



# PRIME MINISTER

**STRICTLY EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY**

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP**

**THE H.V. EVATT LECTURE - NEW VISIONS FOR AUSTRALIA  
SYDNEY, 28 APRIL 1993**

It is a great pleasure to be here tonight.

Pleasure has not been an unfamiliar sensation since March 13, of course. But this is a particular pleasure, because I see a lot of well known supporters in the room and not a few who I suspect of being supporters.

It is also a pleasure because the Evatt Foundation was very much a supporter in the election and I want to take this opportunity to thank them - I know Peter Botsman, in particular, never left us alone, and his attentions were very much appreciated.

It is an inescapable fact of Australian political life that no Labor leader goes through a year without making a speech in honour of a former Labor leader. We honour our dead in the Labor movement. It is because we have a sense of being part of a great story. In any year it is possible to speak on national issues in honour of Curtin, Chifley, Evatt, and Arthur Calwell, among other legends. Last year for me it was Ben Chifley and Gough Whitlam, who is far from dead, but is a legend anyway. Tonight it is Bert Evatt.

It is appropriate that we remember these people, as Labor heroes and as Australians. For their contribution was to both the movement and the nation. They were all nation builders. They were all distinguished by their vision and their ambitions for Australia. To lead the Labor Party you need large ambitions. And just as surely you need courage, for it always involves, in some sense, a leap of faith.

You need a passion for reform; you need a belief in the capacity of human beings to organise themselves for the general good; a belief in the capacity of people to rise above meanness; to see further than the next obstacle; to imagine something better and to do something better.

And with these beliefs has always gone a profound belief in Australia - in an uncompromised Australian identity, a sense of our own worth, of the great story which has been lived out by people who have made this land their home. And in the future which we have to make our own.

It is within that world view that Labor, when it is in form and running as it should, conceives and executes its projects. In tune with a national agenda. It can be said of Chifley and Curtin and Whitlam and Hawke that they had a clear sense of what needed to be done in Australia and they did not shirk from doing it. If they had had their chance it would have been said of Evatt and Calwell. I should like it to be said of me: in fact with the March 13 victory we have the best chance in our history to shape Australia in the image of modern Labor. Progressive, pluralist, fair, democratic - unmistakably Australian.

Bert Evatt made his mark less as leader of the Labor Party than as Minister for External Affairs in the forties, where his work was distinguished by courage, independence and flair. He brought an Australian perspective to the task. He stood for democracy and the rights of small nations. He stood for independence - he stood for the rights of Indonesians against their colonial rulers.

Bert Evatt never had any doubt that Australia had a right to be heard in the world, a role to play - especially a role in the region.

You will have already perceived the theme of continuity: in 1993 we too assert Australia's need to go confidently into the world, and the role we can play and the rewards we can reap in the region.

Just as we assert the need to raise the level of equality, increase opportunity, lift the standard of living and the life chances of all Australians.

We assert this role for Labor and we take on again the challenge of nation-building. I mean doing the things which will serve future generations of Australians and keep Australia in the front rank of the democracies of the world. Whether it's in education, or social services or a universal health system: or giving us an internationally competitive financial system, or the sort of industrial relations system which will give us the flexibility, productivity and capacity for innovation that we must have - in all these things it is Labor, as ever, with the shoulder to the door. And pushing.

Continuity of effort and purpose is important to us. We are strengthened by the understanding that we are part of the story - the Labor story and, because we have always been the change-makers and the true believers in

Australia and Australians, Labor's story has always been very much Australia's story.

That is the big difference between us and our political opponents. They struggle to find continuity. They are at best reactive and at worst prey to fashion and extremism; and when the fashion passes they unfailingly go to the only place they know - back into that gloomy cave of cobwebbed memories of days when the Liberal Party was an extension of the country's semi-hereditary elite. They retreat and rejoice in the memory of the founder and oracle - Robert Gordon Menzies.

And they ask what will put them in touch with a contemporary reality which does not include a communist can to kick, or a Labor Party divided, or a feigned external threat or a cultural cringe to exploit? And they are met with an embarrassing silence which, for all his efforts, even John Howard is unable to fill.

