

**State Memorial Service for  
The Honourable Robert James Lee Hawke AC,  
9th December 1929 – 16th May 2019**

**Eulogy from the Honourable Kim Beazley AC  
Governor of Western Australia**

**Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

Can I pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and those respects to their elders past, present and emerging and thank Linda [Burney] for her welcome to country.

Distinguished guests, all.

I loved Bob. He was my mentor, he was my friend. He allowed me to be a member of a government that transformed this nation for the better. I would love to speak about the personal aspects of the man for whom I had, and have, such affection. A man who in the extremity of his last illness would cross the country to my installation as Governor. To sit outside in the cold to smoke his last cigar in WA. But what I need to do is talk about how he governed – because that, with what he did, is what cements him in history.

Was he our greatest PM or our greatest Labor PM? Bob told me he was neither. His aspiration was to be our greatest peacetime PM. He deferred always to John Curtin. Bob believed Curtin faced a national existential crisis and responded correctly, with a national strategy of alliance building, whole-hearted national mobilisation, and planning for post-war reconstruction. He saw himself pursuing that necessary complexity in peacetime conditions that also presented existential national challenges.

Bob exemplified Bagehot's view of great Prime Ministers as "men of commonplace opinions and uncommon administrative abilities."

Well, perhaps, with opinions not quite so common but he was certainly trusted by the public whose values and characteristics he shared and he loved.

But as an administrator, he was unsurpassed. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of how this nation worked, how the system could be creatively deployed to achieve the necessary reforms.

So, first, he governed with his ministers.

He had a superb office, an engine of reform. But they were not there to dominate his ministers and sideline them so as not to dull the glow of the Sun King. He told each of us ministers, "You know the policy, you know your resources, you proceed. I will interfere when you invite me. My reputation will rise or fall on the quality of my ministers' performance".

Second, and above all, he governed with the cabinet.

As I sat weeping on my porch as I absorbed the news of his passing, the oddest memory came to mind. It was back at the time of the Navy's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. I nagged Bob into taking the cabinet to sea for a meeting. The biggest ship, HMAS Stalwart, had enough space but no cabinet table. One was duly put aboard. We all came aboard. The Stalwart passed through the Sydney Heads, and began to roll. The table started to move. It pinned the Prime Minister to the bulk head, then it retreated, then it came back harder as momentum gathered.

"F.. this!" he said, repeatedly, as he fought the beast and continued the meeting. Afterwards, pretty cross, he said to me, "You know cabinet is the heart of our government. We cannot have the cabinet table running away and killing a couple of us on the way through!"

Peter Walsh, no great supporter of Bob's said to me: "You know only two ministers read every cabinet submission. Myself and Bob". On Sunday afternoon his senior public servants would come around to his home for a game of tennis. Then they would settle down for detailed consideration of every submission.

Third, there was the Party and the labour movement – the focal point of support for a Labor Government but also, potentially, a base for effective opposition.

Bob accepted their legitimacy as major participants in the Australian democratic project – as had Curtin, of course, in seeking to overturn Labor's opposition to conscription during the war. Curtin did not move till he had secured a federal conference decision. Bob didn't circumvent the machinery. He used it. He was particularly emphatic to me on that when we focussed on microeconomic reform. He had given me the key Transport and Communications portfolio at the beginning of his last term. He said this, "Your first job is to get this through the caucus and the union movement, then to a successful outcome at the federal conference".

Finally he governed with the peak organisations – the unions of course, but also the employer groups – Indigenous, environmental and rural groups - multicultural, arts, sporting, social, religious groups. For him they were the transmission belts of change to the community, feedback and adjustment. Not all or even most of them Labor supporters. But all part of the Australian community – so he loved them and many, despite themselves, requited it.

In all this, Bob Hawke never forgot who he was fighting for. He once said "The essence of power is the knowledge that what you do is going to have an effect not just immediate but perhaps lifelong effect on the happiness and wellbeing of millions of people and so I think the essence of power is to be conscious of what it can mean for others."

Bob was massively persuasive. From his experience as ACTU advocate and President, he was deeply effective publically. But at the heart of his ability to persuade was trust. Most people believed, as that quote indicated, that whether you agreed or not your happiness was his motive. He could afford risk taking in leadership. He was confident in the effectiveness of argument to succeed.

Yet there were some who were hurt. Some who mattered most to him. We owe a deep debt to Hazel and their children, Sue, Ros and Stephen, and to Blanche. We owe Blanche for the joy she provided him and the care in his decline. On behalf of us to the family, thank you.

Where is he now? Bob set great store by his pastor father Clem's saying "If you believe in the fatherhood of God you must believe in the brotherhood of man". We talked of his destination in our

last conversation. He still firmly held the second part of Clem's saying – but no longer the first. But for me, I am sustained by the belief he is in the arms of a loving God. He believed he would live in the hearts, or at least the minds, of those who knew him. Then, when we all pass, in the history books and stories of future generations. There he will reside while ever his nation abides.