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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of affection and nostalgia for the rhetoric and acerbic wit of former Prime Minister Paul Keating. Musical theatre tributes, editorial pieces in prominent national publications, and a plethora of YouTube video montages and Facebook groups have celebrated the supposedly unique rhetoric of Keating. But just how unique was it? As a response to this resurgence of nostalgia, this paper examines the rhetoric of Prime Minister Keating in three key areas: the use of Australian history to promote progressive political agendas, the Keating economic rhetoric, and the invocation of the Australian Labor Party's 'Light on the Hill' ideology. Through analysis of these three areas, it becomes clear that the Keating rhetoric was not, as existing literature argues, a wholly unique entity. Rather, much of the Keating rhetoric was in fact a re-imagining and re-contextualisation of the rhetoric of another looming figure in Labor Party history: Prime Minister Ben Chifley. In arguing against the dominant narrative of difference, this paper thus establishes a new interpretation of Australian political rhetoric, and asserts the need for more cross-generational approaches to Australian rhetoric analysis.

Introduction

In the November 2011 edition of The Monthly, George Megalogenis summed up the current political climate in three words - "We miss Keating" (Megalogenis, 2011: 21). There has been a recent resurgence of constructions of history for former Prime Minister Paul Keating, and much of this reminiscence has centred on the rhetoric of the Labor leader. Implicit in this collective nostalgic indulgence is, inevitably, the assumption that the rhetoric of Keating was unique; at least, that it was sufficiently distinctive to warrant such constructions of history. The role of Keating in shaping our understanding of Australian political rhetoric is not the subject for debate here. Rather, it will be argued that the rhetoric of Keating, far from being a wholly unique entity, was in fact a reimagining of classic modern Labor rhetorical ideals.

The Keating administration entered the 1996 election with a decentralised political agenda and a fractured support base. Traditional allegiances to the Labor Party had been thoroughly disregarded in the wake of the economic upheaval of the early 1990s (Leigh, 2005: 537-552; Singleton, Martyn, and Ward, 1998: 117-130). No longer was the Labor Party the embodiment of progressive, social justice politics. Instead, the rise of fringe group activism fragmented the political allegiances of those on the left-wing of the political spectrum (Bean and Kelley, 1995: 339-356; Bührs and Christoff, 2006: 225-240; Goot, 2004: 652-654;
The burgeoning influence of the Australian Greens Party is indicative of this trend of fragmentation on the left, as is the rise of Independent and minor-party candidates (Bean and Kelley, 1995: 339-356; Lavelle, 2004: 646-647). As leader of the Labor Party, it was Keating’s responsibility to reunite the political left under the Labor banner. This article argues that he did so by updating the rhetoric of former Labor Prime Minister, Ben Chifley.

The core concept of this article is rhetoric revival: the revitalisation and recontextualisation of the speeches and rhetorical themes of an earlier epoch. By using the concept of rhetoric revival to assert the validity of cross-generational comparison between Keating and Chifley, a new interpretation of Labor Party speechmaking will be asserted. There are three key areas of evidence for this new interpretation: the use of Australian history to promote the validity of progressive politics, the articulation of a broader Australian identity through economic rhetoric, and the ideology of the “Light on the Hill.” Through an examination of these three key areas, it will become clear that there is more scope for cross-generational comparison than existing literature currently allows.