For you see, on their side of politics, between the Menzies Government and John Hewson's Opposition there is nothing - or, to give John Gorton his due, very little. They have all in their own way been good little Horatios and held the bridge against national progress.

Well they no longer hold the bridge and we have had a decade re-building it, strengthening it, broadening it and there is no reason now why the whole nation can't cross it into the new Australia of the twenty first century.

For all our differences of opinion in the Labor movement there is a thread which runs through us all; there is a bond between us: we are bound by the common goal of social improvement and the realisation of national aspirations. These things have bound us for a century, and the record of our progress towards them binds us tighter still.

So tonight we pay homage to a Labor man who believed in these things, who worked for them, and contributed more than most to achieving them.

But let me also say, as I said in Bathurst at the Chifley lecture last year, the truth is that this Government has done more. And we will do more still. Much more than Ben or Bert ever imagined. More in the way of extending opportunity, more in the way of nation building, more in the way of securing the country's future and delivering Australia to that place in the world the people of Labor have always dreamed could be ours.

This country, like all new world countries, has always called on people's courage. On their faith and their belief. I'm inclined to think that, in truth, nothing good and long lasting was ever done that did not need these things. They were present in every act of

exploration and settlement, in every enterprise which went into the building of this country. Between the conception and the execution there is faith, hope - and courage.

Countries are built on this. They fail for the lack of it. And I believe that it is never the people who let their countries down - it is their governments. Governments which lack heart. Politicians who imagine things but don't do them. Bureaucrats who take their power to mean the ability to thwart initiative.

I take the view - and the longer I am in politics the more I take it - that the minimum responsibility of government is to at least have the courage of the people.

I mean the courage of a person who starts a business or a farm, or the person who migrates and makes a home here, the people who have gone to war for us, or in peace laboured to create the wealth we now enjoy. The ultimate responsibility of government I think boils down to this: to live up to the same faith, to invest in the future with the same courage.

I take great heart from the 1980s when the Labor government, trusting to the courage of the people, took on the pioneering changes the nation needed. The people responded. The changes were made.

That is what gives me heart in the nineties.

If we Australians are bold and determined and faithful to our beliefs and aspirations I believe the 1990s will be a great watershed in our history. As the 1890s was a watershed so will this decade be. I believe we will emerge a robust social democracy, a player of substance in the world, integrated with our region and prosperous in a way that we have never been before: I mean prosperous not only in material comforts but prosperous in ideas and innovation, in our capacity to make things and to sell them to the world, in opportunity, prosperous in our faith: our faith in ourselves and the life we have created here.

To do this, it seems to me, we need to be a country at peace with itself. And being at peace with ourselves I think depends on making stronger than ever the principles of egalitarianism. I think the vote on March 13 confirmed this: whatever else may have motivated the electorate they rejected the idea of "trickle-down" economics and the new elite and the underclass which have followed from that idea wherever it has been tried.

And I might say nothing made me more confident of victory than my belief that Australians would not embrace that idea. Nothing made me more confident of winning, and nothing so re-affirmed my faith in the continuing

strength of Australian democratic traditions as the victory itself.

For the government, of course, that implies some obligations: to keep opening up the avenues of participation and opportunity, to maintain the safety net, and to keep as our by-words inclusion, unity, cohesion, loyalty.

We in the Labor movement know that it is easy to say these things, something else altogether to make them happen.

We also know that these things ring hollow when more than 10 per cent of the workforce is unemployed.

The principal aim of this government will be to reduce the number of unemployed Australians. And so long as there is a pool of unemployed, of whatever dimension, the aim must be to decrease the amount of time people are spending in it.

Long term unemployment threatens to grow in Australia as it is growing in comparable countries.

How we deal with it will be measure of our success as a society: how well we care for those who are out of work, how well we manage to staunch the flow from the workforce, how well we revitalise the economy and create job growth, and how well we succeed in training and re-training.

We will need from all the players in the employment equation recognition of our profound responsibility, not only to the unemployed and those facing unemployment, but to Australia as a whole. We simply cannot allow so many Australians to be permanently alienated from the workforce and, with that, from the mainstream of society.

It is for the very same reason that a primary goal of the Government in the 1990s will be to remove the stain of dispossession and social injustice which attaches to the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Indeed it will be a goal of all governments.

