



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
ADDRESS TO ALP DINNER, GREEK CLUB, BRISBANE,
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Thank you very much indeed. Thanks very much Bob Gibbs (QLD Party President), Wayne and Roisin, members from the State Cabinet, my Deputy Kim Beazley, members of our Federal Cabinet, Lord Mayor Jim and Mary, Mike Kaiser and Maree and friends one and all.

Well, it is always good to be back at the Greek Club, always a marvellous audience, always a marvellous Labor audience and it should be because Queensland is a Labor State. I am particularly proud to be here with Wayne. I was here with him three years ago when we did and said all those things then at the start of that election and I am delighted to see his Government back in office because you can see what a difference it makes - in Western Australia this week - what a difference a Labor government makes. I thank him for his uplifting speech and for the uplifting sentiments.

This is a Labor State. We lost it for a very long period of time until he won it back and we always remember, of course, that the Labor Party was born in Queensland and every time I come here I am reminded what a remarkable Party it is, more than 100 years old and it has seen the transformation of the country, seen all the history, made a large part of it and has gone on adapting itself and adapting Australia. One hundred years later our Party is still useful to Australia, still cutting the mustard, still making the way, still putting our stamp upon this country and we are stronger now than we have ever been and we will win the next election.

We will win the next election because Australians will not want to squander all the hard work of this last decade. They won't want to make the commitments they have made to build a new modern, efficient, outward looking country and squander it. They will always choose to go forward. Australians always choose to go forward, they will never go back. I don't think Queenslanders are any different than their fellow Australians. They have always cherished in this State our best traditions, the best traditions of Australia and, of course, many of our best traditions began here. They will

stay true to the course and if we have faith in Queenslanders, they will have faith in us and I think that we can show them that we have delivered.

At the last election our most solemn pledge and our most solemn promise was to restore the economy back to growth and to get unemployment down. Remember at the time I said we wouldn't leave the unemployed behind and we have done these things. When the quarter we are living in, this current quarter of the year, when the figures for the quarter come out it will show that we have had 17 consecutive quarters of growth. Four full years and the first quarter of our fifth year and those 17 consecutive quarters will make it the longest growth phase since World War II - 670,000 jobs since the election, we made a target of half a million, they said it will never be achieved, it's just a bit of banter, never be achieved! We got to 500,000 jobs in two thirds of the time - in two years - and we are now at 670,000 since the election. While we have done that of course, we have consolidated low inflation. Not only have we broken the back of inflation as no other government was able to do after it struck Australia, but we have got it around now running at 2.5 to 3 per cent.

Remember about two months ago all the foreboding from the Liberal party when the current account deficit came out at \$3 billion for the month. They went on about our debt, how we were ruined and then the following month it was \$2.2 billion and last month it was \$1.5 billion, last month we were at half of what it was two months earlier and now we are starting to see the current account trending down. So, if you look at where we are I don't think we have been anything like this in 12 years. In fact, the Governor of the Reserve Bank made that point in today's press - 4 per cent growth, 4 per cent employment growth, 2-3 per cent inflation, the current account deficit trending down and exports booming. While we have done all that we have got the budget back into surplus, we have dramatically expanded superannuation so that all of us will have a better standard of living in retirement. Everyone by the year 2002 - which is not far away, just seven years away - will have 15 per cent minimum being put away for everybody to improve their income in retirement while producing at the same time a massive pool of retirement savings to help the country ease its savings path, to call upon for investment, to give us a stronger economy and a stronger income for all of us into the future. And to anneal these achievements while we have been doing that, we have strengthened our identity and our culture. We have righted the wrong of terra nullius with our indigenes. We have given them back that part of the remaining land that was always theirs. We have built a relationship of quality and trust with the countries of the region which, I think, is without precedent and we threaded together while we have been doing all that the most ambitious free trade undertaking in the world - APEC - and at the same time layed down the blue print for an Australian republic.

