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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
ADDRESS AT FAREWELL DINNER FOR MR BOB HOGG, THE LOBBY
RESTAURANT, THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1993**

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It is nice to be here to be able to say a few nice things about Bob. I could actually say many nice things about Bob.

Bob is actually going to break the mould by getting out with some accolades. I think that as a Party person this is a great achievement. Someone said well, he hasn't had a lot out of it - well, I think he has. He has a great sense of pride and achievement and he didn't need the word 'senator' in front of his name or the initials 'MP' after it - to think he made it. I think the fact that he has never suffered from an inferiority complex means he didn't need a label to actually prove to himself that he was worth it. So, I think he got a lot out of it.

I first met him in 1979, it was the time when Tommy and Arthur had adopted me for the second time to head Hawkie off at the pass in 1980. I went down to Victoria and I met Hoggie in the terrace house, at the Party office and Gerry ... he put Gerry in charge of me. I suppose he thought I was a bigger problem than Richmond council or another black bastard he said from Sydney. I had a terrific time with him. When I got back I said to Graham look, they are not all bad these fellas. Graham said look, I find that pretty hard to believe. I said to him no, no look that Hand actually ... I said look a great characteristic in the Left is there is no bloody sense of humour amongst them. I said that Hoggie, he gets a laughs out of most everything, I said and Gerry is a smoker, and a punter, a story teller. I said there is hope for the rest of us really with this crowd.

Of course what was happening was quite an important transition in Victoria and Bob's secretaryship meant the reaffirmation of the Party and Barry earlier mentioned himself and Michael Duffy is here tonight - Mick and Button and others and John Cain who are on the outer and who Bob recognised as a force in Victoria and put together with a lot of tolerance and good sense an

amalgam which saw the creation of the Victorian government. That is a hell of a thing to have on your CV - putting a Labor government together in a place which hadn't had one for a long, long time.

Then, of course, as John Bannon said a moment ago this was the start of something big and we then went on to a Commonwealth Labor government and a State Labor government for most of the 1980s around Australia.

Bob played a substantial role in that. Then, like the BBC say when you get a good program, kill it when it peaks - he jumps straight off when he was doing well killed himself and resigned and went into Bob Hawke's office as Prime Ministerial Adviser and that is when he meet Peter Barron. Some one said to me today about him, he said God! they were a pair; he said Barron smoking his head off and talked to Richardson and Hoggie read The Age ... but between them, the pair of them they got it together and were a great force in those years and a political office which I think we will rarely see the like of.

The thing about Bob is an eminently successful person and the value of him is that he has already made a life for himself, chartered a course for himself outside of public life, outside of the Labor party. The very elements of his personality that have made him such a successful person are now giving him the promise of an interesting and varied life outside of public life, but of course still with a gaze on public life and employing those skills which he developed. Making the transition is as important as being able to do the task in the party, in the movement to be able to make that transition and still remain a useful Labor loyalist as he always will be is, of course, important.

The key thing about him is I think, that he was never self interested and he was never a slick apparatchik, that he did things which needed to be done at the time, he put himself outside of his own faction which is hard thing to do in the clubbie atmosphere of Victorian politics particularly on the left of the party and as John has said quite courageously he took positions which made a very great difference to the Labor party's future in matters like uranium in South Australia where probably John's government might not have been formed without that change on uranium policy at Roxby Downs. And of course, latterly with the great privatisation debates which have been important in dealing with areas of our commerce which we couldn't deal with while they were public authorities and also having large implications as they did for fiscal policy. Again, when ever the opportunity arose or when ever the need was there he was always there, prepared to take a lead and took enormous opprobrium for his stance - his stance on uranium meant he lost friendships and lost regard amongst colleagues he lived twenty years with, but because he is consistent and because he is quality, he has lived to tell another story and to come back where others could see their ways and the correctness of his judgement.

So, he is a person of substance is our Bob and it is a great pity for us, in a sense, to lose him, but a pleasure for us to see him succeed in another way, in an industry which he has developed a long professional association with

and where no doubt, his contacts with the Labor party will remain in tact. Bob will always be a Labor person. Whether he is in the employ of the party or what ever he is doing, he believes in Labor, he believes in the great strength of the Labor party and the way of the movement and its great goodness and I suppose, it is an important thing for us that we have in our society, beyond our party a whole spattering of people who are significant, influential and share our view of life.

So Bob, could I say on my behalf that I have always ... while I have had a few fights with him on occasions - I have always liked you and I have on many occasions supported you and I know that you leave this very august position as our National Secretary with respect and regard of everybody.

Can I also just refer now briefly to 1990-1993 and say that in these two elections in which Bob was so influential, that we had the chance to give ourselves our longevity in office and in 1990 in that campaign where we were really facing as I suppose we have for so many now, difficult circumstances, we had our act together and that made a great difference to us and the same in 1993.