Some of our opponents insist on devaluing the cause of reconciliation by calling it the product of guilt. But it is not guilt which motivates us in this, it is responsibility.

The legacy of injustice towards the indigenous people of Australia shames us in the eyes of the world. Yet feelings of shame and outrage are not necessary to feel that things have to change. Pride should be all it takes.

Not merely our reputation, but our self-esteem depends on our finding answers to the prejudice, injustice and despair which Aboriginal Australians continue to face.

Now, with the Mabo decision, there is a unique opportunity. Mabo presents us with a more substantial and binding basis for reconciliation - a legal and historical basis which goes well beyond those pious and well-meaning sentiments whose history is just as long as the prejudice and dispossession they seek to correct.

We now have a chance to do something real. Because land goes to the core of the dispossession, Mabo may have the potential to work the miracle.

The High Court has declared that a native title exists in common law - a declaration which has profound consequences not just for land management, but for contemporary issues of social justice and for the process of reconciliation.

The Mabo judgement constituted recognition of an historic truth and in so doing created, in my view, the best chance we have ever had for a nationally agreed durable settlement. It should mean - indeed it has to mean - that we will enter the twenty first century with the fundamental relationship between the nation and its indigenous people re-constructed on just foundations.

I think progress has already been made. The cultural shift is occurring. I was enormously heartened by the response to the speech I made in Redfern last year, which indicated to me a genuine desire among the majority of Australians to get these matters set to rights.

I think the Aboriginal communities are determined to take up the challenge as well: determined to raise themselves by their own efforts from the social trap into which Aboriginal Australia has for so long found itself, and increasingly determined that white Australians will not through prejudice or neglect deny their progress.

They are determined to succeed. I do not think they can any longer be denied. And they won't be if we have the ingenuity and the good will to build an appropriate framework around the central seminal truth of native title.

There will always be some who say that we can never overcome the prejudice and brutality, and the alienation and degradation. They have been saying it since 1788: but in truth we have never really tried. We have never made a concerted national effort.

There were plenty who said our immigration scheme would never work. That cultural pluralism would never work. But it has worked. We made a national effort and it worked.

There were some who said we couldn't change Australia into a manufacturing country - a competitive manufacturing country, an exporting manufacturing country. They said we must always be essentially a sheep run and a quarry. Well we made a national effort and it's working.

Some said we'd never reform Australia's work places. There has been a dramatic change and with the new charter for industrial relations we announced last week the change will be completed. Australia will have a flexible industrial relations system, and we will have a fair one - a late twentieth century system, not late nineteenth.

We can make these big changes with Aboriginal Australia. We can do the same with unemployment.

We can do all these things - but we will do them better if we are united as a people, confident of our identity and what we stand for. That is why we need to be in every sense, including the symbolic one, our own masters. It is why the affirmation of our nationhood is central to our psychology.

I believe it is also why the time has come to start the process of creating an Australian republic.

There have been some who have said that this is not the right time - that there are more important things to do right now.

People might well have said the same during the movement for Federation.

I take the view that, far from being the wrong time, there has never been a better time.

It is not simply because we are approaching the centenary of Federation, but rather because we are undergoing a revolutionary change both in our consciousness and in our situation in the world.

It is important that the reality of our having to go it alone is matched by our ability to go it alone: and our ability depends to no small extent on our confidence, our self-esteem, our reputation, our faith in each other, our cohesion, our shared consciousness of the task before us, our belief in our democracy, our sense of responsibility to the nation.

Australia therefore has very clear domestic reasons for wanting to define more clearly and in more confident terms its national identity.

But we should not underestimate the importance this also has for Australia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.

The fact is Australia will be taken more seriously as a player in regional affairs if we are clear about our identity and demonstrate that we really mean to stand on our own feet practically and psychologically.

These things will help us to succeed.

It is important to get our democracy right at the same time as we get our economy right.

That is why I think we should start now on the journey to the creation of an Australian Republic.

Last year my canvassing of this subject was frequently described by our opponents as a diversion. It was said to be not the right time. My argument has always been that if the creation of a republic served to heighten our confidence and our sense of ourselves, if it helped create a new and stronger sense of identity, then it would be a material aid to our economic future and lifting the quality of our national life - and that alone made it an important subject of discussion.

