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**Title:**

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ADDRESS TO THE MURDOCH UNIVERSITY BRANCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on the eve of Anzac Day.

Recently, I made a speech about turning the ALP into a million member Party.

I know that tonight you want to discuss the proposals I advanced to achieve this target.

While looking forward to talking to you on that subject later, I now want to develop my general theme of reforming the Australian Labor Party.

First a short synopsis.

My concern for a million member Party is rooted in disquiet over the incidence of ALP voters who go on to join the Party. Our ratio of members to voters is the lowest of any comparable Party in the world. It means our organisational base is too narrow to support the sophisticated election winning machine we need in the late 20th Century and beyond.

This weakness has forced Party officials to canvass the corporate sector for financial contributions, which in turn has bred a dependence that potentially could be dangerous for us. Some will argue is dangerous for us.

Assuming that the structural changes the Party needs to make to attract and to hold such a mass membership are successful, the next obvious issue becomes the question of how the ideas that propel us as a political force can be made accessible to and part of this broad membership's deeper understanding of Labor philosophy.

I propose to argue for a kind of ALP university to be established. A philosophy factory which would work within the branches and electorate councils and play a key educative role.

On its own such a development will not be enough.

In the wider community, Labor based think tanks need to be established which will act to counter the right wing dominance of public debate and be a quality control catspaw on future directions for Government.

These ideas I will go into in greater detail elsewhere.

The part of my general theme I want to go to now, concerns our international role as a Party.

On Anzac eve this subject has a particular pertinence as the idea I wish to develop deals with the question of a distinctly ALP initiative which will help celebrate the UN International Year of Peace.

Australians who sacrificed their lives in the 1st and 2nd World Wars will have died in vain if we do not seize every opportunity to help establish a durable peace.

The Australian Labor Party is one of the oldest and most respected political parties in the world.

It can rightly claim as its heritage reforms introduced into this country in the middle of last century: reforms which, when they appeared, led the world.

For example, for a long time the secret ballot was known to other countries as the Australian ballot. Universal Adult Suffrage was first encoded as a legal right on this continent.

Some early welfare changes made their debut in this country, and early trade union rights, which led to the first basic wage, were won by bitter struggle here before being adopted as standards of industrial decency elsewhere.

The dark ages of conservative rule, particularly since the war, have taken Australia down the scale of innovative and reforming countries just as it dragged relative living standards down that particular index.

The relentlessness of the conservative years had a profound impact on our Party structure too.

From being in many respects a model for other democratic socialist parties, it turned inwards to defend itself, to survive, and to keep alive the aspiration of political office. With its energies consumed by matters at home its impact on the world stage diminished.

In many respects the Australian Labor Party participation has been frozen in time on the International scene. Our early potential has not flourished. Our international presence is of a standard akin to the days when delegates would pack their seasickness pills for the long voyage to England.

Together with New Zealand we still have no formal International Department at our national headquarters.

This is unique among parties of our standing.

Our servicing and participation in the Socialist International, the world organization of Labor style parties, is part-time. Often it relies on Party personnel or politicians who happen to be overseas and who "can fill in".

As arenas for inter-party diplomacy, world conferences of democratic socialist parties are without a continuous, coherent, researched and lobbied, Australian presence.

To say this is not in any way to diminish the very fine contribution that some individuals have made in promoting Australia's presence among our peer parties abroad. It is, however, to identify that they and the ALP have lacked the structure, organisation and funding that would place our participation on the same level as our history and standing.

Now as a country with a Federal Labor Government and Labor governments in four of the six States we can learn a lot from and contribute something to our overseas colleagues.

In the current debate about our future structure, our international role; its failings and its potential should be canvassed.

The previous pre-eminence we enjoyed can be re-captured.

I therefore, want to propose a distinctive and innovative initiative for the ALP which will give us this pre-eminence and provide us with a unique means of celebrating the International Year of Peace.

It, hopefully, will lift our international profile and make a lasting contribution to world peace and nuclear disarmament.

As an International Year of Peace project, I believe the National Conference should establish a Party Peace Bureau as a forerunner to a fully fledged International Office.

This properly staffed unit should be set quite explicit goals by the Conference and then win support for those goals from other parties, who, like us, are members of the Socialist International, and, later, any other national parties, which can be persuaded to support the initiative.

It would report to our 1988 National Conference. An evaluation of its performance can then be made and if appropriate, it can be turned into an ongoing International Office with a more general and typical foreign relations focus.

As I have said, it should be delegated explicit goals. Chief among those should be a charter to achieve an international accord among major political parties on disarmament.

As things stand, the Federal Government through the agency of the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister have at a political level been working on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and latterly the achievement of a South West Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. These initiatives have been followed up at a diplomatic level by Richard Butler our Ambassador for Disarmament.

These are Government to Government approaches. Needs be, they are constrained by a web of strategic, alliance and other pressures.

Much real progress has been made - much more than I believe is understood or appreciated in the wider Australian community.

As just one example, take our role at the last Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference.

Representatives of SCANA who attended the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty review conference with NGO status, proudly asserted on return to Australia that we, as a country, had played a pivotal role in holding this the key anti-nuclear weapons pact together.

Other reports confirm their views. Yet our role remains one that is seemingly known only to the aficionados.

Because public debate is enamoured with super power struggles the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference came and went without much attention. It, however, was almost the olympic games of the disarmament debate as far as the non super powers are concerned.

Most of these countries can only have a marginal influence on the fundamental, strategic and balance of power, issues pre-occupying the superpowers.

All can have, and do exercise, a real role in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.



Australia as a middle power has considerable clout in this setting - and last year exercised it to great and good effect.

