



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
SPEECH AT THE YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS,
DARLING HARBOUR, SYDNEY, 25 JANUARY 1996**

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I think it is a wonderful thing that once a year we take time out to celebrate our young Australians and what more appropriate day than for Australia Day as we celebrate it by naming an Australian of the Year and a Young Australian of the Year. And it is always a good occasion too because I am always a sucker for a bit of entertainment.

I thought those Tap Brothers were just terrific. I remember seeing the Tap Dogs, but hairy legs and working boots are not quite the same as those knee tights and spats. And I saw in some of the routines, being an old Fred Astaire fan, some of the work of his great choreographer, Hermes Pann - and there is a name for you. Of course his mother and father were Mr and Mrs Pann and they just loved Hermes. But he was the best choreographer in the business and obviously some of it has rubbed off and, of course, the spats - you know, the white tops on the black shoes - give you all the movement.

And, of course, in the twenties, spats were all the go with the well-to-do. I mean one of my predecessors, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, always had them on. But what I worry about is if the Tap Brothers get very famous, half the Coalition will put them back on again. I mean if they look anything like becoming a fad, they will slip them on so quickly I mean half of that front bench. But I will tell you this, they might have them on but one thing they won't do is tap or dance I can tell you that. There is certainly no rhythm in it.

And, of course, John Williamson. Isn't he a star at getting that ethos and sense of Australia out there. And James Morrison - I mean the one authentic form of American music, of course, is jazz and I don't know that we have ever had a better exponent of it here than James Morrison.

So apart from the essential importance of our function today. It was good to come just to be entertained. If you know that old video

"That's Entertainment", I have rearranged all the magnetic particles on that over the years because it does you good, it warms you up.

Well, I think, that one of the things worth saying about young people is that I don't think any experience I have had - as a Minister, or as a Member of Parliament, or as Prime Minister with young Australians - hasn't been positive.

Always you get from them the hope, the expectations, the up-lifting spirits they have, the belief, the hope and the faith they have - scepticism but not cynicism, interested, keen, and it is our duty to, I think, understand what a great joy it is to have them around us, what a great strength they provide our country and to invest in them.

In the last couple of days I have been thinking about that and I did this morning in thinking about this question of, it's called, inter-generational trust, or the inter-generational inheritance. And this morning I met the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Without a doubt, I think, the most distinguished group of people in the world saying of how the world would be a better and safer place if those 50,000 nuclear warheads laying around, arsenals, were taken away. And, I tell you what, it almost brings a tear to the eye to hear the Strategic Air Commander of the United States just three years ago say there is no place for nuclear weapons today, that they have no military use, that essentially they are a dead weight on the world and they are making the world an unsafer place.

Or to hear similar views expressed by the former Prime Minister of France, or the Nobel Prize Winner - Joseph Rotblat - or any of the other distinguished people there. And if we Australians can be just that much influential in being the first government to take this issue up and start moving against the view that in the post-Cold War world we need a stock of nuclear weapons to keep it safe, then we will have done something for our children that, I think, we can be proud of.

And we won't be leaving them with the inheritance we have lived with, all of us, through our young years, the tyranny of knowing that the world could be annihilated at any moment by accident, or by design. And so that is one thing that in this last 24 hours I have been thinking about in terms of inter-generational trust.

The other is the environment and yesterday the government announced a very large package of measures to deal with some of the real environmental problems of this country - land degradation, dry land salinity, destruction of bio-diversity, developing a National Reserves System. And you might recall before Christmas where the government announced a big policy of putting 6 million hectares of Australian forests away for posterity into deferred forest areas.

And looking at the commitment we are getting now from Landcare, where we hoped in 1989 when we started it we would have 1,000 Landcare groups.

We have now got 2,500 Landcare groups and we are going on. The big commitment of that is coming from young Australians. They are the ones who are interested in the environment. They know that we don't have to spoil the place to have a good life. And yet we know that if we don't manage it well, by the time our generation is no longer - managing this country's fortunes - we will have left them a degraded place, a place that they can't be proud of.

So in just these two things, in the environment where we have got this great inheritance of this old continent of ours and where we have a chance to hold some of its pristine quality and repair the damage of 200 years since European settlement. These are things that, I think, we must think about in terms of the inter-generational inheritance, or cleaning the world up of nuclear weapons, making life safer and better.

There are things that we can do, all of us, I think - both with and for our young people - and our question of who we are and our identity; the fact that we are now an open, modern economy trading into the world; the fact that we have made the linkages with Asia. I mean I know, as you know from just a week ago, the people who manage Malaysia, and Singapore, or Indonesia. But I didn't know them when I was young and young Australians will know them and they will know their counterparts in these countries. They will have that interest and excitement and opportunity that we didn't have.

And I notice this debate in the press about now, you know, the pundits sitting back saying well you haven't jumped the TER hurdle. It is sitting up there in so many universities having not filled up their places, this is shocking. Well we want to see the places filled up. In fact the government just about doubled, in fact we have added 70 per cent of places, to universities - taking them through from 300,000 to 560,000 places. So there are more places and that is why it is taking more time, perhaps, to fill them.

But the fact of the matter is, eight young people in ten now complete a secondary education. Ten years ago, it was three in ten and now they have a secondary education we want to invest in them the confidence of knowing that we are interested in them, that we will take their education further, that we offer them the promise of an interesting and secure life in a country that is nice to live in, in an international society that is sane.

Now, I think, these are some of the things that we have to think about. And on this occasion we have these awards to acknowledge the contribution of some young Australians, so that when we honour them we honour all young Australians and to say that we love them, that we are interested in them, that we will put our arm around them and that we celebrate their victories and their successes and their joys.

That is what today is about and a nation that cares about its young people, is a nation with a soul, it is a nation that has got its values properly fixed and that is what we are doing here today.

So it is my very pleasant duty to announce the Young Australian of the Year in 1996. And I suppose what makes it, for me, a double pleasure is to dwell on the point I made earlier about entertainment and to celebrate the successes of our young people who can perform the way those Tap Brothers performed earlier, or the other artists today.

And the winner, at 20 years of age, is already one of Australia's busiest concert pianists. She has won numerous awards and is currently studying for her Masters Degree at the Manhattan School of Music and about to make her debut with the New York Symphony Orchestra. It is, of course, Rebecca Chambers and Poppy King will escort her to the stage.

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