

**Bob Hawke Memorial**

**Eulogy by**

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When Bob invited me over to see him, the better part of a year ago, he and I were again joining the circle on the great friendship and partnership that drove the longest reform period in the country's history.

Eight and a half years we were together and with a great cabinet we were able to give the country what it formerly never had - at least not since the war - policy creativity, coherence and continuity. And as it turned out, not just for eight and a half years but thirteen years.

At the core of it, Bob and I shared one primary idea - that Australia's creativity had been locked down by a stultifyingly paternal policy regime - the idea that the government knew best and that Australia was best protected and nurtured as a closed economy behind policy barbed wire - a framework that both the Labor party and the Coalition then heavily subscribed to.

Bob and I had clear ideas as to how each of us had independently reached the same conclusion and as to why Australia had operated sub-optimally for so long, and broadly what had to happen to change it.

But we also knew that to change it required wholesale policy reform on a scale the country and the Labor Party had never experienced.

We knew we were in for it. And so did our senior Cabinet colleagues who shared our view - we knew that none of the factions of the Labor Party would embrace so great a philosophical shift without a lot of persuasion and heft.

It was this quest that was central to my eight and a half year partnership with Bob - the long and weary externalisation of the country - binding up sections of society as the changes bore their fruit and inevitably, their cost.

Eight Budgets and six major economic reform Statements - the equivalent of more than fourteen normal Budgets, along with singular standout reforms, put in place along the way, was a major undertaking.

Through this great body of work, Bob and our Cabinet colleagues remained focused on the target - the nirvana of an open, creative and free society - with enhanced opportunities for all.

It was a big agenda and one moving on a broad front.

Bob was a great chair of a very creative and independent Cabinet.

Contestability was its hallmark; loyalty and commitment was its binding strength.

The quality Bob brought to the Prime Ministership was of an open mind - regard for policy creativity and a commitment to reform in areas central to Australia's economy and society and place in the world.

Areas long neglected and passed over by a succession of governments, broadly since the Second World War.

The shape and direction of the government came about with Bob setting the overall direction - balancing off the competing policy demands - giving the whole a recognisable and compelling coherence.

He presided over the Cabinet in a manner where all matters were generally contested - but where, importantly, he allowed Ministers to prioritise their issues and proselytise for them in public. He led a very 'can do' collegiate group.

In a perpetual contest of ideas, inevitably egos clash. Bob and I would have private skirmishes over this policy or that, even criticise one another to immediate staff, but by instinct and a large dollop of friendship, we always remained welded to the same objective - a point even the closest of our staff sometimes failed to comprehend.

Through ups and downs, each of us knew the other would remain faithful to the obsession.

In the end, it was trust that held Bob and me together.

He knew I would never leave a landmine in some Budget or Economic Statement to explode in his face, as I knew, when push came to shove, he would not rat on the big ones – on the big changes.

And we both loved the game of political dodgems - off with a spurt, banging our way round the course - often trying to sell the near impossible. We were sometimes wary of particular dodgems, but always exhilarated by the wild ride that generally followed.

The thing about truly big confidence plays is that there is no substitute for the psychological reward - the bounty of major policy achievement.

We truly relished those achievements, often celebrating them with family dinners at the Lodge.

Much of the very late focus on my relationship with Bob was, of course, on the termination of co-operation between us and his displacement by me as Leader.

But any cursory observation of these events generally fails to comprehend the very high level of friendship and cooperation between us for those eight and a half years - a long time in so hot a policy hothouse. And, in policy terms, it lasted right to the end.

In the event, between us, Bob and I won five elections successively - not far short of four American presidential terms in a row.

Underlying the fact that Bob asked me to speak at this Memorial was his recognition that our control over the 1993-1996 parliament broadened Labor's policy frontier, well annealing the policy achievements he believed the country sorely needed and which book-ended the policy framework begun during his own period of office.

And I think I can say, the template which we and our remarkable Cabinet colleagues set into place in those thirteen years, has provided the foundations for Australia's burgeoning growth and wealth - in a fundamental sense - really ever since.

People seek leadership in political life for all manner of reasons. We will never know what particular mix of influences propelled Bob Hawke or whether, what Immanuel Kant called 'the inner command' – the commitment to more exalted objectives drove him. Certainly that higher calling rang loudly in his head.

None of us can be on the stage for long. What matters is the value of the legacy – its quality and endurance. On both counts, Bob Hawke well earned five star rank and 24 carat stars at that.