Whether or not it was for these reasons I do not know, but it is plain now that there is increasing interest in, and support for, a proposal to amend the current constitutional arrangements so that our affairs are no longer presided over by the King or Queen of the United Kingdom.

Our Head of State, the British monarch, cannot in the nature of things ever be a purely Australian head of State since she holds that office in relation to a range of other countries.

And the monarchy being hereditary, gives us no choice about who the person might be.

It implies no criticism of the monarch to question whether this arrangement remains meaningful and relevant to Australia today

- . where a growing proportion of the population has few if any ties with the United Kingdom
- . where our future increasingly lies within our own region, and
- . where our identity as a nation is no longer derivative but our own

Clearly, the debate has come a long way in recent months.

Many of those who might have been expected to oppose change in this area have indicated support for change.



Others, while not advocating change, agree that debate is desirable.

John Howard, three weeks ago and running hard for the Liberal leadership, said that debate on the Republic was desirable.

In fact he went further, bless him, and said:

"I think the Liberal Party has got to be part of that debate, and I would bring my contribution to it. I think there are strong intellectual arguments that can be made on both sides of the Republican issue and I think what the Liberal Party ought to do is to become part of the debate." -

We do, of course, welcome the debate. And we particularly welcome John Howard's willingness to put the conservative view - though, like many others, I am sorry that since making those remarks he has sounded rather more like a spoiler than a true voice of conservatism.

At any rate, my position is clear.

I would like to see the Australian people demonstrate our social and political maturity by voting at a referendum for the establishment of a republic.

I am an advocate of what has become known as the minimalist approach.

My view is that the Constitution should be changed sufficiently to replace the hereditary monarchy with a non-hereditary, Australian Head of State.

But I do not know what the detail of such changes would be, and what range of options might exist within this minimalist approach.

And although commentators and constitutional forums have dealt with many of the issues in reports and learned papers over time, there has not yet been an officially sponsored study devoted solely to this question.

In my election policy speech, therefore, I pledged that the Government would establish a broadly-based committee of eminent Australians, including representatives of the States, to develop a discussion paper which considers the options for a Federal Republic of Australia.

I said it would be the intention that as a result of this committee's deliberations and the public discussion that would follow, the Australian people would be in a position to decide by referendum later in the decade whether Australia should become a republic by the year 2001.

We have now taken the first steps in this process.

I have invited Mr Malcolm Turnbull to chair the Republic Advisory Committee and he has accepted.

The other members of the Committee are: Mr Nick Greiner, Ms Mary Kostakidis, Ms Lois O'Donoghue, Ms Susan Ryan, Dr John Hirst, Professor George Winterton.

I have written to the State Premiers and Chief Ministers inviting them to choose 2 members of the committee to represent the states and territories and to let me have their nominations as soon as possible.

I have also asked that the Premiers and Chief Ministers ensure that one representative be from one of the most populous states and the other from a smaller state.

In my policy speech I said I would like to invite the Federal Opposition to participate in the work of the committee.

Although this invitation was refused at the time, I am determined to encourage a bipartisan approach and have therefore written to Dr Hewson today asking him to reconsider and to nominate a representative.

In keeping with the bipartisan nature of the debate on this issue, I have asked that none of these representatives be practising politicians.

I have also made it clear to Mr Turnbull that he should seek expert advice beyond the committee, including from the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, if he believes this is warranted.

I expect the committee to start its work by the end of May with my department providing the necessary secretariat support. After discussions with constitutional and legal experts I am confident that such a paper could be completed by early September.

The terms of reference of the committee ask it to prepare an options paper which describes the minimum constitutional changes necessary to achieve a viable Federal Republic of Australia, without examining options which would otherwise change our way of government.

The establishment of an Australian republic must be an inclusive process which involves all Australians. The government does not seek to include any other constitutional changes with the republican proposal. That is not to say the government is opposed to other proposals for reform but they should be considered separately and on their own merits.

Even with this relatively limited purpose, however, it will be necessary to examine a variety of practical possibilities.

The terms of reference therefore require the committee to describe these, and the main arguments for and against them, but without indicating or recommending preferred choices.

