

Speech by *The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP*

We build the house they tear it down

Launch of “For the True Believers”

Saturday, 16 March

Riverbend Books, Brisbane

Thank you very much Suzie and it's good to be back here at Riverbend. The centre of reading, reflection and Sunday morning conversation for a long, long time now and it's a good place to be to think about a book like this. Also to Troy Bramston and his family, welcome to the People's Republic of Queensland. You are all welcome guests here just make sure your visas are intact. To all of our other friends who are here with us this morning it's good to have you here.

When I first opened this book by the way I thought it must have been one that had been scribbled in because if you go to the front page, it's full of my appalling handwriting that is inside the dust jacket. I recall a conversation with Troy when he was beginning this book about whether there were notes left over from when I wrote the apology speech. When I wrote the apology speech, it was in the study in the lodge. In fact where Curtin sat during the war and I put pen to paper the weekend before the apology speech. If you look at the original manuscript, it is full of crossings out, it is full of I think I can phrase that better, it is full of the product of a Queensland primary school education system and why I failed so badly in handwriting but Troy thank you for the work that you have done.

There's a tendency among the political class of our generation to believe that the challenges of our time are somehow unique, in their complexity, in their difficulty, times even in their impossibility. The value of this volume is that it is a pungent reminder that this is not the case. Just as it has never been the case for all the generations that have preceded us as they reflected on the challenges of their time. We have all in the Labor tradition had to identify to contend with and then prevail over the forces that would undermine the national security, the economic strength and the social fabric of this country we call Australia.

This has been an important national conversation for us all over many, many times. In doing so as our leaders have reflected on these challenges in times past, we have all in the Labor tradition been navigating the challenges of our time in animated, guided and when necessary modest by our continuing tradition of Labor values. These have stood as our moral compass for 125 years. Charting our course in one of the most turbulent centuries in human history. These pages remind us afresh what these continuing values are. They are values of freedom, values of fairness (what we uniquely call in this country a fair go for all), values of prosperity, values of openness, values of inclusion, values of compassion, values of internationalism, a deep value also in matters, always in our lot, in Australian history to imagine our possible futures, a constructive vision for the future of our nation and then prepare the nation for that future rather than simply believe that it will all somehow spontaneously combust from the ether. Nations rarely are built that way.

The great nations in human history are those that are built on the energies and the creativities of their peoples, with a properly elected government carting the way forward beyond the horizon, without stifling the most fundamental freedoms of their peoples. This is what we might call the great Australian social contract between the Australian people and the governments they from time to time choose to elect. Here in lies the apparent contradiction between our two political traditions which are alive throughout the pages of this book. Not just a casual reflection on recent decades but right across the spread of our recorded history. We seek to build the nation, they seek to tear it down. We seek to

unite the people. They seek often to divide the people. We seek to envisage a positive plan for our future. They seek to pour scorn on the very possibility of any such vision or any such plans. We seek to define our independent place in the world. They seek to ridicule our independent voice in the world. In fact the history of Australian politics is one of us building the house up while they seek to tear the house down. Sometimes by stealth. Sometimes brick by brick. Sometimes with a very giant wrecking ball.

One hundred years ago we built the Australian navy. This is recorded well in this volume. We built an Australian navy. They wanted to be part of the British fleet. Half a century ago we built the snowy mountains scheme. They opposed it. A third of a century ago we built Australia's first universal health insurance scheme called Medibank. They then set about destroying it. A quarter of a century ago we internationalised the Australian economy. They had simply folded their arms. Within the last decade alone we stood up to the Global Financial Crisis, learnt from the Great Depression and borrowed to save the economy from mass unemployment. They said we should sit on our hands and like Europe allow the business cycle to solve it all. We have modernised every school in the country, built digital libraries for thousands of primary schools, provided a million plus computers for our secondary schools. They opposed every dollar spent on that. We are building a National Broadband Network as Australia's information super highway of the 21st century. They have said they will rip it up from the ground. We argued that Australia should have a seat at the top table of the world in the G20. They ridiculed our being in the G20. We argued that we should have a seat at the United Nations Security Council. They actively campaigned against their own country being on the United Nations Security Council. We argued for reconciliation by saying sorry. They argued against saying sorry.

So we build the house, they try and tear it down. This is the endearing narrative of Australian political history as recorded under Prime Minister Fisher, as recorded under Prime Minister Scullin, Prime Minister Curtin, Prime Minister Chifley, as also recorded under Prime Minister Whitlam, Prime Minister Hawke, Prime Minister Keating and all our leaders past and present. That is why I commend this volume to you. Thank you Troy for the labour of love involved in writing it. Our challenges today are great, our values are consistent which is why I believe we can still prevail. I thank you