



PRIME MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP,
OFFICIAL OPENING OF KURILPA PARK, SOUTH BANK, BRISBANE
THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER, 1994**

Well, I'm delighted to be here on this occasion, but most particularly to have been able to have joined with Brisbane City Council in doing some of the things that we thought we could do together during the worst of the recession, to provide some hope and some value to young people, in particular, who were unemployed or long term unemployed, over the course of the recent past. And, it's not really part of one's experience that city councils take on with such fervour, with such a sense of decency and humanity, the interests of young people in particular and even mature aged unemployed people, to find tasks for them that lift their self esteem, give them a place in the scheme of things and, as an end result, achieve something on the way for the city and the people.

And, this has happened and the collaboration between the Commonwealth and the City Council has been a matter of great pleasure to me. And, I congratulate the Lord Mayor on taking this initiative. Because, it's one thing for the Commonwealth to have the money to do some of these things... we can't do it unless there is the help and assistance on the ground, the sense of ambition, locally, for these things to happen. And, I'm delighted to say that we've seen it with Brisbane City Council. What we have seen here is, I am sure, just another, further manifestation of the concentration on the river which we are seeing in Brisbane in recent years - certainly since Expo' some years ago. I think, now, most people in Brisbane regard the river as a major asset where I'm not sure this would have been true all that many years ago. And, Kurilpa Park is going to be a further asset to the river and a place of solace for people to come because cities need some open space and some breathing space and this is a bit of breathing space - another part of the lung of the city. And, it wouldn't be here without the efforts of these young people.

The Lord Mayor's statistics, I think, are pretty impressive. That is, the number of trees put into place, the tonnage of garbage which has been taken away, the lawns, the stonework, the footpaths... all employing, over the course of it, 2000 people, 700 of whom have found full time employment. So,

it's a pretty successful strike rate when one is considering that the young people - mainly young people - involved here are amongst the longer term unemployed. And, that sort of work experience is terrific for them, it makes the community feel good about itself, but most importantly it makes them feel good about themselves.

The Lord Mayor was kind enough to congratulate the Government on the White Paper and I think the White Paper is one of those things... I was saying last night the attention span of the media is so short these days. When I first went into Parliament 25 years ago stories would be developed in the print media and would then be picked up by television. Something like the White Paper would go for weeks, people trying to digest it. Now, the reverse is the case; television picks it up for a night, you get a one day follow-up in the print the next day and that's the end of it. Done. Now, we're still building the White Paper and - I see Neville Bonner has joined us - I have just been at ACOSS where he was present, this morning, saying that we are going to be case managing 560,000 people this year. We're setting up in what is a world first, a system of case management where an individual person will be relating to an unemployed person, unemployed 12 months or more, and understanding their aptitudes, their educational qualifications, what they'd like to do and getting a plan in place and a subsidy to get them back into work.

So, you can imagine setting up a system where we are actually, personally case managing over half a million people. It is going to be an enormous challenge. But, one that will mark this society out from other comparable countries where we will not have, and will not accept that 300,000 people should go on the labour scrap heap while the rest of us move off to prosperity; that we will keep the country as one, inclusively, inclusive and together and that we will get the longer term unemployed people back into mainstream jobs. Now, we've already had tremendous success in the last year; since the election 413,000 jobs have been created in this country. We were heading for a target of half a million over three years, we're four fifths of the way in two thirds of the time, or just over half the time.

But, importantly, 80,000 of the 400,000 jobs have gone to the long term unemployed. If you were looking at 400,000 jobs in the eighties, that 80,000 would be more like 15,000 or 20,000. So, out of 400,000 jobs, 15,000 or 20,000 might have gone to the long term unemployed. This time, out of 400,000, there are 80,000 which have gone to the long term unemployed so we are really starting to get them back into the mainstream of the labour market. And, as the economy picks up and grows and as we bring more growth to the labour market, hopefully, we'll really start chopping that long term unemployment back.