Before I go into the reasons for not seeking recommendations from the committee, and the further steps which might follow the committee's report, let me briefly describe the things we are asking the committee to address.

The first is removal of all references to the monarch and the Governor-General as the Queen's representative in the Constitution.

The second is creation of the new office of Head of State and consideration of what the office might be called. Heads of state of republics are generally called "president", but the committee will be at liberty to identify other possibilities for Australia.

The third question is that of provisions for appointment and removal of the Head of State.

As matters stand, we do not have to worry about appointment of the Head of State. The Governor-General, as the Queen's representative, is appointed, and could be dismissed, by the monarch on the recommendation of the government.

If we are to have a non-hereditary Head of State, there are a number of possible methods of appointment, nomination and selection.

There are also questions about the length of an appointment, such as whether the appointment should be for a fixed term and what the term might be, and the removal of a Head of State.

The next matter about which the committee will report is the powers of the Head of State. At present the Constitution is silent about the so-called reserve powers of the Governor-General.

The committee will be asked to consider how the powers of the new Head of State, and the exercise of these powers, can be made subject to the same principles and practices as apply to the Governor-General.

The committee will identify the nature of the necessary constitutional amendments required to implement the options it lists.

The committee will also report on such implications as there might be for State Governors if Australia becomes a republic. Obviously the States will be very much

involved in this issue and I look forward to hearing from them.

The reasons for not seeking recommendations from the committee are simple.

First, while description of the options should be relatively straightforward, there may well be legitimate scope for disagreement in the committee about which options it should recommend.

We want a paper which the whole committee can endorse.

Secondly, while the forthcoming debate will inevitably focus on options and while the paper will provide the necessary information base for that, the primary task is to establish whether we can achieve consensus about the principle of a move to a republic along these lines.

Settlement of the detail of what might be put to the people in a referendum should, in my view, be a matter for a different body.

There will be discussion and debate in the community both before and following the committee's report.

There will need to be discussions in the Council of Australian Governments, and probably in Commonwealth and State Parliaments.

If out of such discussions there emerges a developing consensus, it may well be appropriate at some future point for there to be a constitutional conference or convention.

The task of such a conference could be to deliberate and decide upon the precise options to be put to the electorate.

The Government would not be interested in putting referendum bills to the Parliament and the electorate unless it was clear that there was this degree of agreement.

I do not expect all Australians to agree with the view that a republic is a desirable goal.

What I do hope for is a mature and sensible debate, in which both supporters of the current system and those who would advocate change will explain positively, clearly and honestly the benefits of their preferred system.

If that happens, then whatever the end result, we will at least be seen to have conducted ourselves with the maturity we are entitled to claim after a century of living together as a nation.

An associated matter is the question of how we commemorate the centenary of federation - the year 2001.

The Government believes that the opportunity exists to use the occasion, and the years leading up to it, in a constructive way.

There will be plenty to celebrate, but it will also be an opportunity to take stock.

The key issue in the immediate future will be how to develop goals and strategies for the years leading up to and including the centenary.

The states will have an important role in this process and I intend discussing this whole question with Premiers at the Council of Australian Governments in June.

Ladies and gentlemen

This is a crucial decade. The prospect of success is real: I mean success in carving out a prosperous future. Tonight I have said very little about the economic future. I could quote you the evidence, the unmistakable evidence of the sea-change which has occurred in Australia.

It's enough to say now that we are becoming a different country - a manufacturing nation; a nation exploiting its intellect; an exporter of things we invent, develop and make. The dream some of us had in the late seventies shows many signs of coming true.

Already the sceptics and the cynics have begun to lose their doubts about our ability to find our feet in Asia,

And now many of them are losing their doubts about the not unrelated subject of our becoming a republic.

Our success in the world does depend on our strength as a nation, on our faith in ourselves and the way we represent that faith - the way we symbolise it.

It might not be too much to say that the faith is spreading. Armed with it, I believe we can in this decade marry a new era of economic success to a new era of social justice.

It will take an act of courage, as all these things do - but we won't be found wanting, and the reward will be all the richer because we Australians will thereafter always know that we rose to meet the challenge.

Thank you