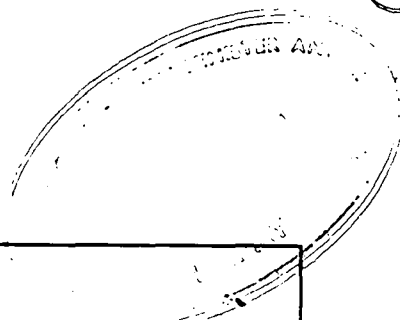




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**PRIME MINISTER**

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL DINNER  
SYDNEY, 9 MARCH 1991**

Mr President, Mr Secretary-General, distinguished guests,  
ladies and gentlemen

It is a very great pleasure and honour to welcome you all tonight, on this occasion of the meeting of the Socialist International Leaders' Conference. I do so, of course, both as Prime Minister of Australia and as leader of the Australian Labor Party.

I extend an especially warm welcome to our distinguished visitors from overseas, representing, as you do, the great cause of social democracy around the world.

And I am here to say, at the outset, that there has never been a time in the 20th century, when the fundamental values and ideals of social democracy have been more relevant, more important, for the future of humanity than they are today.

The events in Central and Eastern Europe have confirmed that relevance dramatically. But the representation here of the fraternal parties from Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South America remind us of our world-wide role and relevance.

Mr President, it is just over a year since the Berlin Wall came down.

There is no need for me, here tonight, to dwell on the immense symbolism of that event.

It is unnecessary, because in your own presence, in your own life and career of service and sacrifice, Mr President, we have a living embodiment of more than 50 years of struggle against two monstrous tyrannies.

And it was no accident of history - but rather in the very nature of things - that both those totalitarianisms identified, as their foremost and common enemy, the cause

you have served so nobly, the cause we represent - the cause of social democracy.

We are all honoured by your presence tonight. We are all honoured by your Presidency.

This is a year of important anniversaries - among them the 40th anniversary of the Socialist International and the Frankfurt Declaration, about which I will say something later.

But here in Australia, as you all know, it is the 100th birthday of the Australian Labor Party.

And to understand the true significance of that event, and to understand its relevance to social democracy today, we need, I think, to realise that this centenary marks a very precise event - an event which had a very specific purpose and meaning.

What happened in 1891 - here in Sydney, and more or less simultaneously in the colonies of Queensland, Victoria and South Australia, as they then were - was that the trade union movement established a political organisation with the express purpose of securing direct parliamentary representation for the workers in this country.

By that decision, by its commitment to the parliamentary system, the Labor Movement set the Party, which it had created, upon the course to which it has kept, to this day.

The Australian Labor Party has been profoundly shaped by its fundamental commitment to parliamentary democracy.

But equally important: more than any other Australian institution, more than any other political organisation, the Australian Labor Party has shaped the very nature and content of the Australian democracy itself.

In June 1891, history was made when the Labor Party, here in New South Wales, secured the election of 35 members - a third of the Parliament - to form the world's first parliamentary Labor Party.

And in the light of all that has happened since, it is instructive to read the objective which the fledgling party set itself. The founders stated, as their purpose:

'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.

To bring all electors who are in favour of democratic and progressive legislation under one common banner and to organise thoroughly such voters, with a view to concerted and effective action at all general elections in the future.'

Over the decades, the objectives of the Labor Party have been hotly debated and frequently re-stated. Yet no formulation has better stated its consistent purpose than that of the Party founders one hundred years ago.

It has often been said, and correctly said, that the Australian Labor Party was born with a sense of history.

Indeed, that sense of its past has always been, and remains, one of the great sources of its strength and its confidence about its future.

One of that first band of 35 members elected to the New South Wales Parliament, George Black, himself wrote a history, and tried to identify some of its formative influences.

'No movement so widespread' he wrote in the 1920s, 'could owe its origin to any one person. To discover the impulses and influences which generated the Australian Labor Movement, one must look far beyond those who stood beside its cradle when its feeble cries, almost inarticulate, first reached the public ear'. Black then proceeded to trace Labor's first appearance in Parliament 'to the Eureka Stockade, the Chartist movement in England, the teachings of Tom Paine, William Cobbett, Robert Owen, through to the French Revolution and Rousseau, Voltaire and Montaigne, and ultimately to the Sermon on the Mount'. Perhaps even beyond that, he said: 'from hilltop to hilltop of thought, to the first incoherent mutterings of toilers who felt that their conditions were unnatural and unjust, but had no idea as to how they might be bettered.'

Now, that's a fairly comprehensive ancestry.

But there is a notable absentee from the cradle of Australian Labor.

Karl Marx doesn't get a guernsey.

And the truth is, throughout its long, often turbulent, always vigorous, history, the Australian Labor Party has utterly rejected Marxism and the ideology constructed upon it.

Specifically, the Australian Labor Party, from the beginning, has rejected the dogma of the class war.

And the distinctive creation of the early Labor Movement and the first Labor Governments - the arbitration system - is one of the enduring outcomes of that rejection. The legal foundations of our arbitration system rest upon the recognition of equality - the equality of unions and employers - before the industrial tribunals.

In effect, a statutory declaration against the class war.

That, no doubt, is one of the reasons why we have the distinction of having been singled out by Lenin himself, in 1914, as an example of all the worst shortcomings of social democracy.

Mr President, as you will recall better than any of us here, when this organisation was reconstituted as the Socialist International in 1951, it too, specifically rejected Marxism and the class war, in the terms of the Frankfurt Declaration.

It is now extraordinarily difficult to convey, to a new generation, the derision and contempt with which it was greeted by the ideologues who accepted the instruction of the Comintern.

Yet, everything that is most hopeful in Europe today springs, in large measure, from the stand taken by the parties of social democracy in Western Europe 40 years ago.

It is easy enough to say, with hindsight, that the collapse of the central command systems was inevitable - that ultimately the human spirit would break the system before the system crushed the human spirit.

Yet, few in the 50s would have dared to venture that the collapse of communism, materially and morally, was a foregone conclusion, at least in our lifetime.

And of all the factors which produced the epic, and epoch-making events of 1989, none were more important than the example and the efforts of the parties of social democracy.

That is why I said at the beginning that the values and ideals we hold had never been more relevant or important.

And the key to those values is the enlargement of liberty, through the advancement of equality of opportunity.

For all the variations we make in our respective parties, the differences in emphasis according to time, circumstance, the diversities of economies, nationalities and cultures, these are the enduring themes, the enduring values of social democracy: liberty, equality, opportunity.

And underlying all, underpinning all, is the commitment to democracy.

This cause - our cause - endures precisely because it rejects the arrogance of dogmas and ideologies which claim to be universal.

But the values the cause represents can speak to men and women everywhere.

It has been the honour of the Australian Labor Party to be the standard bearer of those values, now for a century -

pre-eminently, but by no means exclusively, because this is a great democracy, and we do not claim a prescriptive monopoly on all virtue, now or in the future.

But I do profoundly believe that the greatest single source of the strength of the Australian democracy has been the strength of the Labor Party, and the values of liberty, equality and opportunity - the values of social democracy - which we represent.

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