



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
SPEECH AT A RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE HON WARREN  
SNOWDON MP, HOTEL DARWIN, DARWIN, 5 SEPTEMBER 1995**

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Well thanks very much indeed for that very warm round of applause. I am delighted to be here with Brian [Ede] and Bob [Collins] and Warren [Snowdon] and Laurie [Brereton] and our very distinguished Parliamentary representatives and candidates here in the Northern Territory.

It is true, I think, that Bob and Warren have been a great team and yes they have wrenched the money off me every time they have come through the door. I used to say every time when you see that fat guy and the skinny walking in, it is going to cost me money and they would saunter in all very casual, but all very effective.

But the thing is it is a great thing for the Labor Party and Bob says we are 90 years old here. This is the oldest Labor Party in the world and we keep on renewing ourselves and the thing that always keeps us going is faith in Australia, faith in our fellow Australians and faith in the country.

Above all else, we have the policy disputes, but they are the things that keep it rolling along and we keep producing these people that always push the envelope out, that always enlarge it and make it bigger. And we have got a double here in the Northern Territory with Bob and Warren and I sometimes, you know, .. because you tend to, in Cabinet meetings, study people in sitting there opposite you because everyone is a psychiatrist in politics, you look into your little foibles and manners and characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and you know you get very proud of a group of people like this.

And I was looking at Bob only a week or so ago, I am not saying that ... I mean it is hard not to miss him by the way. I am not saying this because I am here, but I thought well there he is, he has sauntered in and you know he is in an open neck shirt and I thought well look at the change he has brought to Australian agriculture.

The previous week I was in Queensland at the Graingrowers Conference and there was great warmth towards the Labor Party from an area which has

been traditionally a non-Labor voting and supporting group and it is because with the drought, and the severity of it, this Government has kept income support under that whole community. Now 10,000 farm families get income support from the Commonwealth to tide them through this drought. There is also funding under the Rural Adjustment Scheme and these are the sort of props we put in to keep agriculture in place while the drought was on and Bob has done an absolutely original and first rate job in putting all of those things into place.

And you think well remember him in the Assembly, he goes to the Federal Parliament as a Senator you take your chance in the lucky dip of the Federal Caucus. He bobs up in a ministry, in a number of ministries where he has done important jobs - in transport, in communications and in agriculture and we keep on producing people that do these things, that do good things for Australia, understand the ethos, really love the country and want to advance it. You know the others just don't breed them like we do. They just don't.

So he is almost tailor-made for the job of Minister for Agriculture. Bob is out there, sort of you know, chews the fat with all these farmers and he understands, of course, well. And the same I can say about Warren. I mean Warren is a terrific Member of Parliament, a great constituency member. He genuinely represents the place, understands all the balances, pushes the envelope when he can, knows when not to, tries to get the best right and I think this is most obviously true during the Mabo discussion, the Native Title Legislation, which was a year long, tooting and froing over little details of a complex piece of property and cultural law, which we had to build from the ground up.

And this sort of value for the Labor Party ..... you know it is not a huge financially strong organisation, it's a collection of ordinary Australians who have come together for the public good of it because of their commitment to the country and we have produced Members of Parliament and Senators and they go on to the Government and they make a tremendous contribution. Whatever people might think organisationally about the Labor Party in the Northern Territory, or in any of the other States, here you have produced two cracker representatives who really are doing you proud let me assure you.

I am delighted to know them and to be in a Party with them and to be colleagues of them and Laurie, of course, followed Bob in the transport portfolio. And they have extended ... you know we were down today opening the international terminal at Brisbane airport which we did in 1992, I think. You turned the sod? He is a good sod turner. Turning over sod is an accomplished art, I can tell you, and of course Laurie is here today as the Minister presiding over the opening. So you know, again, it is just another milestone in the great aviation story of Australia of course which the north has played such a role in of course as we know Queensland with Qantas in particular.