The problem with existing literature

Despite a robust field of intellectual inquiry and an ever-expanding archive of source material, histories of the Australian Labor Party are almost uniformly dismissive of cross-generational comparisons. Underpinning much of the existing literature is a quasi-Whiggish narrative of inevitable progress; a timeline of change and growth, serving as an implicit argument against the concept of rhetoric revival. Some such studies emphasise decline rather than progress; for example, Graham Maddox’s *The Hawke Government and Labor Tradition* (1988) and Rodney Cavalier’s *Power Crisis: The Self-Destruction of a State Labor Party* (2010). Others, however, do chart a history of progress and positive-g geared growth. Stuart Macintyre and John Faulkner’s edited collection *True Believers* (2001), for example, uses evidence of changes in the Labor Caucus to assert broader, immutable changes in Labor leadership, while Ross McMullin’s *Light on the Hill* (2001) contends that the post-Whitlam Labor Party was a vastly different entity than pre-Whitlam incarnations. Similarly, Patrick Weller’s *Menzies to Keating* (1992) charts a natural and inevitable process of change and growth, instigated by changes in Labor leadership. Naturally, these histories assert a thread of dogmatic continuity – what is interesting, however, is that this ideological thread is depicted as an amorphous entity, subject to the whims of the individual leader and epoch. Dean Jaensch’s *The Hawke-Keating Hijack* (1989) is indicative of this, citing the individual leadership styles of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating as vital in the new Labor narrative of the 1980s. In histories of the Labor Party, personality is pivotal to the politics. This dominant narrative is most apparent in assessments of the Keating Labor years. As Paul Kelly noted, “[t]he Hawke-Keating Government had the courage to begin charting the new directions... if successful, they would make the old Labor Party obsolete” (Kelly, 1994: 15). This concept of reinvention and change lies at the core of Keating Labor histories. Though some Labor histories do examine cross-generational comparisons (Carol Johnson’s *The Labor Legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke* (1989) is of particular note here), these comparisons are
most commonly focused on continuities in Labor Party dogma. Existing literature on the
Labor Party’s rhetoric, however, allows little scope for speech or language-based cross-
generational comparisons. Perhaps the only exception is James Curran’s *The Power of
Speech* (2006), which examines the political rhetoric of a succession of Prime Ministers, with
a particular focus on national and party identities. However, even in this text, cross-
generational comparisons are implied through the text’s structure rather than examined
explicitly, and so a more unambiguous study of this nature is required.

As orators, Chifley and Keating perhaps represent either end of the Australian political
spectrum. Stylistically, the linguistic grandeur of Keating’s rhetoric (Younane, 2007) bore
little resemblance to the brusque nature of Chifley’s public speaking manner (Crisp, 1961:
216; McLeod, 1969: 166-168). While the former was a naturally gifted orator, the latter’s
attempts at public speaking frustrated the media. “What are we to do with our new Prime
Minister?” lamented the *Argus* on the 21st July, 1945, “He simply won’t be dramatic.
Perfectly good limelight is wasted on him.” A second dichotomy was found in the language
of the speeches – where Chifley’s rhetoric was unemotional and to-the-point, the rhetoric of
Keating was more in keeping with the loftier form of the ‘grand speech.’ (Younane, 2007;
Watson, 2003). Existing literature often addresses this point of difference between the two
Labor leaders through deliberate omission: while Australian speech anthologies are replete
with any number of speeches by Keating, very rarely is there any inclusion of Chifley’s
rhetoric that isn’t ‘Light on the Hill’ (Warhaft, 2004; Robertson, 2009; Fullilove, 2005). By
judging Keating as more worthy of inclusion than Chifley, we are thus led to assume that
comparing the rhetoric of the two would be an exercise in futility.

Given the contextual considerations of Chifley and Keating, it is unsurprising that published
histories of the two men focus on their differences, in both rhetorical style and party
leadership. The Communist threat that dominated Chifley’s epoch was a distant memory in
the post-Soviet Union 1990s, while the environmentalism and fringe group concerns of
Keating’s Australia were certainly not forefront in the minds of post-World War Two voters.
However, by focusing on specific historical contexts, existing literature of the Labor Party
does not allow space for broader thematic similarities to emerge. Similarly, a focus on the
flair (or lack thereof) with which a speech was delivered dissuades more comprehensive
analysis of the rhetorical content. A new means of interpretation will explore these gaps, by
drawing out the broader themes and by applying closer comparative analysis of specific
speech content. By doing so, it will become clear that the rhetoric of Chifley and the rhetoric
of Keating are not as different as they appear on the surface.

**Constructions of history and progressive politics**

The use of history in the political rhetoric of Prime Ministers is a curious entity. Certainly,
the invocation of history is a powerful electoral tool, and one that sits far more comfortably
with those of a conservative political persuasion than with those of a more progressive
demeanour. Given that both Chifley and Keating almost certainly sit wholly within the latter
of these categories, it seems unlikely that either of these men would be able to employ
constructions of history to their political benefit. Remarkably, they did, and with some success. Both Keating and Chifley invoked powerful imagery from Australia’s past, and in doing so redefined the dialogue of progressive politics. For Chifley, this historical imagery primarily focused on the role of the working class man in Australian labour history. By the 1990s, however, this portrayal of Australian workers had gone rather out of vogue (Moore, 1998), and so it is unsurprising that Keating chose to focus on a different area of historical imagery. Keating’s emphasis was on the Anzac spirit, and the birth of the nation’s identity through its involvement in war. Chifley and Keating used the invocation of the past to underscore a new interpretation of Australian history, one that highlighted the ways in which the history of Australia so often deviated from the traditional or the conservative.

