for the Labor Council and the unions it represents in New South Wales.

In commemorating one of the landmark events in the formation of the Australian Labor Party, we are taking part in a celebration of Australia itself - a celebration of Australian democracy.

And in the official Centenary next year we shall celebrate not just 100 years of our Party, but 100 years of Australia's greatest political, industrial and social force - this continuing, enduring, authentic Australian institution which, more than any other, has shaped the lives of the Australian people and the destinies of this nation.

Tonight we commemorate a clear, precise, public event - the adoption on 28 November 1890 of the Labor Council resolution in these terms:

That with a view of securing better representation of labour in Parliament, and to effectively organise all that are favourable to the said object, this Council deems it advisable to establish Labor Electoral Leagues in every centre where practicable throughout the colony, and the Parliamentary Committee be instructed to prepare a scheme for the organisation and government of same.

Now, Mr President, that resolution was in fact the last of a long series of resolutions and recommendations adopted by the Council over the previous two years - all designed to advance the Council's long-held plan for direct labour representation in the New South Wales Parliament.

And these efforts were to be crowned with tremendous success barely six months later, when 35 endorsed Labor candidates were elected to the Legislative Assembly in June and July 1891 - the first parliamentary Labor Party in the world.

So great a work as the creation of a Party like ours had to be, of course, the work of many hands and many years.

But it is fitting tonight that we should remember and honour two of the Labor pioneers in particular - Frank Dixon and Peter Brennan, both of whom served as President of the Labor Council.

Until his untimely death in 1884, Dixon was the chief advocate for a political Labor Party, and Brennan thereafter was its chief architect.

Brennan's special achievement was to give the idea a form and a structure - to establish, indeed, the essential elements of the structure of the Party in New South Wales to this day.

Mr President, there is another event - another centenary - which adds a dimension to the tributes we pay tonight.

This month, 100 years ago, marks - at the end of more than three months of bitter struggle and sacrifice - the defeat of the maritime and shearers' strike of 1890 - always, in the annals of Labor, the Great Strike.

In New South Wales the Labor Council's work to form the Labor Party was well advanced before the Strike, and may in fact have been delayed by it.

Nevertheless, the failure of the Great Strike reinforced the case for direct parliamentary representation; and gave the cause a new urgency, a new and passionate determination that Labor's cause would be pursued through Parliamentary action, and ultimately succeed through parliamentary power.

And that, Mr President, is the fundamental achievement we celebrate tonight - the fundamental commitment to parliamentary democracy which the union movement made 100 years ago and to which we as a party and a movement hold, undiminished, today.

Mr President, following the November resolution, there took place in New South Wales what the first historians of the Labor Party, Roydhouse and Taperell, described as "the greatest burst of political activity ever seen on this continent."

By May 1891, more than 40 Leagues - the branches - had been established throughout New South Wales. The Parliamentary Committee, constituted as the first Labor executive, drew up the first Platform - a solid, realistic fighting Platform for industrial, social, electoral and education reform - a program deliberately designed for broad electoral appeal.

And they stated the Party's objective:

"To secure for the wealth producers of this colony such legislation as will advance their interests by the return to Parliament of candidates pledged to uphold the Platform of this association; and to bring all electors who are in favour of democracy and progressive legislation under one common banner."

That was the objective for which we were founded.

It is the objective for which we continue to fight.

Mr President, in a century of infinite change, in a century which has transformed six colonies into a great nation, in a century which has seen the collapse of empires, the discrediting of ideologies and dogmas - never more dramatically than in our own time - the foresight and clear vision of our founders shines out - a constant star which has guided us for a century.

And that of course, Mr President, is the real point of this historic occasion tonight and our centenary celebrations next year.

We of the Labor Party and the Labor movement do not commemorate some dead past.

We celebrate the past as the unbroken and unbreakable link to the living present and even more important to the future.

We do right to honour our past. We are right to be proud of our history - not least because it is so very much the history of the Australian people.

But its real importance lies in the strength we draw from it for the present and the future.

And in this context, ladies and gentlemen, we have every right to draw the contrast with our political opponents.

I will not say of them, as was said of the DLP - remember the DLP? - that, like the mule, they were born without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity.

Well....perhaps I will say it.

But I thought Bob Carr summed it up neatly when he introduced Paul Keating as the William McKell Lecturer at Parliament House, here in Sydney, last Friday.

And Bob said that he might concede that the Liberals had some sense of pride in their history on the day Peter Reith delivered the Bob Askin Memorial Lecture.

But perhaps, the Leader of the Federal Opposition put it even better himself.

Because, only a few days ago, trying to explain away his cave-in on family allowances - when he was rolled by his rural rump and failed the first test of his leadership - Dr Hewson said this:

"One of the things that I have been doing since I became Leader is trying to put a lot of our history behind us."

Now, of course, we can all understand why this new-look leader of the Tories would seek to put their past behind him.

For the truth is this

Their unprecedented electoral success over three post-war decades represented an unprecedented failure of performance.

Theirs were the decades of opportunities lost for the Australian nation - a record of wilfully creating a second-class economy, sheltered behind the high walls of Country Party tariffs and isolated from the challenge of international competition.

And theirs were the decades of opportunities denied for the bulk of the Australian people - the entrenchment of privilege, the deliberate creation of division.

That is why it was so vital for Labor in 1983 to embark on the task of reconciliation, recovery and reconstruction.

And in a very real sense, our mission in 1983 was what it had been 40 years earlier - to save this nation.

No wonder Dr Hewson seeks to put his party's history behind him. But history is not so easily cut away.

And on this occasion - this celebration of the workers' part in founding the workers' party - let us look briefly at their record for the working men and women of this country.

What does Tory history tell us about the most basic concern of working Australians - their jobs?

