



PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

**"IT'S TIME - WHITLAM GOVERNMENT DINNER"
RANDWICK RACECOURSE, 29 AUGUST 1992**

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Gough, Margaret, distinguished members of the Whitlam Government, supporters, friends, one and all. Well this is a very lovely night for all of us who were members of that Government, and a very important thing for our Party to be doing. It's a nice thing to celebrate your successes and be proud of your achievements and it's an important part of your history that you're doing it.

Fred talked about the true believers, we are the believers of Australian politics. We are the people who believe, we make the system tick. But in celebrating this Government twenty years ago, it was not just the election of another Government because we had our share throughout the century, but we celebrated with the election of the Whitlam Government, the coming out of Australia. Coming out of 25 years, a quarter of a century, of the torpor of the Menzian age. That's what we really celebrated. And the re-sparking of Australian nationalism, the re-sparking of Australian social experimentation, which was killed with Gallipoli and Flanders at the end of the First World War. That's what we celebrate tonight. We celebrate Labor coming of age again in 1972.

Of course none of this would have been possible without the leadership of the then darling of the Fabian set, Fabius Maximus himself, not to be confused with Tiberius Telecom who certainly had the odd run-in at the time, but he is the person who put Labor back together.

The two problems we faced in all of this century was in that great period, the 1890s, when the Labor Party was put together in that terrible depression and drought, when we had the Federation conventions when we put together the Federation, and that period of great social experimentation where we led the world. All of that made Australia basically a

Labor country until the First World War. And then the other great hurdle we faced was, of course, the Cold War and the Cold War and the belief that many people had with the collapse of robber baron capitalism in the United States in the '20s, that centrally planned economies were the way forward, and our party was divided on this very important issue for a long time. And it was Gough who put the Labor Party back together, and this is his great crowning achievement. He made Labor a relevant force again, when another part of this century have disappeared, he grabbed us almost from the grave and brought us back together. In truth he made Labor relevant again.

I am here tonight as the leader of the Labor Party, as the Prime Minister, as Bob was here in the early 1980s and throughout the 1980s, we are here because of what Gough was able to do in making Labor relevant again. Gough understood that the ALP was like a bicycle, it only stands up when you pedal; if you stop peddling it falls over, if you run out of ideas, and you run out of push, and you run out of drive, it just sort of lays to one side. But the thing is he understood the need to lift the national spirit.

And what's "Its Time" was about, it's when you read through the policy speech and the caption, the records were in many respects quite tame when one compares it to today, quite tame. But what it did in the epoch of that terrible Menzoid, Menzian age, was lifting the spirit of Australians. And if you were at the Blacktown Town Hall the hair was standing up on the back of your neck because you know that you were in the presence of something big. That's what Gough understood, lifting the national spirit, lifting the national sentiment and exciting people. He taught us again that undiluted affection for Australia, and a belief that the day might come when this country would not need the emotional or institutional supports of old affections and old connections. That was what he taught us, and that's what we started to understand back there in 1972. And that's why there was so much hope and so much promise. That's why we are able to carry on as we were, as a Party, right through that period.

And so when we celebrate this Government, we celebrate the dreams of Fred Daly's generation who came there at the end of the Second World War who have always such difficult periods to deal with. Scullin arrived in office in the 1930s virtually days before the collapse of the Depression, the stock market in 1929, Curtin arrived just a short time before Pearl Harbour. We are always saddled with the tough things to do in this life. We were denied the easy days of post war growth when people like Fred and others went to the House, because in the '40s Fred was actually in our war time Government, but many members came in '49 and by 1972 had just about given up. We nearly won in 69. Really the Government of 1972 was mostly won in 1969 and then a couple of years later in '72 we pushed it over the line.

And what was put together was a tremendous program of social change and social policy, which lead Labor back to the main stream of Australia, of the main stream views which Australia had in the past, which it had given us the constitution, which had given us some of the best social policy in the world, and which had taken us back there.

And the fact of the matter is that, that great tradition which Gough and his Government re-started has continued down through the period. And that is why I think it is a delightful thing to be able to claim in your history, a continuum between the Labor Governments, between the Whitlam Government, the Hawke Government and this Government. This is a delightful thing to be able to do.

And all of the things which the Whitlam Government did, things like Medibank, we've continued with Medicare. This is one of the great health systems around the world. With pensions, indexation for pensions, which we have now brought to 25 per cent of average weekly earnings where we sophisticated the whole of the aged care system. With Gough's Schools Commission, which has now led to a continuation of these policies with now 7 kids in 10 completing secondary school, and now a new revolution in vocational education, 40 per cent of kids going into university. We kept the whole policy going that begun in 1972. In foreign policy, a peculiarly Australian foreign policy, which we now make without reference to anybody else, thanks to that great period between 1972 and 1975. And even DURD, DURD is back with Better Cities. I don't know whether Tom's here tonight, but the fact is at the time this was path breaking stuff and again with the Better Cities we are back doing the same thing. With railways, Gough tried to take the railways over and make the national system. There were only two clever States at the time, Tasmania and South Australia, the rest said no. We are doing it all today, same policies, same sort of Labor Party, same sort of people.

This Government adopted the World Heritage conventions, which has been so much a basis for our environmental policy and all of our actions in Tasmania, or the wilderness areas, or the wet tropics of Queensland, come relying upon that legislation. Or in multiculturalism, which was again part of the vogue of the Whitlam Government bringing Australians together, producing as we did an understanding between cultures and making one society out of the many cultures of Australia. We are sticking to that, we are not going to the miserable politics of Dr Hewson.

