



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB
CANBERRA - 11 MARCH 1993

I thought he might have surprised us.

I thought, seeing that there is an election on Saturday,
he might have come along for a debate.

I thought he might have stopped impersonating American
Presidents, stopped running, and come along to answer some
questions from the people whose democratic purpose is to
ask them.

No such luck.

Dr Hewson has broken one of the traditions of Australian
politics: we don't have such a lot of home grown
traditions - but one of them is that leaders make
themselves accountable to the press in the week before an
election.

Dr Hewson has not answered a question of substance since
Christmas.

Every time he has been asked a question of substance - and
that is about three times - he has fallen over.

Dr Hewson has not been able to accommodate anyone who is
asking for facts about his so-called "plan".

His campaign itself has been a falsehood.

His imitation of President Clinton's campaign disguises
the fact that what Clinton stands for, Hewson despises.

Dr Hewson has worn a mask in this campaign.

If Australians have not seen behind it yet, they still
have two days.

Dr Hewson has been unable to provide us with facts on the
GST.

He has said it will create 2 million jobs. He has said it consistently.

There is not one person in this room who believes that.

I daresay, there is not one economist in Australia who believes it.

I would venture to say there are a good many people in this room and a good many economists who believe that it will create no jobs - or, worse, it will cost jobs.

I am one of the latter. I am sure I am not the only one to have heard reports in recent weeks of companies - in my case some of the finance houses of Sydney and Melbourne - which are planning lay-offs of workers when the GST is introduced.

That is the first great deceit of the Hewson campaign.

They say the GST will create jobs.

The GST will not create jobs.

I would also venture to say that there is not one person in this room, nor I imagine is there one doctor in Australia, who doesn't know that Dr Hewson is going to rip the heart out of Medicare and leave it a universal health care system in name only.

Dr Hewson would move the Australian health system towards the American system.

The American strategy of publicly subsidising private health care and insurance has left 35 million Americans without insurance, and given doctors and private health insurance companies the ability to unremittingly jack up health costs.

Just as they promise to do in Australia: in their own journal. In the Sydney seat of Lowe 9 out of 10 doctors promise to increase their fees.

It's your money or your health.

American health care costs are more than 50 per cent greater than Australia's - 50 per cent greater and a fraction of the service.

Last year in the United States employer spending on health care exceeded total after tax profits.

Last year in Australia employers paid nothing and were that much more competitive as a result.

In America a huge part of the population lives in fear of being sick or injured because of the health bills they would have to pay.

In Australia the only thing to fear is the sickness itself.

There are waiting lists. it is true. In the campaign speech I announced action to remedy it by contracting out the treatment of public patients in private hospitals. This is additional to the \$70 million we have given the States to shorten waiting lists.

But if those waiting lists were twice as long they would not constitute a reason to adopt the American health care system.

That is the second great deceit of this campaign.

The Liberals say they won't destroy Medicare.

The fact is they will.

I am also sure that there isn't a single person in this room who doesn't know that Dr Hewson's industrial relations program will destroy the cooperative ethic on which industrial relations are based; or that he will throw people onto individual contracts and destroy thereby their security, their wages and conditions, and their dignity.

That is the third great deceit.

Dr Hewson's industrial relations policy is not designed to reduce unemployment but to drive wages down.

I don't believe there is anyone here who doesn't know that Dr Hewson's plan for Australia is a plan of radical regression.

A plan conceived in the bowels of a computer in the late 1970s, using the Thatcherite software that was all the rage at Johns Hopkins in those days.

Dr Hewson's so-called "plan" for Australia is an old plan that has failed wherever it has been tried - with disastrous economic and social consequences.

My great fear is that the damage he could do in three years, would take us decades to repair.

Then there is the one about selling Telecom to an overseas buyer for \$20 billion.

This is the one from the man who talks about national sovereignty and creating jobs and funding promises.

On each of these counts, the Telecom sale is a fraud.

Does anyone think that Dr Hewson will get \$20 billion for Telecom?

Does anyone seriously think that there will be more jobs in Telecom if it is sold?

The only way they could get anywhere near \$20 billion would be to sell it overseas and remove all protection for Australian consumers and workers. It would have to mean timed local calls. It would certainly mean huge job losses.

Creating jobs in Telecom by selling it overseas is about as likely as creating jobs in tourism by making it cheaper to holiday in Bali than it is in Cairns - which is what the GST will do.