The other great thing about the White Paper is that we're saying that we will not let any person, any young person under the age of 18, slip through the system. If someone drops out of education we will case manage them back into it. And, if not into mainstream education - secondary education - into TAFE, and if not into TAFE into a subsidised workplace and on the job

training. In other words we just won't let somebody leave at age 16 and, basically, drop out. We're going to try and get them back in because I think a country which does not care about its young people is not a country with a future. It is as simple as that. So, this is very important to us and the innovation that we had in there - we're now starting to stream kids in years 11 and 12, the last years of secondary school, into TAFE accreditation so they can actually get their career path set in years 11 and 12 and do things in secondary school which give them accreditation for TAFE, thereafter.

So, you might ask what this has got to do with the park? They are all a common theme. That is, we won't leave the unemployed behind - particularly the young unemployed - and whether it is work experience under JOBSKILLS, LEAP or the other labour market programs in the White Paper, they are things that, I think, a country as wealthy as this should commit itself to. Now, one may say, "Well, that's entirely reasonable", but not many people were sticking their hand up in the depths of the recession saying, "Well, look, we'll take young people on, we'll put our own money in and we'll do it." Now, Jim Soorley did this and so did his council and we'll be forever in their debt for it. And, the young people who have got those jobs, whose lives have been restored will be in their debt. And what price? The product of 700 jobs in the economy versus the cost of 700 unemployed people. The obvious benefit in terms of product of having those people engaged compared to being unengaged is, of course, manifest. So, not only have they been taken up but they produced quite a wonderful change in an area such as this and when this gets to maturity and those trees get larger and it gets a bit of patina about it, this will be a very lovely space for the city.

And, I'm actually delighted with the way Brisbane is changing. There is tremendous growth behind Brisbane now, as one of the growth capitals of the country. The fact that it has a greater Brisbane Council area and is not broken up by small municipalities means that there can be city planning and you have a Lord Mayor who understands the potential of Brisbane, the demands which will be placed upon its infrastructure in the future, and how it can, with the growth - and particularly its temperate climate and its relationship with the Asia Pacific - become a very significant part of Australia and one where we can do some things with city planning that will make Brisbane one of the beautiful places in this country. One of the great joys to me is some of the worst architecture of the sixties and seventies - and we've got more than our liberal spread of it right around the Commonwealth; there's a great dollop of it here, of course, in Brisbane - it will be mulched in because the sites are more valuable than the buildings. So, we get a second crack at it. That is something which I think is going to be terribly good for Brisbane. I was delighted with the Commonwealth Law Courts just across the river there, that we've been able to add a quality bit of architecture to the city and a lot of the packing case rubbish which surrounds it will go as the years go on. And, we'll be able to build some decent buildings along the river front here and maybe get the height limitations right and make this a very lovely city.

At least. I think, we'd like to be involved, with Better Cities - to see the Commonwealth involved with some of these things, which we are now, of course, in the greater Brisbane area - and to see a partnership between the government of Queensland and the Commonwealth in doing these things, but in a tripartite relationship with the Council of greater Brisbane. So, there is, I think, a great optimism about Queensland, a great sense of opportunity, of the future and a sort of civic pride returning to the place where it is not just simply a developers' melee - but, where the public interest gets a look in and there is an understanding that there is a greater interest in doing it right. I certainly salute the Lord Mayor's efforts in this respect.

So, could I thank everyone associated with today, with this project, but more particularly with the JOBSKILLS and LEAP projects around Brisbane and for the many people involved in the supervision and design of these projects. But, most particularly, to those unemployed people who have joined them, who have benefited from them and who have given something back to the city as they go off then into permanent employment. And, those who are unemployed, we'll be case managing them back into a job and back into training. So, again, congratulations Jim, on a job really well done and I am delighted that my colleagues and I could be here on this occasion to declare Kurilpa Park open. Thankyou.

ends.