And in other great reforms like the family allowance supplement, which is one of the world's leading family income support systems for low income families, or occupational superannuation for the whole of the workforce, we have seen a traditional Labor Government in the Whitlam Government, and a continuation of the tradition through the current Labor Government from 1983 to 1992. And the fact is, Gough, I think we can say, even though people say of us we're rationalists, no we're not rationalists, we're rational we're not rationalists. We're not isms and we're not ists, we don't belong to the isms and we don't belong to the ists. We are not Thatcherite, we are not Reaganite, and we are not Rogermomic, we are Labor, we are traditional Labor.

We need to always rejoice in the things we have done, because we have got our troubles and people now are finding the current recession difficult and people are looking elsewhere for solutions to other Labor Parties in other places. We get told get about New Zealand and the New Zealand Labor Party, and a few things worth saying. In 1983 we had 6 million people in the Australian workforce, today we have got 7.6 million, that is 26 per cent bigger. Between 1983 and 1992 the workforce in New Zealand actually got

smaller. And that is the difference between Rogermomics and traditional Labor economics. And also, not just in that respect, the country is twice as large as its product ever was.

The fact is, I think we can say Gough, that in the things which you did, started, that your Ministers took pride in, and the policies you built, these were the foundation stones for the Hawke Government in 1983 and the Government which I have the privilege to lead now at this time. We kept them going. We had those dismal years with Malcolm Fraser, but of course we now understand that compared to John Hewson, Malcolm was a comparatively good guy.

It is an interesting thing isn't it? In the 1980s which finished off communism and finished off monetarism, the parties which have the comprehension and support worldwide now are the Social Democratic Parties. The half hearted, Gordon Gecko Wall Street view of the world that basically greed is good and survival of the fittest. And its the productive economy, the efficient economy with the nice social policy grafted on, with a proper safety net, access to health, access to housing, access to education, all of these things are basically where societies are going to go and where we have taken Australia.

Now when you look at today's Liberal Party it does believe in isms and ists as we do not where they've been raised literally on capitalist ideology. We used to say about Malcolm, Mick and I when we were in the Parliament's Assembly, we would go out there on the attack every night, we used to accuse Malcolm of just about being a capitalist raider and all the rest. The truth is he was just a warm old regular. He was. Malcolm was really just a trifle. Now we have got a leader of the Opposition who makes Malcolm look like a Bolshie, who believes in all of that wall street eth. His view is that he wants the social impoverishment of Australia so that everyone who rises out of it will be like him, that is self made, rising from the ashes of the impoverishment which has produced a better class of person, a better entrepreneurial type. His spirit is of course the spirit of the 1980s, of the worst excesses of the 1980s. He is very much a product of the place he is from, it is Thatcherism ten years on.

So if your spirit ever flags, if ever you have got any self doubt, if any self doubt creeps into your hearts and minds, or if you ever wondered whether it is all worth it, just read one of John Hewson's latest speeches and you will understand, it is. You will understand that we have got now a conservative, a radical conservative who is going to try and wipe away a century of social change, a century of industrial progress, a century of social policy and try to take Australia back to some level of social impoverishment where only basically the fittest survive. This is what he is about. Never in the last 25 years, in my time in politics, has there been a greater opportunity for Labor to show what it is made of, and to make a difference to them that we believe, in essence, economies that can produce the goods, one that can reduce employment, one it can produce wealth. But also we believe in having the right to a hospital bed if you are sick, the right to a school and a university if you are a poor kid, the right to support if you're aged. All these things we believe in, because we are a tradition.

That's why we come along here tonight. We've got our political difficulties, we know that. But we are the people who make the Australian history. We are the ones who nominate the heroes, we anoint the heroes of Australia, we set the ethos of Australia our Party, our Labor Party. And we are here, we have got our troubles but we are not sad, we are happy with ourselves, we sleep well at night, we know we always try to do what is good and what is best. We are into good work and good things for altruistic reasons. And we are as we are now because other good people did other good things, in our case 20 years ago. And those Ministers who are here tonight, that I had the privilege of serving with for just three weeks - Mick said he would have given a fortune just to be in there for three days - but to all of those who blazed the trail and took the blow torch on the belly from the Conservatives, we owe them a debt of gratitude. It is a nice thing for us to remember them, remember them well, appreciate them, take them to our heart and say thank you.

And that is what we are doing Gough, we are saying thank you to your Ministers, and we are saying thank you to you. We are saying thank you to you because you did take us out of the Conservative torpor. You did relight the fire of Australian nationalism. You taught neo-Australian's to be something different, to be something to be proud of, an identity of our own and for that of course we owe you eternal gratitude. And this Government will do all it can to keep faith with those great ideals. So it is with the utmost of pleasure that I introduce you, although you need no introduction to this audience, as the person who put Labor back together, who made Labor relative again, and gave us a chance to show our social and economic paces of the '80s and '90s and to make Australia in our image, the image of a caring party, of a caring society, but one which is productive enough to hold its head up to the world in clothing, feeding and housing people. We owe you a great debt and I am sure all of us here tonight appreciate what you have done, you and Margaret, who fought beside you for all those years and put up with you all those years. We owe you a great debt of gratitude and it is a nice thing that we have come together to remember you, to appreciate you and to applaud you.

ENDS