The historical imagery of Chifley’s rhetoric was drawn from the role of the working class in building the nation. The policy address of the 12th June 1948 articulated this concept. Entitled ‘Things Worth Fighting For’, Chifley’s speech reminded the labour movement of its intrinsic role in Australian society, referencing the economic upheaval of the 1930s:

I have sad memories of happenings in the 1930s and onwards when, although there was ample production to meet the needs of the people, people were not in a position to buy these things, nor through lack of necessity but through economic stress. And although factories were crammed with goods, employees were being put off... The Labour movement can only be as great... as the united efforts of all those who believe in it, of individuals who are not in it to get out of it something personal... We have seen what happened in the 1930s... [we] go forward as a great army fighting for a great ideal... We can play our part and it can be a great example for everybody else (Chifley, 1948).

In this piece of rhetoric, Chifley constructed and articulated an interpretation of an epoch of Australian history, and related it to the ideals of his contemporary political campaign. The working class was, in the view of Chifley, the beacon of hope throughout Australia’s history. The working class worked in spite of devastating economic realities, and they were the people on whom the Labor Party depended. This imagery of the working class in ‘Things Worth Fighting For’ was used by Chifley to assert his progressive policies, particularly those policies which brought forth “the human ideal” (Chifley, 1948). Wide-sweeping industrial and economic reforms were the hallmark of the Chifley Prime Ministership, and such reforms defined the progressive agenda (and subsequently, the conservative backlash) during the 1940s (Castles, 1999). By articulating the working class as a group of altruistic patriots, Chifley hoped to appeal to their sense of national duty and trust in the Labor Party. During industrial disputes in 1946, for example, he praised West Australian coal workers for “responding to every appeal made to them in the interests of the country as a whole” (“Chifley calls miners ‘irresponsible,’” 1946:3). Similarly, Chifley urged workers to support the Labor Party’s policies for “the greater good of your country” (“Mr Chifley addresses miners”, 1946:5). Chifley tied his progressive politics to the historical imagery of the
idealised working class, and by doing so encouraged the electorate to question the conservatism offered by the Opposition Liberals.

It was not the image of the Australian working class through which Keating expressed his constructions of history. Rather, it was through the Anzac legend, and the birth of the nation through war. A theme throughout his speeches, the preoccupation with Anzac imagery came to define much of Keating’s public rhetoric. For Keating, war and the Anzac legend defined Australia, as he most clearly articulated in his Anzac Day address in Port Moresby on the 25th April 1992:

The spirit of Anzac became the canon of Australian life: the ideals to which we aspired, the values by which we lived... War has shaped Australia’s history in the twentieth century. Shaped and twisted it... Legends bind nations together. They define us to ourselves... (Keating, 1992a).

Similarly, in the ‘One of Us’ speech delivered at the funeral service for the Unknown Soldier on Remembrance Day 1993, Keating reiterated his vision of the Anzac legend as the heart of Australian identity:

It is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumphs against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is a legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity. It is a democratic tradition, the tradition in which Australians have gone to war ever since... we have gained... a deeper understanding of what it means to be Australian (Keating, 1993a).

Keating’s interpretation of the Anzac legend was not restricted to the events at Gallipoli, but rather served as a broader metaphor of Australia’s engagement with global conflict throughout the twentieth century. It was also proof of Australia’s independent tradition; it was this proof that Keating used to validate his claims of a new geo-political reality for Australia and the notion of an Australian Republic. Keating used the constructions of history of wartime ideologies to underscore his progressive vision for an Asian-focused Australia:

I think we have cause to celebrate that in the Pacific we have a meeting of minds; we have a kinship that was forged in the conflict of 1942-45. So now when we talk about APEC... we do it on the foundations of the sacrifices made here fifty years ago... we have a chance to do things together we haven’t had in the past. Just as Chifley had done with the working class, so too did Keating use the Anzac legend to assert the relevance of an Australian progressive political culture (Keating, 1995a).

