



## PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
LAUNCH OF ANNE SUMMERS' BOOK, "DAMNED WHORES AND GOD'S  
POLICE", SYDNEY, 24 JANUARY 1994**

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...Anne, if I had of known you were this popular I would never have let you leave my staff. You must accompany me more often with this guaranteed turn out of media.

Well, it is a great delight to be launching the book for an old friend, as Anne is, and to be doing so where it is recognised that of all her great achievements, this is perhaps one of her greatest, probably her greatest, because this book has been continuously in print for nineteen years and it has sold more than 60, 000 copies. That must be a real feather in the cap for Anne, and for Penguin and now as Bob says the book has been revised and Anne has written a couple of new chapters at the beginning and at the end, and revised the work in its substance.

One of the things which I thought touched me in the book, she says it is logical that the generation which launched the movement will have to see it through. There is a certain weariness about that statement, which I well understand. Anne is a baby boomer, and so am I, I was in the middle run of the baby boomers born in 1944, when I turned 50 the other day I knew that all the Peter Pan notions that we baby boomers have had, because we have resisted ageing as no generation before us has resisted ageing, and that basically it is a losing battle, a losing battle.

But we are still in there punching away, putting our views about, trying to reform the place, moving the debate on. Anne is in that classic tradition of the activist baby boomers of Australia. So here she is with her famous publication doing it again, after having returned to Australia from a very exciting and interesting period abroad and re-establishing herself here and doing things, further things, for the Australian women's movement and for the status of women in this country.

Now, this notion of hers, she said it was logical that the generation which launched the movement will have to see it through. And the other interesting thing she said when saying that, she said that when she was editor of Ms

magazine in the United States the staff came to see her about the management of the magazine and some of its content. And the presumption was by Anne and her partner, the staff would be pretty much wanting to see things the way she had seen things, and to be committed to, if not just simply the same ideals, the same vision, particularly for the status of women and women's issues. And they said to her, we are here to say that we did not want to be and don't want to be like the editors. In other words, the debate had moved on, and the success which women had had, particularly feminists in the '60s and '70s, with women's issues, changing the status of women, had been so profound that the next generation of people to follow them were in fact living in a different epoch and that their vision and vista and their objectives were not the objectives of those who had been the pioneers of change and of the movement.

With some basking, I think, in the success which they had brought, Anne was then, as you know, running and editing a magazine where the staff were looking from a position for some plateau in the change of the status of women. In ways which were different to Anne, which drew upon the strength of the changes which people like her had made. And she said that we now have to, in making that statement which I said has weary overtones, have to start thinking about things like being frail and elderly, and the lack of economic independence. Well, she is not frail and elderly yet, but there may be some baby boomers who are frail and elderly. So in other words, the issues change, and we are going across the life cycle of a generation of women who started this at university, started these issues, being involved in these issues at university and have gone on to see the changes through.

One of the things I thought was most telling, and she makes reference to it in the book, was the survey which was conducted in 1992 amongst Australian women about the attitudes of women to the changes which have taken place in society. And Anne was on my staff at the time and we considered the survey results very closely. Women were pleased with the changes in their lives, with the increased opportunities, with the greater freedom, with the independence coming from employment, the much higher participation rates in education in fact the dominate participation rates in education. They valued the choices which the changes of the '60s and '70s and the '80s had brought to them.

And so one of, I think, Anne's conclusions upon returning to Australia from the United States was that women's lives have changed enormously in Australia across the course of the '80s at least, if not the '70s. But the changes were not only here to stay, but women were rejoicing in the changes and enjoying the choices and opportunities and that one of the frequent subjects of discussion was the role of men in coming to terms with the changes in their lives in their new relationship with women, their wives and partners, and that being part and parcel of the current debate.

Now, I think it is true that those changes have been profound and that they are widely enjoyed by Australian women. Because there is no doubt, if I look at my political life, over 24 years, the status and opportunities of Australian women today are nothing like they were when I became a member of Parliament in 1969. And a large reason for that is because of the pioneering work which has

been done by those interested in the status of women, the feminists, and by people like Anne Summers.

Now these changes are very real, and I just mentioned a moment ago the participation in schools and in university, now there are of course, more women graduating from universities than men, in technical and further education this is also true, we have got a higher participation rate in secondary school now amongst women than men. And all of this has meant a dramatic change in the opportunities for Australian women.

Now, we have had a lot of talk in this country in the last year or so about reconciliation between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal Australians. The word reconciliation has been used a lot and used with all of the meaning that it deserves to be used with. But one of the great reconciliations which is underway now, is a reconciliation between men and women and the lives they now lead, with the changed role of women, the changed opportunities of women and it will be, I think, many a long year before that reconciliation is complete, if ever.

But the progress and opportunities underlying it I think are fairly profound. And I think most men understand that and they are adjusting their view of life and society and opportunity, in terms of the changes which have taken place, and the reconciliation which is required of it. It's a major adjustment by men to the new order of life which has come about because of the efforts of many women like Anne.

One of the things she talks about is domestic violence, and she laments the prevalence of it - as we all do - because there was a lot of violence against women in the early days of this country, and it's more the pity that it's still a part-and-parcel of Australian life. It's something I think we all have to be conscious of. It's something which I think we all have to try and remedy. As much as one can make public policy remedy it, the Govt remains very interested in the subject and determined to do something meaningful about it. But again, it's something which only societal change and education and understanding can, I think, really make the difference in terms of that issue.