So there is another great deceit.

And here is another little one.

On every Fightback pamphlet that has gone out in the last 12 months the Opposition claims that it will abolish seven taxes. One of them, the coal export levy, is a standing joke - because it is already abolished.

There is another one there under the heading "customs duties".

The Coalition says it will abolish custom duty.

That means, unequivocally, zero tariffs.

But when it suits them, they say they are not for zero tariffs - not immediately, in some industries, in some electorates.

Both things cannot be true.

This whole "plan" of Dr Hewson is a deceit.

He does not have a plan, he has an obsession.

He does not have facts, he has gimmicks.

He has only one fact at his disposal - unemployment.

The one big negative of our national life at present.

Unemployment is the great curse of the nineties.

And it is apparent again in today's figures. Essentially, they are "as you were" figures, which makes the point that unemployment is going to be immensely difficult to deal with and it won't be fixed quickly. That's why we need the full focus of the nation's energies; and why we don't need those energies dissipated in a divisive scramble for a piece of the cake.

The figures mean simply that unemployment is too high. They also show that the unemployment rate may be flattening out, which is consistent with recent statistics showing that the economy is picking up.

But this is really beside the point. If unemployment has in fact peaked, that is no reason for complacency. It is certainly no comfort for the unemployed.

The central issue is which party is best equipped to deal with unemployment, and that means which party will succeed best at getting the economy moving.

It also poses the question - which party is best equipped to help the unemployed directly?

There is no simple answer to unemployment, but there is no doubt that the best answer in the long-term and the short-term is economic growth, and the way to get growth is by investing and our efforts are aimed precisely at this point - investment in Australian companies.

By contrast, it seems to me beyond doubt that Dr Hewson's so-called "plan" will not be a remedy - but a new disease.

If unemployment is our greatest problem now, how much worse will it be if we stifle the recovery with a 15 per cent tax on virtually everything we buy and everything we use.

How much worse will it be if we deal with the problem of unemployment in an atmosphere of industrial and social turmoil.

How much harder will it be to find solutions, or to find the concerted national will to solve the problem, if the rest of the population is divided, insecure and rancorous.

If unemployment is a great problem now, how much worse will it be without a universal health care system, or with an unfair education system.

If unemployment is a tragedy now, how much worse will it be with \$10 billion taken out of the Budget.

How much worse will it be with social security spending cut?

How much worse with funding for regional areas cut?

How much worse with cuts to State services - like State schools?

How much worse with \$800 million cut out of funds for the unemployed and people left to wait much longer for their benefits?

If unemployment is the worst fact of our national life at present, how much worse will it be if Government "gets out of the way" as Dr Hewson says it should, and people are left to fend entirely for themselves?

How much worse will it be if we put inflation back in the system?

How much worse will it be if we add a tax burden and an accountancy burden and a time burden to the small businesses which we know are going to drive growth and create jobs?

Since the campaign started, a raft of positive indicators have appeared illustrating our economic progress. Tuesday's figures on job vacancies and retail sales were the most encouraging since 1990. Export figures have been positive.

Today - this very day - if you distil the politics out of this morning's press you will find unequivocally positive economic news. There's a story about our continuing export surge, another about our growing manufacturing sector, another about an Australian company landing a \$1 billion contract in Laos. There is much more - but John Hewson of course won't tell you. For twelve months wherever there has been hope, Dr Hewson has counselled despair.

That's why today I have released a document accompanying this speech which describes some of the good things which are happening in Australia, and which Dr Hewson refuses to talk about.

There is no question that the direction we are going is the right one. We are going too slowly to lower the unemployment figure, but that is not a reason for changing course.

It's a reason for accelerating progress where we can - and we have done this by lowering company tax rates, by introducing an investment allowance of 20 per cent and by cultivating a new banking culture.

Every sensible thing that can be done to speed the pace of recovery and long-term reform is being done, or is proposed for a second Keating Government.

And the things we do are all directed at the goal of creating employment and helping the unemployed through with training and other forms of assistance.

Some of you will have seen the statistics released this week on the success of labour market programs. They are working. They are helping thousands and thousands of Australians.

So why wreck the recovery? Why wreck the safety net, the humane and constructive government interventions? Why wreck the social fabric of Australia?

My message for those people who are presently wondering whether to desert the Labor Government is - think very carefully. Think about what you would lose.

In an election the choice is not between one party and a vacuum, it's a choice between two parties.

