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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
ADDRESS TO THE BARCALDINE COMMUNITY, BARCALDINE,
10 OCTOBER 1992**

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Thank you very much Rob (Hulls), Lance (Norman), Pat (...) and Rob's wife Pctrina and ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great honour to be here and thank you very much for so many of you coming out to see us, on this I'm sure another Queensland sunny day. My daughters are telling me now I've got a bald patch up here I've got to watch and I should have had the sun tan cream on it; I'm warming up for the Sydney summer. It is lovely to be in such nice weather, but more particularly in nice company and the nice company being those of you who kept flying the flag of the Labor Party and the spirit of Labor and the spirit of Australia - so known to be connected with the town of Barcaldine and the famous Tree Of Knowledge under which the Labor Party was formed a century ago.

It is an interesting conjunction of events that in this decade, the last in this century, that a century ago, in probably our worst drought and worst depression, the Labor Party was formed and we went through that great time, that great spirit in Australia, when Australia federated and became a nation. And that great spirit of experimentation continued right until the First World War. And now a century later, in what is not a general drought but one near by here, and a recession we are now moving from, we are contemplating that spirit of Australia again because we lost that sense of social experimentation which came in the 1890s and in the first fifteen or so years of this century. And the problem was it was snuffed out at

Gallipoli when all the conservative forces of this country took what was a very radical thing, the contribution of the young men and women of Australia to the First World War, and wrapped themselves conservatively and all their conservative mores around it.

And then, of course, we had the '20s, a period of economic expansion, the '30s with the depression. the '40s with the war and then, under McNzies in those years, the '50s and '60s, we again kept focusing back on other countries rather than our own. So we lost that sense of nation, that sense of experimentation, that spirit of Australia which was kindled here a century ago.

That spirit has, I think, returned and there's now a greater sense of national identity than there was at any time since just before the First World War. And that has been recovered, I think, across the countryside; people are much more clear about their identity as Australians and Australia as a country is more clear about its identity in the world as a nation.

The Labor Party has always been called upon to lead that national spirit and one wonders today if we hadn't federated a hundred years ago would we federate in this decade. Given all the various rivalries between the States and the Commonwealth I don't know.

But yesterday we had another indication, I think, that that spirit is around. We decided in June this year to form a National Training Authority - that's to take the TAFE system and turn it into a national rather than a state system - and yesterday the decision was made to put the headquarters of the national body in Brisbane. So, for almost the first time, Brisbane has picked up a national authority in the State of Queensland and that spirit of co-operation which will produce for Australian kids a vocational education system to sit beside the universities is perhaps a glimpse of that great spirit that obtained in the 1890s in this country and in this part of Australia.

So the spirit of Australia, the spirit of Labor owes a great deal to Barcaldine, but the Labor Party still carries the spirit on and in this century, in the latter half of it, we've had to remake Australia in Labor's image. That is, try and take it from a closed country to an open, robust country again one that is prepared to look at some social experimentation like a century ago - but this time go out to the world in trade. And we have done this in the 1980s. We've made the great cultural shift out, instead of staying with the cultural shift in which we had through all the post war years. This is the first year that we'll export more manufactured goods than rural exports or mining exports. Because the problem was, though the great rural industries and mining industries have been such strong things for Australia, they

weren't able to pay for our imports as long ago as 1980 – over a decade ago. So we had to start developing our goods and our services, but you can't develop goods and services, you can't develop sophisticated things, without developing the most valuable resource and that's our young people – our children.

When we came to office only three children in ten completed secondary school; this year that's over seven in ten, and in five years' time we think it will be nine in ten. And then we created enough places for 40 per cent of them to go onto universities. But there was always a hole: those who couldn't get into university. And we're now filling that by developing a proper vocational education system under that so that we end up with a trained workforce that can develop sophisticated products and not only that add value to our rural products so instead of selling beef and wool in an unprocessed way, we start adding value to it and selling it to those markets that really matter. That's what really is going to add income to Australia, add benefits to the country and put a stable base in employment right across the country.

