

SPEECH BY THE HON R.J. HAWKE, A.C., M.P.
PRIME MINISTER, AT THE
LABOR DAY DINNER
MELBOURNE 12 MARCH 1983

LET ME SAY FIRST OF ALL: THIS IS NOT MY NIGHT - TONIGHT BELONGS TO YOU, THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR MOVEMENT, WHO WORKED SO HARD, SUFFERED SO MANY DISAPPOINTMENTS AND SETBACKS, AND GIVEN THE LABOR MOVEMENT YOUR LOYALTY AND DEDICATION TO BRING ABOUT THIS GREAT VICTORY.

AND FOR ME, IT IS A TREMENDOUS PRIVILEGE TO BE ABLE - WITHIN A DAY OF BEING SWORN IN AS PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA - TO SPEAK TO YOU PERSONALLY, AND TO SAY SIMPLY BUT MOST SINCERELY: "THANK YOU".

IT IS YOUR VICTORY. IT IS YOUR VINDICATION.

THE YEAR SINCE THE LAST LABOR DAY DINNER HAS SEEN THE MOST REMARKABLE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA.

AND IT HAS ALL HAPPENED FROM HERE - FROM MELBOURNE, FROM VICTORIA.

VICTORIA HAS LED THE WAY.

AND THAT TRANSFORMATION IS SYMBOLISED BY THE FACT THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, THIS DINNER IS ATTENDED BY A LABOR LORD MAYOR OF MELBOURNE, A LABOR PREMIER OF VICTORIA AND A LABOR PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA.

JOHN CAIN'S TREMENDOUS TRIUMPH LAST APRIL SET THE PACE.

IT NOT ONLY BROUGHT TO AN END 27 YEARS OF CONSERVATIVE ASCENDANCY IN THIS STATE - THE JEWEL IN THE LIBERAL CROWN.

IT WAS THE KNELL SOUNDING FOR THE FRASER GOVERNMENT.

WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA RETURNED LABOR UNDER JOHN BANNON.

THEN THREE WEEKS AGO TONIGHT, BRIAN BURKE LED LABOR TO A STUNNING VICTORY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

AND LAST SATURDAY NIGHT, IT WAS THE COUNTING IN VICTORIA WHICH RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING, POINTED TO THE REALITY - WHATEVER THE COMPUTERS AND THE PUNDITS MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAYING - THE REALITY OF A MASSIVE LABOR VICTORY THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

AND NOW THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY IS IN THE EXTRAORDINARY POSITION OF FORMING GOVERNMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA AS WELL AS THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA.

NOT SINCE THE LATE FORTIES, WHEN JOHN CAIN'S FATHER - THAT GREAT LABOR LEADER, THAT GREAT AUSTRALIAN - FORMED HIS FIRST GOVERNMENT, HAS THERE BEEN ANY PARALLEL.

BUT IN REALITY, LABOR'S POSITION IS NOW VERY DIFFERENT. WE CAN NOW SEE THAT BY THE LATE FORTIES, LABOR WAS ABOUT TO ENTER A LONG PERIOD OF DECLINE AND DIVISION.

BY CONTRAST IN 1983, THE LABOR GOVERNMENTS ARE FRESH AND VIGOROUS IN VICTORIA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA OR, AS IN NEW SOUTH WALES, ROCK SOLID, STABLE, AND SUCCESSFUL.

AND IN QUEENSLAND, THERE IS EVERY SIGN OF A GREAT LABOR RESURGENCE, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF OUR HOLDING EVERY MAINLAND STATE GOVERNMENT BY THE END OF THIS YEAR.

BUT ABOVE ALL, WE ARE I BELIEVE, UNITED AS A PARTY AND AS A MOVEMENT AS NEVER BEFORE.

AND THAT WILL BE THE BASIS FOR OUR WORK TOWARDS NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, NATIONAL RECOVERY, AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION.

THIS IS NO TIME FOR GLOATING OVER THE DISCOMFITURE OF OUR POLITICAL OPPONENTS. THAT HAS NEVER BEEN MY WAY.

BUT I DO BELIEVE WE ARE ENTITLED TO HAVE FROM OUR POLITICAL OPPONENTS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SOMETHING THAT THEIR POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE POWERFUL FORCES OF THE CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT BEHIND THEM HAVE FOR TOO LONG TRIED TO DENY US.

AND THAT IS THE LEGITIMACY OF LABOR AS A NORMAL AND NATURAL GOVERNMENT IN THIS STATE AND IN THIS NATION. IT WAS THE ATTEMPT TO DENY OUR LEGITIMACY - THE ASSUMPTION BY MEN WHO BELIEVED THEY WERE BORN TO RULE THAT THE LABOR VICTORIES OF 1972 AND 1974 WERE MERE ABERRATIONS ON THE PART OF THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA - WHICH LED TO THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 1975.