Both Chifley and Keating evoked history in their rhetoric, and both men did so through powerful historical imagery. Most importantly, both leaders used this rhetoric to argue
against the inherent conservatism of Australian society, and to soften the perceived radicalism of their progressive politics. Constructions of history, then, changed the story of Australian identity – no longer was it exclusively a tool for those on the conservative side of the political spectrum, but it could also be used to argue for an inherent progressive and independent spirit within the Australian psyche. The differences in subject matter do not render the two leaders inherently incompatible; rather, the differences in subject matter convincingly demonstrate the way Keating was able to revitalise the rhetoric of Chifley, and recontextualise the broader theme to appeal to voters long after the Chifley era had subsided.

Communicating economic policy

There is no question that the economic policies of the Hawke-Keating governments differed greatly from those of the Chifley-era Labor Party. In *The End of Certainty*, Paul Kelly spends much time detailing the ways in which the Hawke-Keating government’s economic policies were a concerted break from previous Labor fiscal ideology. In particular, Kelly notes that the deregulation of the financial system was a remarkable shift in policy from the Party who was more typically characterised by its deference to the unions and its emphasis on nationalisation of industry and institutions. It was “contrary to ALP policy... a reversal of an established political philosophy” (Kelly, 1994: 78). Despite initial Party misgivings, Kelly notes that by the early 1990s the policy of deregulation had been thoroughly embraced throughout the Labor Party hierarchy, and indeed by the wider non-ALP community (Kelly, 1994: 89). The “early Party misgivings” (1994: 89) of Kelly’s interpretation refer to the long-held economic policies of Labor government-instigated economic restructuring and growth schemes, radicalised by Chifley and polar opposite to the deregulatory reflex of the 1980s Labor Party. Despite these differences, Chifley and Keating articulated their economic policies within remarkably similar themes. On the subject of deregulation, Keating explained:

> There has been a new acceptance of the need for change – to adapt to new world realities... I do not think it is particularly surprising that is has been a Labor Government which has sought most comprehensively to capture this new mood and to express it in policy reforms (Keating, 1984).

Forty years earlier, Chifley made a remarkably similar address to the House of Representatives on the purpose of the Banking Nationalisation legislation:

> With economic difficulties increasing overseas, the Government must be in a position to act with certainty and effectiveness to ensure the policy of full employment and the maintenance of economic and financial stability (Chifley, 1947).

Both Chifley and Keating saw the Labor government as pivotal in challenging the difficult economic conditions of the post-war period and 1980s respectively, and of maintaining an economic stability despite global market pressures. While the policies may have differed, the
rhetoric and communication of their goals remained remarkably similar, and in this Keating can again be seen as recontextualising the rhetoric of Chifley.

Underpinning the economic rhetoric of both men was a somewhat naive belief in the electorate’s willingness (or, indeed, ability) to comprehend the complexity of Labor’s economic policies. Both Keating and Chifley refused to reduce their economic strategies to a mere catch-phrase or sound-bite. This would prove disastrous for both epochs of the federal Labor Party. As Crisp notes in his biography on Chifley:

Chifley had rather too sanguine a faith in the political and economic grasp, the rationality and the dispassionate public spirit of at least a crucial part of the electorate. He was almost certainly prepared to place too much confidence in the people’s appreciation of the wisdom and necessity of the stern measures his Government had taken in the face of the grave state of the world and of Australia’s position in it. Long-term economics rarely if ever make good short-term politics (Crisp, 1961: 369).

Where Chifley’s rhetoric complexity revealed an over-estimation of the electorate’s comprehension of economic policy, Keating’s rhetoric complexity revealed a misunderstanding of the nature of the twenty-four hour instant news cycle. The verbose had been replaced by the economical, and the grand speech had been replaced by the sound bite (Younane, 2007). It also revealed a lack of awareness of the public disillusionment on matters of the economy that permeated the post-recession era. Biographer Don Watson asserts that Keating’s inability to make long-term economic measures appealing to the electorate proved the undoing of the Labor Party:

The remedies for recessions are economic, of course, but recessions change more than the economy. The willingness of people to trust and believe also changes. The government ... could not go on telling passengers why the plane was falling when what they craved was a reason to believe that the thing wasn’t going to crash. And if it was going to crash, they wanted someone to blame (Watson, 2004: 100-101).

It was difficult for Keating to marry his faith in the politics of the economy with this reality of electorate cynicism. Try as he might, he could not avoid reverting to the language of a Treasurer, just when the public needed to hear from a Prime Minister.