These are the things which we've done, but as well as that we've picked up all the social aspects of the people, the views of the people who have met here a century ago. And while there was drought here a century ago, now we have drought relief courtesy of a Labor Government.

Where they were talking about unemployment a century ago in that depression, we've got unemployment benefits. Now Dr Hewson, our Tory friend, wants to cut them out after nine months, but we've got them there, we've increased them through the 1980s and we've got a decent social security system sitting there for Australians courtesy of the fact that a Labor Party was formed so long ago. And it means now that access to health through Medicare, access to education, support for the aged in retirement, a new scheme of support for the aged with occupational superannuation for those who will be retiring in some years hence, child care, as well as all those aged care things, all that support in the education system, that great social wage has come from a Labor Government that knows to keep Australia strong, you've got to keep Australia together. And the notion that the rich should prosper and they'll flick some crumbs off the table and the rest of the public pick that up, is not our view of the world.

We say all Australians should come along together. So we want to build a strong industrial base, but not just growing wheat and wool or even raising beef, but to add value; to make sophisticated products, to get into services like tourism as we see tourism changing the whole of the state of Queensland, an industry that developed entirely under a Labor Government in the past ten years. And that trade

in international services, whether they be tourism or medical services or financial services or health services, have all come from a Labor Government.

The funny thing is, it has taken a Labor Government to give Australia an open market economy. In that great struggle between capital and labour here a century ago, capital won, but capital has been tamed since so that now it works with labour to make Australia stronger. We are working together. And now the great phalanx of enterprise agreements across Australia, where unions and employees and managers and businesses are sitting down making novel changes for productivity and higher wages, is part of the growing up and maturing of Australia, part of the maturing of Labor and the country.

There's always been a to-ing and fro-ing in this century between the notion of private interest and private reward being the key to everything and government intervention being the key to everything. We saw the robber baron capitalists of the United States and Britain in the 19th century believing that private interest and private reward was everything, and yet we saw the communist parties of Europe, of Russia, and some of the other socialist parties, believing that government intervention was everything.

In the Labor Party we've had neither one of those things. We've always had that nice happy mix, that fair mix of saying not everything is going to be solved by private reward or looking after yourself and it's not all going to be solved by the government sector getting too big so let's render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but let's get that nice balance in there.

We think we've got that balance in there, that is the rights of the individual, the freedom to achieve, but at the same time this concept of nation and community. And that's what I think our friend Dr Hewson has forgotten. He's trying to tell us basically that greed is good, if you go out and achieve for yourself that's all that matters, but God help you if you are not an achiever, God help you if you are not on the top of the heap because in that sort of a world you get left behind. We heard John Howard speaking at the Press Club during the week about industrial relations, he wants to depress Australian working conditions. So it's the same old stuff. As I said during the week, Howard could have made the speech in Lancashire in 1895 and I'm quite sure the people arguing for capital could have made it here in Barcaldine in 1890 or 1891. It's the same old argument, put by the same sort of people, but we're not having a bar of it. We're saying all Australia comes along together, let's grow together prosperously, let's rekindle the spirit of Australia that came with the federation in the 1890s and let's do it with the spirit of Labor which came from Barcaldine in 1891.

Let's make the spirit of Labor in the 1990s as relevant as it was in the 1890s and let's show as we did a century ago that Australia leads the world in social experimentation and social change and economic change with it. We can do it again, in fact we are doing it again and while the recession has been a real problem for us and brought a lot of suffering to people as we get out of it into a recovery, a strong recovery, the basic breadth and depth of the country will mean that we've got those balances right and that spirit and hope which the Labor Party has always been able to provide will be there again in the last decade of this century.

To the people of Barcaldine can I say not only thank you for seeing Rob and me here today, but thanks for keeping the faith, thank you for keeping the spirit and the hope of Labor which has for nearly all of this century been the hope of Australia. And a century later say that your loyalty has brought back that economic and social change, that economic and social experimentation which this town and my Party started a century ago.

Thank you very much.