We have done all these things in three years, in less than three years. Within one Parliament. We have made Australia a country that we can be proud of and, I think, we have made it one of the fairest countries in the world and that is what the Labor government, after all, is all about. It is about fairness. It is about equity. It is about imagination. It is about belief. It is

about faith. Faith in our fellow Australians, compassion for their lot in life and belief in Australia. But now at the brink of a new century we can't go back. We can't go back to the inequality. We can't go back to our past uncompetitiveness. We can't go back to the conflict, to our continental insularity, to the monoculture, to the denial of truth about our indigenes, to the monarchy. We can't go back to the old Australia. We can't go back to John Howard's Australia.

We can't go back to the man who describes himself as the most conservative leader the conservative parties have ever had. To the man who a week ago told us Asia was a threat. To a man that told us when he was leader that Australians need to avoid being fooled by Gorbechov and Perestroika. Who railed vociferously against the economic sanctions against South Africa and condemned our government's anti apartheid policy as mistaken and who opposed the government's south pacific nuclear free zone initiative. We can't go back to that person and to those things.

Imagine if John Howard had been managing Australia over the last twelve years. There would have been no accord, no awards, no Medicare, no safety net, no superannuation, no Daintree, no Gordon Below Franklin, no leap into Asia and no progress towards a republic. In other words, we would be a completely different kind of Australia, a right wing regressive backwater of a country that would be unrecognisable from the country that we have today.

We have seen him in the last week with industrial relations. John Howard is always talking about support for families. He says he is in favour of families. He is in favour of families but not in favour of family support. He is in favour of families but not in favour of awards. He is in favour of families but he is not in favour of overtime rates. He is in favour of families but he is not in favour of penalty rates. He is in favour of families but he is not in favour of annual leave loadings. He basically believes as the Western Australian government does, that he can cut across the rights of society, he can break the social contract, he can do things which rob Australians of their sense of democracy and their rights. He can do things to say that Australians can't withdraw their labour, that they must keep their heads down, they have to work for the offer that they have been given, that we take them back to where they were more than a century ago in the 1890s. These are the things that he believes in.

But this week was, I think, quite revealing about the Liberal party. It is haunted you know by its past. It is a bit like a haunted house. The echoes come out of the walls, the old policies - the old individual wage contracts or the old disasters like Vietnam - you see, he wouldn't see Do Muoi here five or six weeks ago. He wouldn't meet the paramount leader of Vietnam, but the US Secretary of State met him two days later. He was good enough for Warren Christopher but not good enough for John Howard.

They are haunted and it keeps bubbling out. In just one week we have had Mr Andrews the Parliamentary Secretary to Mr Costello the Shadow Treasurer talking about the need for a GST. We have had Bronwyn Bishop giving us her treatise on families and children. She said 'I think it is an

important principle that when you bring children into the world you have to remain responsible for them and that it is not the tax payers responsibility to pick up the remnants of a family when it breaks up.' She is a real charmer isn't she? She is a real sweetie, Bronwyn.

Then we had Costello, of course, today with his state income taxes. They, of course, won't show us their policies. Andrew Robb says they are 98 per cent prepared, but he won't let the public see them. Supposedly to keep them from me, but somebody on the inside on one of the consultancies who are working with them, gave the story to the BRW - Business Review Weekly - published today, saying that basically they want income taxes for the States so the States can put their rates up as they see fit. So you would have a different rate in Queensland to NSW to Victoria et cetera. In other words, they would fracture the country and break it up.

Then you have got, of course, Mr Fischer. Did you see him on Lateline the other night? That was a stunning performance wasn't it? Kerry O'Brien said to him 'well, you would have to concede that it does on the face of it give ammunition to the Government's claims that the Coalition is a policy free zone?' He said 'but we do have policies, policies of substance, policies in the pipeline, policies some aspects of which have already been announced. On the small front but important, the reintroduction of the black spots road program.' This is one of our programs. It happens to be an important one, but you would hardly say it was the rationale, as the principle policy focus of a deputy prime minister talking about the policy framework for a new government.