Ask yourself whether by voting for policies which are proven failures elsewhere in the world, you won't be punishing Australia and the next generation of Australians.

Ask yourself whether the absolute hollowness, the absolute fraudulence of Dr Hewson's campaign is not an indication that a vote for Dr Hewson is a leap in the dark.

To the people of Australia, between now and Saturday, I would say, every time you hear Dr Hewson say he has a plan, ask yourself do I understand. Has he explained it to me. And if the answer is no or maybe - don't vote for him.

In this forum this week, Dr Hewson had a chance to explain his so-called "plan" - a chance to explain how it would create a single job, how it would not destroy the social fabric of Australia, how it differs from the plans of Thatcher, Reagan, Douglas and Mulroney - he had a chance to explain it in this forum and he refused. He chose to play soccer and shout slogans instead.

Let me give the oldest advice in the world to the people who are contemplating the big jump. Don't do it. For your own sake don't do it. For Australia's sake don't do it. For your kid's sake don't do it.

I have been to this Press Club 18 times in the last decade. I've been four times in the past year. I don't know how many press conferences I have given in the last twelve months, or how many doorstops that my staff said I let go on too long.

I don't believe it can be said that I've ever run away from scrutiny, or from the opportunity to explain our policies, or failed to face up to the ramifications of those policies.

As Treasurer and then Prime Minister, I have taken full responsibility for the economic and social affairs of Australia. And all the responsibility that is mine, I will shoulder. All the damage that the recession has done, I will attempt to repair. Every sensible thing that can be done, will be done. Much of it is already being done - and I want the chance to build on this.

As I said in the campaign launch, fifteen years ago I began to imagine an Australia which not only exported minerals and farm products, but sophisticated manufactures.

The thought occurred to me and a few other colleagues that Australia could be what no one had really ever imagined it could be - that is, a country integrated with the world (you've heard it before I know), focussed on the region, competitive, creative, sophisticated - secure.

And as every one of you know - this is happening. Any one who was old enough and compos mentis in the 1970s will know what a huge change there has been.

You've heard the figures - exporting nearly one-quarter of our total product, exporting 70 per cent of it to Asia, exporting quantities of elaborately transformed manufactures we never dreamed we could make.

Some of you will have seen the McKinsey report on the new breed of Australian company which is emerging. Some of you will have noticed that in the last two months, a \$2 billion contract has been signed by BHP with the Vietnamese Government, and yesterday a \$1 billion hydro-electric project in Laos - one of the largest construction projects yet in Indo-China.

These things are happening as a result of a conscious decision by the Australian people to change. These things are happening because we intended them to happen.

The new Australia - the Australia of the nineties - will be different from the Australia of any other era. And the essential difference will be this: the Australia of the nineties will be one entirely conceived by Australians and brought into being by Australians and wearing the stamp Australia on everything it does.

Now I say that is at stake on Saturday. Our economic future is at stake, and so is the quality of our society - the Australian stamp of our society.

So much is at risk. A society where child-care is, finally, a right. A society which believes women should get equal pay and be able to participate fully in all areas of work and life. A society which cherishes those who spend part of their lives caring for children or sick people.

Those of you who know me will know what I believe. Whatever my faults, I don't think hiding my beliefs is one of them.

Very simply I believe in creating a high wage, high skill and high productivity Australia. John Hewson believes in a low wage, low productivity Australia.

John Hewson believes in dismantling the public sector - he hates the public sector. I believe in making the public sector, as it is in every successful country, more efficient, more people-oriented.

John Hewson believes in fear in the workplace. I believe in cooperation and creativity in the workplace.

John Hewson believes in private health insurance. I believe in sharing our personal health care risks through a national public and private system working in cooperation.

John Hewson believes in zero tariffs as an end in itself. I believe in using tariff reform as a fair benchmark to improve our industry with long term plans and safeguards.

John Hewson believes in American razzamatazz and hoopla and carefully staged passion plays and bunfights, and American advisers, and the constant reiteration of poll driven phrases.

I don't believe in it, myself. I think it's an assault on good democratic Australian traditions. I think it's rubbish. I think one should face the music - scratchy, discordant, unpleasant music though it might be. I think you have to say what you believe and be prepared to defend it in detail.

This way at least, when people vote on Saturday they will know what they will get with Paul Keating. To judge him by his campaign, the same cannot be said of John Hewson.