So these are the things that make you proud to be in the game and, you know, standing here with a fellow like Brian who is a good leader, with good values, you are proud to belong to the same Party as these people. I am very proud indeed.

When I came across today we took off from a very nice ceremony in Brisbane, where again you see one of the principal gateways of the east coast of Australia to Asia, you think of the way in which the country has changed. And we flew over across the north, across Cape York, up through the Gulf, some of the most beautiful landscape you could imagine on the way down into Darwin. You think how big it is and how beautiful it is and to think that it was held in trust for the rest of us by the Aboriginal community all those thousands of years and that is why we owe it to them and to ourselves to make a decent fist of it.

To know what a great thing we have been, a great bequest it is that this ancient continent has been left to us to enjoy, to live from and to protect, to protect this place and to understand that you almost have to live half your life, if your a non-Aboriginal Australian, to understand a little bit about it and to appreciate it more and there is something about the ancient quality of it. It gets to you as you get into your middle years, I think.

I don't think I understood it as well when I was young. But I understand it better now and you feel the ancientness, if I could use the expression, of it and you know what an absolutely enormously rich bequest it has been because there is no continent reserved for any other group our size and here we are with these old societies like Indonesia, near us, and the great emerging country of China, an emerging economy of a billion people and these old proud societies like Japan and Korea in the region.

We are now part of that region. We are part of that family of nations. We turned over the leaf from 20 years ago, when we were selecting people to come here on the basis of race. It is not that long ago and we have done a good thing in supporting the High Court, when the High Court said in an English speaking country like this, your common law comes from European custom and tradition and we have now said your common law also comes from Aboriginal custom and tradition. This is a great change. Because it is the most honest recognition of the value to the rest of us of Aboriginal life and custom and tradition and, as Brian has remarked, we have had the pleasure of giving expression to how that title will be used and awarded in law with the Native Title Act.

But these things and this opportunity we have in this part of the world, I am sure they [in Asia] say of us "show us how you relate to your indigenies and we will show you how you relate to us" and I think we have made a psychological leap as a country. We have righted a wrong with terra nullius. We have engaged the community of countries around us. We don't select people on the basis of race. We know we have been given a great opportunity, that we can't squander. But Australia is a different place, it is no longer a monoculture, it is a multicultural place. It is a lively interesting place and we are now clear that we have been given this great opportunity.

I think as we have internationalised the country, as we have made the leap with our exports into Asia, as our business culture has changed, as we have approached these countries, we have changed ourselves. We have changed our outlook in our culture and we do want to be a part of this community of

countries around us and we do see this as a tremendous opportunity here. And it has always been true, I think it is completely true because the Labor Party has always had this belief in Australia and through the wholesome view it has, it wants to see a happy society here and wants to see us be a part of this greater society around us.

I think there is a point of excitement about Australia, we haven't seen, not in my lifetime, that we are seeing now. You see the bounty and the opportunity when last week we had the economy growing at 3.7 per cent against the year, sixteen straight quarters of growth - it is the longest phase of growth in 25 years - we have doubled our exports in ten years, we are educating about three times as many kids as we were ten years ago. Eight out of ten young people now finish secondary school, that is feeding through our higher education institutions, that is feeding the product innovation, that is feeding the exports.

All of these things are making this a much more bountiful and exciting country and that sense of excitement is out there. I mean the polls might not measure all this. But if you go to Australians today and say "do you think Australia has a greater future, it is more secure, more certain of itself, more clear of what it is, more exciting?" I think they would answer in the affirmative. And I think that is very much what the next election will be about.

John Howard thinks he is being tricky and clever hiding his policies. But he is not hiding them from me, he is hiding them from the Australian public. He says "I am not going to show that Prime Minister our policies until it suits me." That really is just simply cynical code for saying "I am not going to show the Australian public my policies, until the last moment or if ever".