Of course, John Howard said it would dribble out. I made some illusion to Mr Newman from that Mad magazine years ago, but it wasn't appreciated. But, it is dribbling out and as it is, it is not doing him any good. I mean, we have seen just in the last week his GST out from Andrews, Bronwyn Bishop giving us her view on children and the support of children - I don't think the Pope is on her side. Mr Costello with state income taxes and then, of course, I had little Johnny at 8:00am Monday morning. Now, I don't listen to 'AM'. I used to be an 'AM' junkie until 1983 and I gave it up. I broke the habit. But my colleague Don Russell is coming back from the US to support us and I thought he would be on 'AM' so I turned it on And heard them say we have got a blockade in Western Australia and we will cross live in the Canberra studio to the Leader of the Opposition. So, I thought oh here he is like the cat who swallowed the cream. Sitting up there about to lay into this strike which Premier Court and he have basically conjured up, lay it on us as if it is our responsibility. Sure enough, first sentence, and he has now got this Menzian tone of voice, he says '*I think it is a disgraceful thing in a country like this when a Prime Minister will allow the blockade of a State*'. Now, I don't know whether he has been schooled in this, but this is now the way he is.

It is a long time since I phoned in, I wouldn't even know what the number was. So I got onto Greg Turnbull and said 'you had better get me that 'AM' producer because I want to get into this and I had the flu, I was as crook as Rookwood I can tell you. Anyway I staggered to the telephone, in the dark,

and I got on there but I got the drift after a while because they put me through to the sound box so I had the debate coming over. Of course, it didn't take me long to hit the themes. The main theme was if John Howard was Prime Minister this is how it would be every week that he was Prime Minister.

Well, it was only in the evening that we saw the film footage of his reaction. I don't know whether you saw it, but it was one of the classics of Australian politics. He took the earphones off and then banged them back on and banged his glasses off and then put them back on straight again and banged himself again, then said 'turn him off, turn him off' and I thought God! he has got St Vitus dance. He is doing an Inspector Clouseau impersonation here. Now, it is little wonder he is hearing voices. There is little wonder there is echoes from the haunted house because as we squeeze him, as we squeeze the tube and a bit comes out, every bit that comes out always leaves us plenty of room to get into it because they have no policy structure and they have no discipline.

And it is the same team, the same old team that was there at the last election. Sixteen of the nineteen are the same ones who put Fightback together. The new ones are simply replicates. Bronwyn Bishop being one of them.

He said this recently, he said this on radio. He was on with Jeremy Cordeux in South Australia:- 'the major issue will be what Mr Howard, industrial relations do you think or what?' And Howard says 'no', with all of the seriousness he could summon 'no, I think the major issue will be essentially whether or not it really isn't time that a new group of people were given the leadership of this country.' Not that you deserve it. Not that you have got an agenda for change. Not that you can lead the nation. Just that a new group can come in and give us the leadership of this country. You know, like the new Minister for Trade Mr Fischer, the new Deputy Prime Minister, our black spots specialist. Or the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer. Now, there's a fresh face. Or the new Minister for Industrial Relations Mr Reith, he is real new. Or that happiest one of them all that new Minister for Employment, Mr Kemp. He is always such a happy fellow. Or the New Minister for Privatisation, Senator Bishop. Or Mr New himself, the member for Bennelong. Or the new Treasurer, of course, Mr Costello.

There never was a new group quite as old as this one. Never was thinking so stale. Now, you can take recycling so far, but this is taking it to absurd lengths. You have got to say when you look at some of the other people like, and I always forget his name, that young monarchist, Abbott. Yes, the mad Abbott. You have got to say of the Liberal Party where do they find these junior monarchists to lead Australia into the 21st century? Do they look around for them or do they just spring up naturally? Where do they find these relatively young men and women with the social and political ideas of a century ago. I mean you have got to look pretty hard.

The fact is, this is what we face. This is the same group that put Fightback together. I said the other day they have had the sort of Paulian conversion on the road to Damascus. I mean, 16 of the 19 of them wanted to throw the

unemployed off unemployment benefits after nine months. They wanted to set up a GST. They wanted to make young Australians pay full fees at university. They wanted to abolish Medicare. But now, they are into 'me tooism'. They are in all the things the Government believes. You say Medicare, 'no we're for that'. You know, expansion of opportunity in schools, 'no. we're for that.' Awards, 'no we're for that.' So, well God! if that is the case why don't you let the authors of the policy. If we are the authors of the policy why don't let us do the governing? 'No' they say 'it's time for a new group to run Australia'. Time for a new group to run Australia. In other words, it is on a rotational basis. You know, they have had five turns and now it is our turn. I mean, you know how it works inside the Liberal Party. Howard used to go around saying Andrew has had two turns and I want two turns and he got two turns. He got two turns and now he thinks, he says 'now they have had five turns it is our turn. It is a new group and it is our time to run Australia.' Well, righto, ok, good luck to you Johnny but we are not going to make it easy mate.