By the end of their last term in office in 1983 they had created double-digit unemployment. They were prepared to stand idly by while whole industries closed down - not least in importance, the steel industry, with its thousands of employees and its millions of dollars of exports.

We have created more than 1.6 million new jobs. Jobs for bread-winners. Jobs for women. Jobs for young people.

For those still without jobs, we have created new opportunities for training and re-training.

Visit a SkillShare Centre in the suburbs and the country towns and you see those opportunities being taken up by people with hope and plans for the future. Yet our opponents are on record as wanting to shut down the SkillShare Centres.

Where do they stand on wages policy?

Simply, they have opposed every wage increase that has been offered for the last seven and a half years.

- that is, at no stage in the life of this Government, in the Tory view, have the times been right for the workers to get a wage increase.

What about superannuation? When the Liberals were in office, superannuation was a privilege reserved for the wealthy, white-collared few. But we have opened up this erstwhile privilege, and put the legitimate expectation of superannuation within the grasp of ordinary workers. The number of people covered by superannuation has increased by almost a half in our time in office - and is steadily rising, guaranteeing security to individuals and boosting the savings of the nation.

What about health care - surely one of the most basic concerns of working Australians.

Labor has erected Medicare to provide, for the first time in the history of this nation, affordable and accessible health care for all Australians.

The Tory health policy consists of nothing but a determination to knock down Medicare. Remember Peter Shack? There, I must acknowledge, was a man with a sense of history: "The Liberal and National Parties do not have a particularly good track record in health, and you don't need me to remind you of our last period in Government."

What about taxation? Our Government has consistently and steadily cut income taxes. We're doing it again from 1 January. We have made sure that everyone pays their fair share: through capital gains and fringe benefits taxes. At last Australia has a fair taxation system.

Yet now our opponents want to skew the system back again by making sure that working people pay a consumption tax whenever they visit a supermarket or corner store. And behind this public commitment to a consumption tax lurks their hankering for the flat tax.

And now we have the good doctor declaring that abolishing the Department of Social Security might be a good idea - so that the needy can make their own way down to the voluntary agencies like the Salvation Army and the Sydney City Mission, and get their welfare assistance from them.

Then his Social Security spokesman, Senator Alston (I can't ask you to remember him because you have probably never heard of him) but anyway, he said, well hang on, let's not limit this to the welfare agencies. This Senator thought it could be that a firm of accountants might like to deliver all the welfare services - give Price Waterhouse the job of paying the pension!

It would be easy - but it would be dangerous - to dismiss all these things as passing fads. The truth is that they express the oldest convictions of Toryism in this country - their deep-seated conviction that the system of social justice we of the Labor Party have fought to build, must be destroyed, because in the words of Dr Hewson, it is only 'the hand-out mentality'. Those are his words. That is their real attitude.

Some things never change.

What has changed since 1927, for instance, when one, Theodore Hooke Hill, holding a seat in the Legislative Assembly in the very same area now represented federally by Dr Hewson, rose to denounce Labor's legislation for widows' pensions, in these terms:

'It was just such a system of diseased humanitarianism which led to the fall of the Roman Empire.'

Scratch the paint off one of these new Liberals and you will find a good old-fashioned unrepentant Tory.

On all the main issues - jobs, wages, health, taxation, welfare - their words and their quack remedies and their pet schemes reveal their true colours and their real priorities.

Sure, they have a new nominal leader - who gives himself only two more years in the job - that's staying power for you.

7.

But can anyone believe their party itself has changed - in its pursuit of privilege - in its commitment to the one, permanent principle of Tory thinking: to get into power and to keep Labor out - at all costs?

One hundred years ago, Labor's first platform correctly described Australia's workers as 'the wealth producers'.

Nowhere today is the Tories' unrelenting opposition to the true interests of those wealth producers more starkly revealed - in no way do they more clearly demonstrate their commitment to privilege - than in this: their instinctive repugnance for the solidarity of the political and industrial wings of the Labor movement

- a solidarity which for the past 100 years has worked tirelessly on behalf of those wealth producers
- a solidarity that today finds its fullest expression in the spirit of the Accord between the Federal Labor Government and the national trade union movement.

Tonight we pay tribute to the central role the New South Wales Labor Council played in the foundation of the Australian Labor Party - this Council which is the oldest peak council of unions in Australia and one of the very oldest in the world.

It is most fitting that this occasion should take place at the end of a month which has seen another step of very great importance to the welfare of the people of Australia and the well-being of the Australian economy; another step in the historic partnership between the Australian trade union movement and the Australian Labor Government - the renegotiation of Mark Six of the Accord, which will deliver lasting improvements in family living standards through lower inflation, further cuts in income tax, and save jobs.

My friends,

Tonight we re-affirm our faith in the partnership between political and industrial Labor, which was forged one hundred years ago.

Never in all those hundred years has the strength of that partnership been more important for Australia.

These are testing times for us all.

I do not for a moment deny the difficulties and hardships of the recessionary phase through which we are passing.

But ours has never been just a fairweather partnership.

It was created at a time of tremendous challenge for the Labor movement.

It has been sustained through times of desperate peril for the movement and for the nation.

Now, its continued strength is the key to economic recovery.

And the foundation for the sustained recovery, which we shall achieve, will be the immense structural changes we have wrought in creating a more modern and competitive economy. And the indispensable condition for this transformation has been and remains, the partnership of Labor.

These are the supreme facts of the economic life of this nation in 1990.

And they are facts which in themselves stand as testimony to the extraordinary importance of the work which began at the Sydney Trades Hall in 1890.

And that is the measure of the debt we all owe - first, as Australians, and as the heirs and successors of those who put their hands to the great work, in the great cause of Labor, one hundred years ago.

\* \* \* \* \*