Now I think that honesty in politics can only be about policies. It can only be about policies and where you stand and I take the view, maybe an old fashioned view, that the public have a right to know from the major parties what we think the big issues are and what the direction for Australia ought to be. I mean if they don't have that right, what right do they have? At least for the party leaders and the party to articulate the visions, the steps and the future for Australia. That is what we are doing.

But John Howard is not doing that. He is playing a tricky, cynical, little political game trying to hide his policies because he thinks the public won't like them and you see this is not, if you like, honesty in politics. They try and compare themselves with the American Republicans. But at least you have got to see of Newt Gingrich, even if you don't agree with him, he puts his policies into the marketplace "that is what I stand for. If we get a Republican majority in the Congress that is what we will do. These will be our yardsticks. This is what our sheet anchor will be. You will know where we are coming from. We will go in there and we will actually do it because we will have your authority as a community and the constituency of the United States to do it."

What do our conservatives do? No contract with Australia. No honesty. No policies in the marketplace. No mandate that they can claim. They want to try and slip under the wire without owning up to what they stand for and when they get there, without of course a mandate, they will just slip back to

their prejudicial policies of old. And for Howard it will be the old ones - cutting the guts out of wages, straightening up working people, gutting Medicare ...

(Interjection: And Anti Discrimination legislation.)

Well that too. All the things. You see that is what he will be about. He will be about back to those sorts of things. You saw them at the last election.

You know there are only two members of the Shadow Cabinet that were not there when Fightback was put together. Now have they all had a Pauline conversion on the road to Damascus? Have they seen the light, or do they really believe in full fees for university students? Do they believe in the lowest common denominator for wages? They believe in no award protections. They believe in no support of award underpinnings of a wage system, that gives all the flexibility in the world. Well, of course, they don't. They believe in all the things they have always believed in and, of course, the unspeakable thing that Howard believes in, the three letters they can't utter, is GST. He really believes in the GST.

You look at his whole career. It has been about three things. It has been about kicking income up to the highest level income families to income splitting. It has been about introducing a consumption tax and it is about what he calls labour market reforms, which is code for cutting the bottom quarter of the labour market back. That is what he believes in. That is all he has ever had to say and I mean Australia is a small country. We all know he goes on. He goes around the board rooms. I don't know whether he thinks I don't know about these things. I mean in some of these board rooms, I can hear the ants change step. You can hear the little zings. See the thing is I know they say: "Look he has no ideas. He has no ideas." He sits there, he goes there and recites all the old stuff and about mostly how they are going to nail us.

But, of course, these people are running businesses. They want to know how they are going to keep their business growing. So he thinks because they are business executives, they are part of the sort of Liberal Party club, or the Liberal supporters and when he leaves they are all happy with him. Well they are not happy with him. They are not and we have some people saying to us in the media "oh well, Labor has lost the touch with business".

You know some journos sitting constipated on a stool looking at a PC, tapping away in the Press Gallery. You know never been near a board room in ten years, telling us we have lost contact with business. I mean the fact of the matter is, that the Coalition has the same obscurantist view they had back in the 1970s. Australia has moved on, we are a completely different country, we have changed, we have made the leap into Asia, we are more confident about ourselves. Our culture has changed, it is ours now, it doesn't belong to anyone else. We want it to be like this.

We have made great changes as a country and the public have been right in there with them and that is the sort of country it is now. There is a floating exchange rate. Interest rates are set in the market. Wages are set by

enterprise or collective bargaining. It is not the old tricked up, bolted down, scene it was when Malcolm Fraser and John Howard were playing Prime Minister and Treasurer all those years ago and they think they are going to walk back in and because they think they're the pinstripe suit brigade and they are back in business, the people are going to say "oh well that is it, let's put another five cents on the dollar, you know let's knock a couple of percentage points off interest rates". I mean they have got no idea of what it is like keeping all of those balls in the air - the exchange rate, interest rate, wages, inflation, keeping it all up there.