I'll tell you what is wrong with the Liberal Party, they don't believe in the country. [Sound system breaks] Hello someone has knocked us off. There must be a Tory on the staff. Get their names! It has got to be a Lib.

We may laugh at these characters, but the thing about the Liberal Party is they have got one fundamentally bad trait and that is they don't believe in Australia, in what we have become, and they have no faith in Australians. That is their problem. I have often said and I have used this term that Manning Clark used to use. He said there are only two kinds of Australians - the enlargers and the punishers and the straighteners - the enlargers are the ones who always believed in something better, having faith in people, believing they could do something better themselves and having faith we could do greater things together - enlarging Australia, making it bigger and making it better. That class of Australians and the others were the punishers and the straighteners. Those who said be happy with your place in life, get your head down, know your place, get your nose to the grindstone. I mean, you could see it in Western Australia last week. You know, you want to have a strike? Give us seven days notice. Want to have a strike? Go and tell your employer first. If you try to get under the federal awards we will actually deregister your union. You know, take the offer, get your nose down, don't complain. This is their view, they would never have faith in the people, in the institutions we have built, in the country we have become.

It is as if Australia has passed John Howard by. His defence speech of a week ago could have been given by Harold Holt. No nonsense, no joking, it could have been given by Harold Holt. It wasn't security in Asia, as we are saying but security from Asia. Nothing has changed. The same industrial relations policies, the same general approach. No real pride in the institutions we have built. The Accord which is a model of co-operation in the country and the economy, the lowest level of industrial disputes since 1940 - 70 working days lost per 1000 compared to 690 working days lost per 1000 when Howard was in office. A model of co-operation, low inflation, high productivity.

I was out at a workplace today with Michael Lavarch and the people there were saying 'look, the first enterprise bargain, it took us a while to work out what to do with it. The second one we actually got something out of it, we have got higher pay, better hours.' One fellow said 'I'm home more often than I've ever been these days getting to know my wife again' and 'a real spirit of co-operation' he said. 'When we get to the third enterprise agreement we will really know how to do it better', so the Manager said 'yes.' That whole co-operative spirit is there. No, they want none of that. No faith in people to do the right thing. No faith in the bigger view. No co-operative model. No view that we should basically keep these egalitarian concepts of Australia that it is a good thing that we don't have an underclass here. You saw the American Labour Secretary Robert Reich, no less a person than the US Secretary of Labour saying that in the US 'we have had enormous employment growth, but unfortunately we have had falling real wages for 16 years. We have got an army of working poor.' And you can see the divisions in that society with the O.J Simpson trial. You can see the tensions there. You can see it in Washington during this week. You can see what happens when you don't have the commitment to one another. You don't have that sense of compassion. You don't have that sense of consensus. You don't have that co-operative spirit.

We have got it because we believe in people. We trust them, we've asked them to be in it with us, to make it a new economy. An efficient place, but a caring place and we have done it. But they have none of these understandings and they don't believe in people. John Alston said it another way recently in Canberra. He said 'there is only two kinds of Australians' he said 'lovers and the others' and we know what to think of the others don't we?

I said at the Labor Conference in Sydney a week or so ago, we are going to make this election a referendum on ideas. A referendum on who has the ideas for Australia. Who are the people that can lead it into the 21st century, who can lead Australia into Asia, who can find us an organic place for ourselves in the region. Who can find us peace at home with our indigenes. A society which feels together and at one - truly one nation - one that has a focus on growth and on jobs and on co-operation and on fairness and on the environment and on the big things that we believe in - our identity, the republic - and the things that have made this a great country. The things that have made us unique as a culture and unique as a society and as a people.

