



Keating

Kerry O'Brien

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Paul Keating is widely credited as the chief architect of the most significant period of political and economic reform in Australia's history. Twenty years on, there is still no story from the horse's mouth of how it all came about. No autobiography. No memoir. Yet he is the supreme story-teller of politics.

This book of revelations fills the gap. Kerry O'Brien, the consummate interviewer who knew all the players and lived the history, has spent many long hours with Keating, teasing out the stories, testing the memories and the assertions.

What emerges is a treasure trove of anecdotes, insights, reflections and occasional admissions from one of the most loved and hated political leaders we have known-a man who either led or was the driving force through thirteen years of Labor government that changed the face of Australia.

This is a man who as prime minister personally negotiated the sale of a quarter of the government-owned Qantas in his own office for \$665 million, then delighted in watching the buyer's hand shake so much that champagne spilt down his shirtsleeve. He tells of his grave moment of doubt after making one of the riskiest calls of his political life, and how he used an acupuncturist and a television interviewer to seize the day.

There are many stories of this kind. The revealing inside stories and even glimpses of insecurities that go with the wielding of power, from a man who had no fear collecting his share of enemies and ended up with more than enough, but whose parliamentary performances from 25 years ago are watched avidly on YouTube today by a generation that was either not yet born or in knee pants when he was at his peak.

We'll never get an autobiography or a memoir from Keating. This is as good as it gets-funny, sweeping, angry, imaginative, mischievous, with arrogance, a glimmer of humility and more than a touch of creative madness. Keating unplugged.

Keating Details

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John says

Excellent take on the economics and politics of the time

I don't think it matters what side of politics you may lean toward, it's undeniable that the Hawke/Keating area is one of the most fascinating from an economic and hence political perspective.

This really is an excellent book, both for the sections Kerry wrote 'setting the scene' for the interviews that follow and of course the insights of Keating himself.

Highly recommended for followers of #auspol

Bruce McNair says

Paul Keating was Australia's Treasurer under Bob Hawke from 1983 to 1991, and Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996. He had a huge vision for Australia's economic future, believing that it had to be opened up. He was also a master of metaphor and the political put down.

From a working-class family in suburban Bankstown, he left school at 15 and took a job as a clerk at the Sydney County Council. He had an early interest in politics and joined his father in attending ALP meetings from an early age. Jack Lang was Keating's first mentor starting from when Keating was 18. Lang was NSW premier on two occasions in the 1920s and 1930s. His last government was dismissed by the NSW Governor in 1932. But he was a firebrand who created animosity and division. Keating admired his political style and learned a lot about early Australian politics from him. But Keating also sought advice from many captains of industry. Keating won the federal seat of Blaxland in 1969, which was about the same time that Gough Whitlam became the ALP leader. But the two were chalk and cheese - Whitlam was a silver-tailed university-trained lawyer, while Keating was working class and left school early. Keating was the last minister appointed by Whitlam just weeks before Whitlam's dismissal - an event that Keating remains bitter about. He points out that this event ended any civility there may have been between the two main political parties.

As Treasurer, Keating presided over some massive changes to the Australian economy, including:

- * Floating the dollar;
- * Introduction of bank competition by allowing in foreign banks;
- * Dividend imputation system;
- * Overhaul of the tax system;
- * Reduction of import tariffs;
- * Deregulation of housing interest rates;
- * Introduction of the cross-media rules with respect to ownership of TV and newspapers.

In 1991, Bob Hawke's popularity floundered in the face of a deep recession, and Opposition Leader John Hewson's Fightback, which was based on Thatcherite policies. In order to end speculation about the leadership, Hawke called for a leadership spill in December during which the ALP caucus voted against for Keating due to the falling polls.

As Prime Minister, Keating focused on micro-economic reform and repositioning Australia's place in the world. The most significant items included:

- * Abolition of the centralised wage-fixing system and replacing it with the enterprise bargaining model;
- * Introduction of the universal superannuation scheme;
- * Expansion of standard gauge railway across Australia;
- * Further reduction of import tariffs;
- * An expanded APEC, turning it from a ministers' council to a leadership group;
- * Indonesia/Australia Ministerial Council;
- * Native land title legislation;
- * Outline for an Australian Republic;
- * Sale of Qantas and Australian Airlines (previously TAA);
- * Introduction of pay TV;
- * Establishment of the Australian Competition and Consumer Council;
- * Establishment of the National Electricity Market;
- * Creative Nation arts policy, which included funding for the Internet (the Information Superhighway as it was called then), and separating the symphony orchestras from the ABC starting with the SSO and the MSO.

The book is divided into four broad time periods within which each chapter explores a different theme - these are generally in chronological order. Each chapter is prefaced by the author's description of the events surrounding that theme and followed by the questions and answers pertaining to that theme. Thus, it provides the author's viewpoint followed by Keating's own views on the matter. Much of the latter material was used in the televised interviews on the ABC.

Keating was definitely a large figure on the Australian political stage - loved by some, hated by others, and viewed with indifference by many, but then that can be said of many political figures (as Keating himself points out). His performances in parliament, where he revelled in demolishing opponents with his acerbic wit, are particularly memorable - many of which can be viewed on YouTube. But these performances were often viewed as arrogant, particularly by his opponents and the press. Despite his flaws, he presided over some of the most important transformational changes to the Australian economy, dragging it out of the closed dark ages into a modern open economy ripe for embracing the increasingly global economy. In summary, you have to admire the man for his achievements.

I give this book 4 stars.