Only a Labor Government has ever done it under a market system like this. They have got no idea and have a look at them. Howard will be the Prime Minister and Fischer would be the Deputy Prime Minister. You have got to say where are we going? And then you have got Costello who does his you know ..... I didn't think anyone could out-snarl Peter Reith but he has. Look he is one of our great assets. He always earns a round of applause. Him and Andrew Robb, they are out there ..... you know that song "I've got my mojo working." Well we have got them out there working. Costello and Robb, every day, every time they are out there, we move up. So there is him. And then after that you'll say "well who else is there? Who is the education person?" Well that is ..... we always call him Count Yorga Vampire - Kemp. And then for business, there is Prosser. I mean what a side, what a side, and, of course, this is not lost on the business community. I mean those captains of industry who are picking up the million dollar salaries, they are not going to be managed by this crowd. There is a bit of professional pride there. I mean they may be in the Liberal Party, but they are not going to be run by them.

So look, the thing is, I think that from our point of view we have got Australia now growing strongly. We have had 680,000 jobs growth in 2 1/2 years. That is an absolutely phenomenal number - 680,000. I mean I made the point this way recently. It took us from 1788 to 1983 to get to six million and we have added over 10 per cent more in 2 1/2 years. It is unbelievably strong. I mean we went to the election. What was our principal commitment? That we would restore the economy to growth and employment. We have had 16 quarters of growth, we have had enormous employment growth and there has been complete fidelity in those core commitments we have made to the Australian public throughout the period.

So we can go and we have taken the big issues on like Native Title, like the Land Fund, like the republic. All the things that will paint the way Australia will be in the 21st century. So we can look the public in the eye and say these are the sorts of things we stand for great initiatives like Working Nation, that pick up the long term unemployed. Or the labour market programs, or in education, or in health and we will develop, as always, our policy stance for the next election. We won't be hiding.

There will be no obfuscation on the part of Labor. We will have our policies out there in the marketplace. We won't be slipping around and there will be no business saying "I am not going to show my policies to John Howard", because all that would mean is we are not going to show our policies to the Australian public and we have an honest relationship with the Australian

public. We don't need to be tricky. We have faith in them. We have faith in them to see through charlatans, people who have no ideas and people who are not going to be honest with them.

So this is going to be, again, another important election, when it comes, for Australia. It is going to be to keep the strength of the changes coming through, to keep the linkages with Asia. Here was Howard last week. We had down, on his first ever trip to the west, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, someone running a country of 70 million - fought the French, fought the Americans, fought the Chinese - turning it now into a market economy. He wouldn't see him. He wouldn't see him, he snubbed him. He wouldn't meet him and Do Muoi went home to meet the American Secretary of State two days later.

I mean it gives you some idea and yet Howard says he wants the stewardship of the Asia relationship for Australia and yet the week he snubbed Do Muoi, was the week they became full members of ASEAN. So what do the Malaysians, the Singaporeans, the Indonesians, the Thais, the Philippines, what do they think about when one of their partners was snubbed? Because why? Because he thinks there are a few votes out there with the Vietnamese community in Western Sydney and in parts of Melbourne. That is it. Just for the same reason he told those kids at Saint Ignatius High School that he would put a prohibition on uranium exports to France. He will say whatever he thinks will get the attention and the approbation at the moment. But in terms of the serious stewardship of the country's interests, he can't be relied upon and he can't be trusted.

So I want to thank you for believing in us, for supporting us, for having faith in the better values which the Labor Party has always had on offer and knowing that we are at the cusp an exciting part of our history as we come into the 21st century, as we throw off all the linkages to the vestiges of our past in terms of the things, our Constitutional linkages with Britain. These things which have been useful to Australia but are useful no longer. And that as we take that turn on the centenary of our federation and into that 21st century, that we will be the people marking out the way for Australia.

Now that is what I think this election coming is going to be about and that is why I thank you for supporting us, supporting my colleagues with me tonight and coming along to hear what we have got to say. But more than that, simply to lend a hand. Thank you.

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