This is the agenda of Labor. The big agenda. The big ideas. The big ideas of the nation. The big ideas of our sovereignty being fully expressed by an Australian head of state. Of taking us into Asia and being part of it. Of threading together a great free trade agreement around the Pacific rim, with APEC. Of coming to terms with our indigenes. To say we can't ever make the leap to these old societies in Asia without settling these things at home first. I mean, these are the things that follow. It is not just mean spirited budget making or penny pinching or trying to cut the lowest paid people down, to cut people under \$22,000 or \$25,000 down. What an objective in life to try to do that.

I believe this, that the election will be a referendum on ideas. That it will be about who has had the faith in the country. Who has adapted and been able to change it. Who has been able to make it better. Who has been able to make it fairer and more decent and to be able to say as the Reserve Bank Governor said today, in all the years he had been in economic policy making, he had never seen the Australian economy quite as strong as it is now.

John Howard can slip around, he can try to hide his policies, he can try to keep it under wraps until those last couple of weeks before a poll, but in the end I don't think the Australian people will reward him. I think the sands are running against him already and one thing about the Liberal Party, there is no sentimentality in it. Once your use by date is past you are for it. He is the third choice after all in this Parliament and he knows that.

So, I can say this, I look forward to this election and so do my colleagues. We go into it with tremendous fervour, great faith in what we have been able to do and faith that we can do more with the Australian people. But we know this, we are democrats and we know that all power comes from the people and that we need their support to keep on going. It is not just elected governments, you need that constant support to put the mandates into place. We need their confidence and we need their encouragement. And we will go back to them and say three years ago you wanted us to restart the economy, we have done it. Three years ago we made a commitment to do the hardest thing, to get unemployment down and employment up, we have got employment up and we have still got it growing. We have done these things that we made our commitments to you to do and we want you to assess us but assess us fairly against the other party that has not done the hard yards, that has not done the policy thinking, that has not done the work, that hasn't come together, but after all this that they can't at this point just simply reel off some dreary policies without basically having faith in the place and believing in the place because our Party has the change. It was formed in Queensland 100 years ago, as I said in the beginning, 100 years later it is still useful. We have adapted Australia. We have adapted ourselves and we have adapted Australia and we have made a model of social democracy, which I think now, is unique in the western world. We have got an efficient economy grafted onto a compassionate social wage and, I think, Australians are going to think very hard before they put that asunder, before they put their mark against it.

I can assure you that we will be going into this election with great confidence. And we will be putting those big views, the big views about where we see Australia and where we see it going. And I know that visiting a school today, all those young people joining the rolls, they have got no doubt about which way the direction in this country, which way that direction should be. It should be for the things we value - the republic, the environment, faith in ourselves, opportunity, the right to a job - these are the things which I think they hold dear. They are not about to take a trip down the time tunnel to the Liberal Party.

Perhaps I can conclude on this point by saying how much I have appreciated the Party in Queensland, bringing us together - the Cabinet - today here in Brisbane. For the Lord Mayor for having us at the Town Hall which is a singular pleasure. But to be here in the presence of Wayne Goss and his Cabinet as the Labor family together. Because the thing about the Labor Party is it is united. We are together. There is no fracture in our views, there is no great divide in the Labor Party on social policy or foreign policy or economic policy. There are changes at the edges, there are shades of opinion, but there is no great divide. We have never been as united as this and as well as that we have got the industrial movement with us. We are a united force. I don't think, as I said earlier, the Labor Party has ever been stronger. But this is the State in which it was formed, in Queensland, and to be here with 1200 of you with such bonhomie and buoyancy, with our State Cabinet colleagues and with Wayne, it gives me a lot of pride and a lot of pleasure. We will need your strength to carry it through. But don't believe for a moment that we can't win well and win here in Queensland. We can. And if we have faith in Queenslanders they will return the faith to us. The one thing I pledge is to work for their support. To work with our State colleagues for their support. To work as a united party and when we have that mandate to work hard to put it into place and the great catalogue of things we have been able to achieve in these three years, we will be able to do again in the next three as we come down to the end of the century, as we make that leap into the 21st century and put the indelible stamp of Labor proudly across the face of Australia.

Thank you very much indeed.

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