Here we are now in office, ten years going on eleven with thirteen ahead of us and a chance in the up cycle of the recovery and economic growth to turn thirteen into sixteen if we really want to do it. That is tremendous for the Labor party and for the Labor movement to see a generation of people come, serve and be replaced with another to give you the kind of continuity which we really never had the opportunity of having as a party and the chance to give Australia and present to Australia the real image of Labor which in many senses we were always cheated in giving - that sense of social democracy which we have developed, built on the Australian ethos, the values of working class Australia and where we have now modelled this society, to a very large extent in our own image, turning it into a modern industrial economy, a competitive, outward looking economy, but grafting on to it one of the best safety nets and social fabrics in the world.

Very few parties get this chance, but we have been able now to do it because we have had time in office and to consistently apply ourselves to these very big questions. I noticed in today's Financial Review there was a front page which had a very graphic illustration of commodity prices and it showed them back at 1986 levels. You really have to ask yourself - where would Australia now be without the Labor party? Where would we be if we left ourselves dependent on commodities as our conservative opponents would have left us in these years? Where would Australia be without the Labor party's breadth and ingenuity? On the same front page in the left hand corner was a story of Telecom succeeding in picking up a telecommunications contract in Hong Kong which a decade ago would have been undreamt of. As you leaf through the paper there are stories splattered through it, just in one day which so typically indicate our success as a party in changing Australia, hedging our bets off it being simply a quarry and a mine, investing in our greatest resource our people and our children and developing innovative products

which we are now marketing aggressively and successfully to the rest of the world.

So, I thought that said a great deal about the change we had made and also a day or so earlier, looking through the economist magazine - we are now growing as fast as any western economy; in fact faster - the only country that comes near us is the United States and that means we have been able to do, in these last couple of years what many countries have not been able to do and they are now growing negatively, if I can use that expression. Most of the OECD has got a minus in front of it for growth and we are sitting up there now with these growth rates.

The funny thing was Bill Kelty made the remark a few minutes ago to me on the table, he said God! it is hard to get a bloody break in Australia with the way things are in the media. You have got an expansionary Commonwealth Budget putting \$2 billion into the economy, kicking growth along which has already been re-started, being roundly criticised, but a reactionary Budget in Victoria being hailed a day later followed by an unemployment rate of over 13 per cent in that State. You have got to say there is something screwy about the world which doesn't focus on the value which we in the Labor party have seemed to bring to things.

I think it is worth saying that in this Budget and the debate which has followed it, just how meticulous we have been in meeting our promises and doing the things that we have said - the things that I said to people on election night, saying that we wouldn't leave an underclass of the unemployed to themselves, that we would reach back and pull them up, that we would actually focus on the big issues like unemployment and do the things we said we would do in support of Australian women and all of the other range of policies in our social platform. Meticulously we have put those into place in this Budget - be it the home child care allowance or the generalised child care rebate or the extension of dental services to pensioners and beneficiaries and a wide range ... in fact we published a document with the Budget which listed the promises we had already met including cutting the company tax rate to 33 per cent, putting in a second investment allowance, all of those things which we have already done and accomplished and accommodated.

One hopes that as a bit of time passes we get a focus on the real issues again and the notion that the Labor party will always be into social progress and into its basic loyalty to those groups which have so earnestly and always supported us and that we won't be doing regressive things as we didn't do on this occasion.

I was pleased tonight that at least one person in conservative Australia, the leader of the National Farmers Federation had the courage to stand up and say to John Hewson what you are doing is wrong and indecent and it is bad for the economy, it is bad for public life. That you don't go voting against the Government's Budget measures in the Senate - a point I had made a few

days ago, a point some of the columnists had made in the last couple of days when I said last year if we were to have lost the election, we as an opposition would pass the GST and pass the money measures of a Coalition government. You would have at least thought with even the most elementary power of observation, the most cursory power of observation the Australian media would've said it is wrong for you John Hewson to turn your Opposition senators wilfully against the Budget so that the Government has to take the Budget down the highways and the byways of the minor parties. Morality in our public life will always be important and it is not too late for John Hewson to do the right thing. He would earn more marks doing what is right than being wilful and stubborn and spiteful and continue to do what is wrong.

At least then we could say that the Coalition government recognises that they lost the last election and they give up the notion of trying to say that Labor governments are illegitimate by attacking at the first opportunity they have, the work of the Government which was fairly and properly elected.

So, there is at least some people prepared to call it as it is.