Both Chifley and Keating also used economic rhetoric as an assertion of Australian independence and national identity. In the uncertainty of the post-war and post-recession periods respectively, the two Labor leaders sought to reaffirm the role of the Australian economy in championing fiscal sovereignty. On the subject of money-lending agreements with international sources, for example, Chifley asserted that such contracts would not be
considered except as “an absolute last extreme” (Sydney Morning Herald, 1948:5). The Australian economy, Chifley believed, could only recover from the devastation of World War Two through an internal, domestic effort; re-establishing the domestic economy was thus touted as a nation-building task for the people of Australia. The economic rhetoric of Keating was framed in a similar manner. In a speech given at the Australian Book Publishers Awards on the 26th June 1992, Keating argued for the focus of industry to shift away from foreign markets and instead concentrate on domestic capabilities:

In the 1990s, we need to be confident in ways that we have never been, independent in ways that we’ve never been... We will go into the world independent or we will not succeed. We will go by our own efforts because there is no-one there to help us; we will fulfil our own visions because no-one is going to lend us theirs (Keating, 1992b).

After the “bitter blow” of the recession, the Keating government extolled the importance of infrastructure building and the ways in which the domestic economy could be a way to enhance the national image of “a civilised country where we take care of those in need” (Keating, 1992c). While Australian independence and national identity were at the heart of both Chifley and Keating’s economic rhetoric, it was not at the heart of the policies themselves, nor did it accurately reflect the global fiscal realities of which Australia was a participant. As Castles notes, the policy of decentralisation (that is, the spread of power away from federal governments) was dominant in the post-World War Two global economic psyche. In the wake of the conflict, international markets sought greater co-operations with allies, partially in an effort to prevent further tensions (Castles, 1999). Australia’s economy was not, as the Chifley rhetoric would appear, more independent from its trading partners; rather, it was just as intertwined (if not more so) with foreign markets as it had been prior to the outbreak of the Second World War (Beresford and Kerr, 1980). Keating faced a similar reality: by 1996, economic policy was a reflection of the increased national awareness of the geopolitical actuality of Australia. Increased ties to Asia and the desire to become (and remain) the foremost economic power in the Pacific region dominated economic policy, and as such, Australia’s domestic markets were more involved with the Asian and Pacific spheres of influence than they were independent from foreign influence (Robertson, 2009: 114). The economic rhetoric of Chifley and Keating was not only similar thematically and with regards to complexity of speech, but also created a comparable paradox between the language of fiscal policy and the real-world realities of the global market.

The “Light on the Hill”

The primary theme of the “Light on the Hill” speech was the search for a Western democratic incarnation of the 'Utopian' society. Certainly, More’s description of a society in which “everyone gets a fair share” (More, 2003: 110) and its people exhibit “cheerfulness, peace of mind, and freedom from anxiety” (More, 2003: 110) bears an extraordinary likeness to the ideals articulated by Chifley. In his address to the NSW Labor Party conference in Sydney on the 12th June 1949, Chifley spoke of his Labor Party as:
... a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective – the light on the hill – which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand (Chifley, 1949).

The “Light on the Hill”, then, was the ideology of change and growth for the benefit of mankind; the belief that the political system can be a force for good, and that the progressive politics of the Labor Party should be the prominent advocate for such a force. The “Light on the Hill” transcended a mere turn of phrase to become shorthand for a broader and more pervasive ideology. It is this Labor sentiment and this Labor ideology that Keating so frequently referenced in his rhetoric, almost half a century after Chifley’s address. In the Inaugural Dean’s Lecture at the University of Melbourne Graduate School on August 5th 1995, for example, Keating outlined the ways in which his Labor Party sought to advocate for this philanthropic interpretation of politics:

[Politics] is at times a contest between those with ideas and those without them. And in turn between those with the wit and persistence necessary to see ideas made into reality, and those who are content to merely spout them and argue about them. It is a contest between the pragmatists and the poseurs – the doers and the talkers. It is between those who want to go to the heart of things and those who forever tinker at the margins. Ultimately, it is between those who are excited by the challenge of change and those who recoil from it (Keating, 1995b).