NOW, WHENEVER THEY HAVE HAD THE CHANCE AT THE BALLOT BOX, THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA HAVE DECLARED OVERWHELMINGLY, NOT ONLY THEIR SUPPORT FOR LABOR, BUT THEIR DEEP BELIEF IN THE LEGITIMACY OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT - THIS GREAT AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTION WHICH HAS A PROUD RECORD OF A CENTURY'S SERVICE TO THIS NATION IN WAR AND PEACE.

AND ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS ALONG THE PATH OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION TO WHICH WE ARE COMMITTED WOULD BE AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FROM THE NEW CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP, THAT THEY AT LAST RECOGNISE AND ACCEPT THE LEGITIMACY OF LABOR AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF MILLIONS OF OUR FELLOW AUSTRALIANS.

THERE CAN BE NO UNDERESTIMATING THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE TASK ENTRUSTED TO US BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

AND BY "US", I MEAN NOT ONLY THOSE OF US IN GOVERNMENT, I MEAN ALL OF US - THE WHOLE LABOR PARTY, THE WHOLE LABOR MOVEMENT.

THE GREAT WORK OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, NATIONAL RECOVERY AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION, WILL CALL FOR UNITED, CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT BY ALL OF US, IF WE ARE TO FULFIL THE GREAT TRUST REPOSED IN US BY THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA.

AS A GOVERNMENT, WE HAVE ALREADY SET IN TRAIN THE FIRST MOVE TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR PROGRAM. WE HAVE ALREADY HONOURED THE FIRST COMMITMENT WE MADE DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

YOU WILL RECALL THAT IN THE POLICY SPEECH FROM THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE I SAID:

"WE UNDERTAKE, IMMEDIATELY ON ASSUMING OFFICE, TO CONVENE A NATIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE, FULLY REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY, THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE AND THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR ELECTED GOVERNMENTS.

ITS PURPOSE IS TO CREATE A CLIMATE FOR COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCALE AND SCOPE OF AUSTRALIA'S PRESENT CRISIS, TO EXPLORE THE POLICY OPTIONS, AND TO ENSURE THAT THE RELEVANT PARTIES - GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESS AND THE UNIONS - CLEARLY APPRECIATE THE ROLE THAT EACH OF THEM WILL HAVE TO PLAY IN PULLING THE COUNTRY OUT OF THE PRESENT ECONOMIC CRISIS."

YESTERDAY, IMMEDIATELY UPON BEING SWORN IN, I SENT THE LETTERS OF INVITATION TO THE PREMIERS AND TO OVER SEVENTY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND FARMING COMMUNITIES OF THIS NATION. THE CONFERENCE WILL BEGIN ON THE 11TH OF APRIL AND WILL BE HELD IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

AND IN MY LETTER OF INVITATION, I SAID THIS:

"THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE PRESENTS US WITH A RARE, AND I BELIEVE, AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY TO SET A NEW COURSE FOR AUSTRALIA. I AM CONFIDENT THAT YOU WILL WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE PART IN AND CONTRIBUTE TO WHAT, I DEEPLY BELIEVE, CAN BE MADE A NEW BEGINNING. IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR ME AT THIS STAGE TO STRESS THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS NOW FACING AUSTRALIA.

THE EMPHASIS OF THE CONFERENCE WILL BE ON PRACTICAL, SPECIFIC AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO MEET THOSE PROBLEMS AND TO DEVELOP PROCESSES FOR CONTINUING CONSULTATION AND CO-OPERATION. HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THE CONFERENCE WILL ALSO HAVE AN IMPORTANT SYMBOLIC PURPOSE, AS A DEMONSTRATION, TO AUSTRALIA AND THE WORLD, OF OUR ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER TO SURMOUNT OUR PRESENT PROBLEMS AND LAY FIRM FOUNDATIONS FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE."

AND AS I SAID BEFORE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS, NOT ONLY FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE CONFERENCE, BUT FOR ALL OUR EFFORTS TOWARDS RECOVERY WHICH WILL FLOW FROM AND FOLLOW THE CONFERENCE, WILL BE THE CAPACITY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT ITSELF - POLITICAL LABOR, INDUSTRIAL LABOR - TO WORK TOGETHER, IN CO-OPERATION WITH ALL THE OTHER SECTORS OF THE COMMUNITY, UNTIL WE HAVE RESTORED PROSPERITY TO THIS NATION AND HEALTH TO ITS ECONOMY.

HERE - HOME AT LAST - I SPEAK TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT WHO HAVE GIVEN ME THE HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR EVERYTHING I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE IN MY PUBLIC LIFE. YOU HAVE NEVER LET ME DOWN.

BUT MUCH MORE IMPORTANT - THE MOST IMPORTANT THING OF ALL - I KNOW YOU WILL NOT LET THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA DOWN.

AND I END AS I BEGAN - THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE FOR OUR GREAT PARTY, OUR GREAT MOVEMENT, OUR GREAT NATION; AND THANK YOU FOR ALL THE HELP THAT I HAVE COMPLETE FAITH WILL BE FORTHCOMING IN THE FUTURE SERVICE OF OUR CAUSE AND OUR PEOPLE.