We have had our share of problems in the last week or two. I think, one would be less than honest not to admit that - with the Budget and its reception. We have made some changes and they have probably been some good changes and made the Budget more acceptable. But be that as it may, we are not going to ever pass up the big issues simply to make sure that the cosmetics of our work is more acceptable to the electorate. We are working as we promised on the big issues and the biggest in Australia is unemployment. We have now again introduced another expansionary Budget, with the same fiscal stimulus as the 'One Nation' package, an economic policy that has worked, which has fired the economy back into growth, which is growing faster than any western economy, which is now going to get another \$2 billion kick coupled with low interest rates, which is doing as much as we possibly can in macro-economic terms to promote growth and to promote employment.

Beyond that in the Budget, we expanded those labour market programs to now reach nearly 650,000 people who are unemployed and in November I will receive the Taskforce report into the labour market to see in which ways we might be able to do something novel in world terms here in Australia about a systemic approach to unemployment and particularly the problems of the long-term unemployed.

On this key issue of Budget and Budget measures and Budget debates notwithstanding, we will be focussing on that issue as promised later in the year when we receive that report. Similarly with the other big issues of the last few months - MABO and APEC. On Mabo last week we presented our draft legislation. It is easily the best piece of social work the government had done in a decade in terms of its time, its attention, clear principles, it enunciates the long lines of logic which are there, hoping that we can produce a national settlement, an amalgam between the Commonwealth and

the States, that embeds in Australian government and Australia society acceptance and not grudging acceptance, but whole hearted acceptance of the principle of native title and the fact that Aboriginal tradition and custom are the source of Australian common law and that native title exists in our common law. On this very large matter for Australian society and for our party which has always been committed to reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians on this very large issue we will continue to press for a principled solution, a principled and workable solution to a revolutionary problem in land management and one which seeks to meet the twin goals of justice for Aboriginal people and ...

... And also I mentioned APEC to you. APEC perhaps more than any other thing has the chance to provide jobs for the next generation of Australians and to guarantee our standard of living as perhaps nothing else we can do can. I leave on Saturday to meet President Clinton in the United States. Naturally, this is one of the issues I will be speaking to him about.

Normally, when Australian Prime Ministers go to the United States, the issues on the top of our agenda are rarely - if ever - the issues on the top of the US agenda. On this occasion APEC is one of the issues on the top of the US agenda and it is also one of the issues on the top of our agenda. So, I am hoping with that opportunity to be able to talk to the President about the opportunities in the Asia Pacific, about the importance of the role of the United States in the Asia Pacific, its power for good in putting the stamp of the largest liberal democracy on APEC, of keeping it involved strategically in our region and opening up the opportunities of open regionalism and freer trade in which Australia can participate. If we get APEC to a strong, multilateral body which is given authority at heads of government level, we will have given Australia a seat at the largest table in its history - a table that it's largely, in a way, created for itself. But one it can only create with others, but one which has got tremendous influences for Australians; for the standard of living, Australian employment and the way we will be as a society into the next century.

These are all very large measures, very large issues and core issues which we are intending to over the course of this Parliament and indeed this year.

So people in the Party should not for a moment think - there has been a bit of this comment - we have lost our way. Well, pigs we have lost our way. We haven't at all lost our way and we should not be a moment discouraged by the fact that we have had difficulties with the reception to the Budget because in this game it is a game for the long term and the medium term - it is not for this week or next month - it is for the long run. Our conservative opponents have got nothing to offer. John Hewson has junked his GST and he has junked Fightback. At the moment he doesn't even have a policy, and his policy is to wilfully oppose the legislation of the Government in the Upper House of our country - the Senate, and supposedly pass this off as basically a solution to Australia's problems. It is no solution and while they are doing that, we are working on issues so large, like Mabo and APEC and a long-term solution to

unemployment, so large that I think they give the promise of being able to sustain our Party a long time into the future.

Let's be grateful for the fact that we have had ten years in office, that we are on our way to thirteen and that we remain a party of imagination and principle and that we do fight for good and worthwhile things and while ever we have breath in us we will always seek to do innovative, imaginative things which are good for the society, good for this country.

The Labor party is the only real political party in Australia as we all in this room know. The Coalition parties are really like business organisations, more than they are political parties. The Labor party is a real political party with feelings, with loyalties, with notions of fairness - many of which they have developed themselves. This in part comes from the ethos of the people we represent - working class and middle class Australia - and the people who join us and participate in our affairs.

Let me return to where I began. Tonight we are sending off one of those people - Bob Hogg. One of the people who in a relatively long political life, but in not a very long period has made such an outstanding contribution to Australian public life and the culture of Labor in Australia.

Bob, let me say as the Party's parliamentary leader, again, recap and just make that point that we owe you a debt of gratitude, we appreciate the things you have done, we appreciate your integrity and your sense of what was right and what needed to be done at the time and say how much influence it has had on all of us and how much influence you have had on all of us and make the point that it is because of people like you, we are the Party that we are - a Party of principle and a Party of achievement which will go on to do other things and which will generate more Bob Hoggs and keep the Australian Labor Party the great Party that we in this room know it to be.

Thank you