One of the revelations in the book -Anne said of course she needs to bring it up-to-date, and in a sense she's sort of admitting she's brought herself up-to-date by saying that she's now a fervent pragmatist. Now, these are words Anne would never have uttered not so many years ago. I could have saved her a lot of anguish if she'd asked me 19 years ago, but I'm not quite sure she would have been taking that kind of advice from me then. If even now. I know a lot of people think there is a great contradiction between pragmatism and ideals, between pragmatism and vision - and the words become one which is over-worked and, of course, misunderstood. But pragmatism is not cynicism. It is about learning the lessons of things, and seeing how one can advance visions and objectives. A lot of my public life in the years before were managed by ideology. We had the largely competing polarities - the ideology that intervention by governments in society was the appropriate way society should run - and then the competing ideology that the more unfettered is life and society from government intervention, the better. We've seen that pendulum swing over

the period between the Calvin Coolidges in the US and the Richard Nixons and the Ronald Reagans. Then on the other side, the planned economies of Eastern Europe and less so the social democratic parties' interventions in policy over the course of the century. These have been the competing ideological things. But what's happened, is that ideology has faded as in fact communities demand changes from governments and those people who are given a role in managing society. And so one looks for - if you like - visions and then objectives within those visions, and the going about of getting those objectives, and in the doing of it - materially advance the welfare of people, of men and women. I think Anne's confession to being a fervent pragmatist, is that when she looks at the women's agenda in this country from the late 60's onwards - and so much having been accomplished when one compares Australia to other countries, not just in Australian terms, but it in international terms, so much in terms of the change in the status of women having been accomplished in this country - she's seen being put into place like building blocks. One block, on top of another block, on top of another block - the foundation, a structure and one moves on. In other words, it can't all be done instantly. And while it's idealistic, if it's simply ideological it probably won't happen or wouldn't have happened. The changes needed to be engineered by interested people who knew what they were doing, who set for themselves objectives at the time, and went and pursued those objectives and brought them home.

Now, this is very much a commentary on life in general - and certainly in government - and something which I've very much subscribed to myself. One has a broad vision - a big canvas as I've often called it - and then one sets up the objectives and goes after them, one after the other, until there is a coherent whole - and when one reaches a plateau with a firm set of foundations, one builds on further and goes on further.

Now, if that's called pragmatism, that's what's changed Australia from an insular, frightened society - one not prepared to get out and trade, and to deal with the rest of the world in its own terms in the 60's and 70's - to now a burgeoning, outward-oriented and confident society and economy. It's been done by that method.

So too, have the changes in the status of women in this country been done in that way. That is, those achievable things are understood to be achievable, and those committed to their achievement go after it. It's sometimes called pragmatism, but it's very effective - and it's the effectiveness which I think Ann recognises and nominates. Let me just give you an example. She came back to Australia, to join my staff, and then set about feminising me - which she knew was basically a hopeless task. But really what she set about - was what she always set about - and that was how next to try and improve the lot and status of Australian women. With some other very committed people on my staff and in the Prime Minister's Department, and in the Office of Status of Women - and, need I say, with an enlightened Cabinet - we put together some changes which have been very material just over the course of the year, in further improving the status of Australian women. Child care, an issue which went to opportunity in work, was advanced by the Government announcing and setting into policy, the payment of a generalised child care rebate - making this an area of availability in

the normal course of the Government's disbursement system, an opportunity for women to join the workforce. It's something which we'd never had before, even though the Government extended child care opportunities with child care places - we'd never had a generalised rebate for child care. It's there now, and of course we announced further extensions of child care. The other change which I think, amongst many, which was notable, was the cashing out of the dependent spouse rebate into a home child care allowance - which evened up some of the benefits and incentives of the tax-free threshold and income-splitting - and recognised the fact that the primary carer at home had the responsibility and that there are payments to be made. Rather than simply a rebate for dependents, they were paid as cash by the Government to the accounts of that person - mostly of course, the woman, the Mother, at home. That I think is going to change forever, the way in which we regard support for dependents in the Commonwealth, and the way in which we will support and make available to women in the main those direct payments, and the capacity that change provides to do other things in policy. It was a landmark change, and the women's movement have been arguing for it for many years - and Anne was there at the key time to bring the enthusiasm about and to get support for and to drive it home.

She's a great networker, she's a great talker. She's tremendously energetic and everyone who has known her, can only marvel at the depth of energy she's always been able to bring to bear on any subject, and the enthusiasm that she has. As well as that, she has that other glorious quality, and that is she has a great sense of humour. There are enough bores in the world without us needing to be burdened further - all of us - particularly in important areas of policy, by people who've got the blinkers on and are so serious, that it just becomes such a leaden issue that one can hardly deal with it. Anne's always had that lightness about her, that sense of fun, of joy, and I think this has made her so much more effective, and has given her a sense of balance on life - which has been terrific for her and everyone associated with her.

Now I know her Mum's here today, and Chip's here, and all the people who are close to her are friends - to rejoice in the fact that this celebrated work by this very celebrated person, has been re-written for another generation of Australians - men and women. It's a standard text now in our tertiary institutions, and as a consequence Penguin has been on a winner for a long time, and it's likely to stay on a winner. So, could I say to Penguin, congratulations again - first of all on supporting Anne in the first place - and encouraging her through the years, to update this seminal work as the status of Australian women has changed. And congratulations to Anne, for putting her mind again to this important work, which has traced over time the evolution from 1788 to the present, the threads of exclusion and oppression, the threads of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, the threads of prejudice, of victimisation, of the threads of violence. It's there, written tightly for all to read, recording the changes as we've made them. Congratulations, Anne. It's a great pleasure to be associated with you again on this happy occasion, and to launch - if it needs launching again - your seminal work *Damned Whores and God's Police*. Thank you.