Keating continued in this vein, asserting that Australians were a nation for whom change was no longer a threatening entity, but rather one which excited and inspired (Keating, 1995b). The loftier elements of the “Light on the Hill” were similarly echoed in the rhetoric of Keating. In a speech on the occasion of the National Library’s twenty-fifth anniversary, for example, he asserted that the Labor Party was the “vehicle – the only suitable and reliable vehicle – which can change Australia” (Keating, 1993). It is perhaps Keating’s Redfern Park Speech of December 10th 1992 which most clearly recontextualised and revitalised the lofty designs of the “Light On The Hill”:

This is a fundamental test of our social goals and our national will: our ability to say to ourselves and the rest of the world that Australia is a first-rate social democracy, that we are what we should be – truly the land of the fair go and the better chance... We have to give meaning to ‘justice’ and ‘equity’... we will only give them meaning when we commit ourselves to achieving concrete results. If we improve the living conditions in one town, they will improve in another... we can have justice. I say that for two reasons. I say it because I believe that the great things about Australian social democracy reflect a fundamental belief in justice. And I say it because in so many other areas we have proved our capacity over the years
to go on extending the realms of participation, opportunity and care (Keating, 1992d)

Just as the “Light on the Hill” was concerned with the “betterment of mankind” (Chifley, 1949), so too was the Redfern Speech concerned with ensuring “more dignity, more confidence, more happiness” (Keating, 1992d) for Australian citizens.

The “Light on the Hill” also provided a blueprint of political endeavour, asserting that progressive policies could be achieved only by the masses, rather than by individualistic or elitist political leadership. This sentiment permeated Chifley’s speech:

...the strength of the labour movement... comes from the roots of the labour movement – the people who support it... many of you have been [working for the labour movement], not hoping for any personal gain, but because you believe in a movement that has been built up to bring better conditions to the people. Therefore the success of the Labor Party at the next elections depends entirely, as it has always done, on the people who work (Chifley, 1949).

This notion of an intrinsic link between the Labor Party and the people for whom it advocated was also articulated by Keating, in language strikingly reminiscent of the ‘Light on the Hill’ rhetoric. A speech delivered by Keating at Rockingham High School on the 16th February 1995 asserted:

... we reject the notion of a dog-eat-dog society, that the strongest take the best and the Devil takes the hindmost, and that we will – together – go forward as a society not with an underclass, or subgroups, but as one group... a loyalty to Australia, to the notion of what it has become, and a loyalty to one another (Keating, 1995c)

“Together”, said Keating, with “a loyalty to one another.” Just as Chifley advocated for the unity and loyalty of the labour movement, so too did Keating advocate the advancement of Australian society through the combined efforts of its citizens.

The 2006 Casey Bennetto / Company B comedy musical Keating! featured at its climax a song entitled “Light on the Hill,” in which a fictionalised Keating lamented the demise of progressive inclinations of the voting public, and hoped for, “a country rich and clever / full of passion and endeavour / reaching out beyond forever and still / I’m dreaming of the Light on the Hill” (Bennetto, 2006). This link between the two men was deliberate: more than any other Labor leader previous or since, Keating personified and embraced the core ideologies of Chifley’s “Light on the Hill.” By combining the lofty ideals of “betterment” and “happiness” with the practicality of working class political mobilisation, Keating effectively recontextualised the “Light on the Hill” and thus provided us with the most convincing evidence of a rhetoric revival.
Conclusion

Underscoring much of the existing literature on the Australian Labor Party is an assumption of inevitable progression, and a subsequent dismissal of the possibility of cross-generational comparisons. This dominant narrative of difference, however, is limiting. By utilising the concept of rhetoric revival, we are able to examine the history of Chifley and Keating in a new way, and draw out broader themes of rhetoric that would otherwise be buried under the minutiae of the historical contexts, campaigns, and individuals. Both Chifley and Keating used constructions of history to validate progressive politics; the former conjuring up images of the working class man, and the latter relying on the Anzac myth to promote Labor Party ideology. Despite radically differing economic strategies, the two leaders couched fiscal policy rhetoric within broader themes of nationhood (and, of course, both men placed arguably too much faith in the electorate’s ability to comprehend complex economic policy, to the detriment of their Prime Ministerships). Finally, it is within the speech and dogma of Chifley’s “Light on the Hill” where we find the most compelling evidence of a Keating-led Labor rhetoric revival, for it was Keating who revitalised and recontextualised the concepts of the “Light on the Hill” in his rhetoric. In an effort to consolidate and re-energise a fractured Labor Party, Keating reframed the rhetoric of Party stalwart Chifley, to varying degrees of success. Prime Minister Paul Keating was one of Australia’s most formidable oratorical talents, but to claim his rhetoric as unique or unprecedented in Labor Party history is to ignore the broader themes of his speeches. Prime Minister Ben Chifley may not have inspired audiences with his public speaking skills, but much of his rhetorical themes served as the basis for Keating’s time in office, almost fifty years later

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