Finally, let me say this - if people are not convinced by Dr Hewson's intention to impose a GST, to make Medicare a universal health system in name only, to destroy the basic rights of workers and the cooperative ethic of the Australian workplace, to turn our colleges and universities into businesses, to set back our environment programs a generation or more - if they're not convinced that Dr Hewson's policies represent a threat to our way of life and our values, perhaps it will help to think of it in philosophical terms.

Dr Hewson's philosophy is based on the idea of self-interest and survival of the fittest. Remember what Margaret Thatcher said: there is no such thing as society, only individuals making their way. This is Dr Hewson's philosophy.

He wants to impose this idea on Australia. That's what he means by breaking the mould.

What he doesn't like about Australia is the humanitarian, community ethos - the one that is there in Australia from the beginning of our European history until now. Think about it. The heroes of Australia have always been and remain the champions of the underdog.

Now this may not fit well with the economics that Dr Hewson believes in, but it fits well with Australia. It is what we are. It has sprung from our history. It is what unites us - it is the principal bond between us.

I hope I never see the day when our traditions are subverted by the doctrine of unmitigated self-interest. That is Dr Hewson's doctrine - if I fought him on nothing else, as an Australian, I would fight him on this.

So if you're not persuaded that ripping up the social wage and introducing a giant flat tax will irrevocably damage the fabric and the way of life of Australia, be persuaded by this.

Be persuaded by the philosophical change, the change in the ethic - be persuaded by all those statements Dr Hewson has made in the last couple of years, the most telling of which was that one in the Budget reply when he said, we must not reach back for people because they will drag us down.

This goes to the heart of it. Ultimately this is the nature of the risk. John Hewson has been projecting a more temperate image in recent weeks of course - but perhaps the best reminder of John Hewson's old Fightback 1 persona came in January, in a speech by Ashley Goldsworthy, the Liberal Party Federal President.

Goldsworthy said Australia needed a jolt. "Life has to become tougher", he said - "with less security and greater uncertainty".

Be warned - this is the brave new world of Dr Hewson. Let dog eat dog. Let the lucky and the rich prosper and the rest gather the crumbs that fall. Dr Hewson is an unashamed theorist of trickle down economics. If he is allowed to become a practitioner of this theory, he will turn Australia on its head.

Call it scaremongering if you like. I do fear for Australia. I fear for the people. I fear for all those things which bind us together, and in which I believe above all other things.

But it's not scaremongering. It's factmongering. Exposing the facts which Dr Hewson won't reveal.

I am absolutely sure that Dr Hewson will be bad for Australia. His agenda is radical, disruptive, destructive. I sincerely hope and believe that Australians will recognise that they cannot take the risk.

MINISTER FOR TOURISM MINISTER FOR RESOURCES



ALAN GRIFFITHS

NEWS RELEASE

11 March 1993

COALITION WILL RUIN GAS INDUSTRY

Claims today by Tim Fischer about the future of gas in the Nowra region are a cheap diversion from the Coalition's real agenda of ruining the gas industry.

The Federal Minister for Resources, Alan Griffiths, strongly refuted claims by Mr Fischer that Labor would not build the gas pipeline extension to Nowra.

"Labor has committed \$15 million to extend the Moomba-Sydney pipeline to Nowra, to ensure gas is supplied as cheaply as possible to the region, especially the crucial APPM paper recycling plant located in Nowra," Mr Griffiths said.

"We stand by this commitment. The people of Nowra can be assured that the pipeline extension will be delivered."

The Coalition plans to sell off the pipeline, regardless of the consequences.

Mr Fischer is today indulging in pathetic politics to disguise the fact that the pipeline extension to Nowra will not be built under the Coalition - the pipeline will simply be sold off to meet the Coalition's unrealisable promises.

"Only last week, Mr Fischer spoke at the Australian LP gas conference, where the Coalition's GST policies were condemned as representing an end to the auto LP gas industry.

"Furthermore, Mr Fischer knows full well that the Coalition's GST policies will cripple attempts by the gas industry to extend gas pipelines which supply gas to more Australians," the Minister said.

Labor was the force behind the Moomba-Sydney pipeline, which now supplies gas to Sydney and the many country centres Mr Fischer claims to represent, including Wagga, Orange, Cowra and Young. Under Labor the Pipeline is being extended to Griffith, Leeton and Narrandera.

Only Labor has a true commitment to develop Australian gas resources to meet Australian energy needs.

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