My point in this digression is threefold: although not well understood we have and are making important progress; the issue is complex and much wider than the public's pre-occupation with the superpowers; as a Party we have operated and continue to operate at a Government to Government level only.

That summary invites the questions: can we complement our Government to Government role with a Party to Party focus; and the further point, if we can, will it achieve anything useful?

I believe the answer to both is, yes.

Let us continue the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty example. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is as I have said, the key international treaty on nuclear weapons. It focuses on both vertical and horizontal proliferation and proposes a mechanism to contain and diminish both. It has spawned international agencies to police it.

Its key failings are that not all countries are signatories to it (indeed, some of the worst offenders are not), it doesn't stop the supply of nuclear technology between signatory and non-signatory countries, and it could improve its surveillance regimes.

We, as a Government are pursuing political and diplomatic initiatives to address these three problems.

Two of the countries we are encouraging to sign the Treaty and accept international safeguards, and surviellence, and renounce any efforts to develop their own bomb are Spain and Argentina.

Co-incidentally, both these countries have Democratic Socialist/Social Democratic governments. They are the counterparts of the Australian Labor Party in their own countries.

The Spanish Socialist Party, in fact, is a member in good standing of the Socialist International. Prime Minister Gonzales is a Vice President. Argentine's governing Social Democrat Coalition is considering joining the Socialist International.

To ALP members it appears incomprehensible that like parties such as these would not support membership of such a basic Treaty as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

However, the recent spectacle of the French Government - a Socialist Government - conducting Nuclear testing at Mururoa and committing an act of State terrorism on the Rainbow Warrior may give pause for thought. The French Socialist Party, need it be said, is a member of the Socialist International.

What for some reason gets lost in the disarmament debate in Australia is the job the Australian Labor Party has to do within its own peer group abroad.

Our focus is exclusively on what the Government should do. We have not paid much attention to what we can do and how our actions can fit a mosaic of Government and Party initiatives disciplined to a common goal.

I cannot excuse the French on any count. The Spanish and the Argentinians have historic and special reasons for their stances. Reasons which are negotiable, particularly if we take initiatives backing and complementing what our Government is doing.

If the Australian Labor Party mounted a diplomatic offensive to round up as many national political parties as possible in a common disarmament accord, it would get considerable and instant support world wide. On the basis of this momentum it would be in a position to pin point non-supporters and backed by gathering opinion open a dialogue which would inexorably lead to their signing.

I believe a substantial and meaningful accord could be reached on a world party level which would have tremendous impact on governments. I think it would be much easier to achieve than inter-government treaties, and ultimately, its content would be much tougher than formal diplomatic language allows. Whatever else it would do, it would be a powerful symbol to a world grown weary with frustration by showing

that results can be achieved

It would require negotiation skills, detailed planning and careful development.

As a policy Accord between parties it would have a trickle up effect upon governments.

As an exercise for Australian Labor Party national conferences, it would give a major role to the Party and bring the Disarmament debate onto Branch agendas, not in a "wishing" way, but in a practical nuts and bolts manner. As a Party, we would have to confront the problems governments do in international relations and shoulder the responsibilities that comes with such an approach.

The test for us would be, if we cannot convince our peer group parties, how can we expect to convince the rest.

The prize is, if we can convince them we make it easier at Government to Government level to legislate real change.

For the Australian Labor Party it brings us out of isolation and onto the world stage with an issue that all can respond to. In domestic political terms it stakes out the disarmament debate as an Australian Labor Party issue and puts us in the forefront of this constituencies aspirations in a way that reliance solely on Government performance cannot do.

12.

In this address, I do not wish to canvass the technicalities of how such a peace unit would fit into our national office, what it would cost, who should staff it and what should be the content of the Accord we seek.

I have views on all these matters and will soon disseminate a discussion paper on them.

For the moment, getting the concept understood, is important.

One last illustration can be given. Recently, Don Grimes criticised Palm Sunday marchers in Canberra.

The nub of his remarks was that some in the procession were carrying banners commemorating the contribution made to world peace by the recently assassinated Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr. Olaf Palme.

Grimes observed that he had just returned from Stockholme where he had represented the Australian Government at the Palme Memorial Service.

Palme had been a personal friend of Grimes from the time they first met at the Socialist International.

Deeply moved by the Memorial Service, Grimes was bitter that some of the people in the Palm Sunday parade, who were mourning Palme, would have banned the Swedish Prime

Minister from marching if they knew that while he was a celebrated peace activist, he was also a strong supporter of civil nuclear power. That last credential would have blackballed him. Grimes went on to make some ascerbic remarks about how blinkered some activists are.

I think Don Grimes is right to draw that powerful, if somewhat sad analogy.

However, I don't think one should stop there. Whether views espoused in the Peace movement are 'right' or 'wrong', (whatever those terms mean) views are held which reflect our isolation, the inward looking nature of the debate here, and the fact that many of our views are fashioned from the English speaking world, often from attractive figures in the U.S.

Locked into English we tend not to hear what voices in other languages are saying.

Grimes was speaking from a European viewpoint.

He was talking as someone who has taken the trouble to put Australian policy internationally, and in all languages. And as someone who has had to counter the objections it provoked.

This is an experience that most Australians, hidden away in this remote corner of the globe, have not encountered.

Until they do, there will be little idea of what a Labor Government has to contend with in pursuing some of our goals internationally.

Until they do, expectations will be well ahead of performance, no matter how good the performance is.

Until they do, political charlatans, or one issue activists, will always undermine the Australian Labor Party.

And, until they do, new and young voters will be attracted to simple slogans because they could not be expected to understand any of the complexity.

This disenchantment affects Party/Government relations now.

But, saddest of all, a great opportunity to do something important and real could slip away.