Ian says

Colossus

This guy is a colossus! Has more visionary ideas and observations than every PM since put together. The book is well written and I enjoyed the structure of historical lead-in followed by interview. Keating speaks for himself; uninterpreted and without political judgment. Recommended reading for anyone who has the misfortune of living only through the dreariness and insularity of Howard, the bombast of Rudd x 2, Julia's struggles and the eccentricities and stupidity of the Mad Monk. Jury out on the present one.

Angus Cairn says

I'm an unabashed Keating fan and reading this book in the current political left me sad for the lack of outward focussed visionary leaders we had but now lack. I was particularly interested in reading Keating's memories of the recession years and why things happened the way they did. A very good book and well researched and written by Kerry O'Brien.

Bernard says

It is important to me to capture my thoughts after reading this weighty account of Paul Keating's public life. I was desperate to finish it at the time of my maternity leave (to avoid needing to carry it with me back to work and) to help to clarify my own political leanings. As a public servant I spend most of my time suppressing any personal political leaning in order to maintain objectivity. But as someone who has experienced first-hand the operations of both sides of politics, I have never sat comfortably with observing in action the notion of left and right, labor and liberal. There is more nuance than these black and white lenses of ideology.

This book reminds me why I was so enthralled by the Hawke and Keating governments. Not out of any sense of love for the trade union movement, or left, socialist leanings. But rather, in my crude way of thinking - those governments were reformists, socially inclusive, economically-expansionary and outwardly progressive. Keating had a vision for Australia that was an integral part of the global community, but where every individual had access to the means to lift themselves up and to share in the resulting prosperity of his radical reforms. His predecessors and successors weren't always interested in the difficult task of implementing necessary changes and/or ensuring everyone can access the benefits of change.

Keating also had a significant ego and a disdain for the press/opposition. Whilst they are reasons people hate him, I couldn't help but admire those traits at the time he was in office, and they are more endearing to me today after successive prime ministers of lower quality. I secretly hope Malcolm Turnbull finds time to read this book and ponders what he hopes to achieve for Australia in the time available to him in the Lodge, and understands just how much effort is required to deliver on that vision.

This is a cracking read and I thoroughly recommend it to all. Particularly people that hate Keating.

Michael says

No surprise that I would give this book five stars. Keating is up there with Dylan for me, in that it is a privilege just to share this earth with him. Even if you thought you already knew it all; the way KOB frames the questions, coupled with the depth and honesty in which PJK answers them, is just so engaging and illuminating. The last 15 pages in particular, where KOB moves to 'more personal things' were fascinating. One for the ages.

Warren Gossett says

I loved this book. I like the voice of Paul Keating himself and of his interlocutor Kerry O'Brien. I appreciated

better than before Keating's crucial role as Treasurer in the Hawke Keating years. I could see some of his failures when he was Prime Minister. Of course each reader will have his own views about such a controversial politician. So here is mine. Keating was Australia's best treasurer. He fought the hard battles to change our economic culture and our economic literacy. I only wish there were someone like him now to shake up Australia into living within its means as defined by the terms of trade and creative outputs that yield internal efficiency or external trade advantages.

I regretted that he was distracted from the economic task by ephemeral foreign policy goals such as APEC. Does anyone think China, the US or Japan is constrained by the structures of APEC? Worse was Keating's tilt to Suharto's Indonesia and worst of all was the desire to re imagine Australia as an Asian country. Perhaps this view could lead Samuel Huntington (in his 1993 article, *The Clash of Civilizations*) to question whether Australia was a "torn" country, unsure of its identity as Asian or Anglocentric. Or like Turkey, torn between Europe and Islam. This dissatisfaction led me to switch to the Liberals and John Howard, who are reliably pro Western and pro American (confession: I moved to Australia from America in 1980). All the same, Keating now is still much tougher on the economy and the need for fair reform than the dithering Malcolm Turnbull. In my view, as in Keating's, we need more digitalisation, automation, workplace flexibility, individually tailored education, and education in personal physical and emotional health. But I say whether we are a republic is irrelevant. There are republics called Russia, America and Iran. What counts is how smart we are about keeping a healthy and prosperous life, combining our labor and capital more efficiently. That is the best tip that Keating had. Kerry O'Brien's mix of biography and scene setting gives a marvelous view of Paul Keating, the prime minister that Australia had to have.

Naomi Stephens says

I really enjoyed this. O'Brien is an exemplary journalist, and applied his considerable skill to the task of interviewing Keating - no mean feat. Keating has long said that he will never write an autobiography, and O'Brien's work is likely as close as we'll get.

I am, traditionally, a conservative voter, and despised Keating for his arrogance and derogatory demeanour. But, times change, and looking back on how this country changed under Labor in the 80s, I have to admit it changed for the better. Current Australian politics is dominated by camera loving egomaniacs, hell bent on populism rather than doing the job that needs doing. How I long for the days where we had politicians of calibre. Keating is definitely a politician of calibre, and he served his country well.

Highly recommended.

Ian Muil says

Disappointing - Kerry O'Brien managed a brilliant TV series interviewing Keating. It was obviously expertly edited. To Take all the dialogue in the entire interview and turn it into a book is cumbersome and unreadable.

Chris says

They don't make politicians like that anymore.

This was a pretty daunting book when I picked it up, but there was something about the format I found quite compelling. Each chapter follows a similar format. Kerry O'Brien introduces the chapter, asks a question and Paul Keating answers, usually in great detail, whereupon O'Brien often asks a follow-up.

It's more of a discussion than an official biography, although it covers all major points of Keating's political career.

I came away from this book with a greater appreciation and respect for Paul Keating. I always liked him, I liked his vicious cunning watching clips of him in Question Time, his often devastating insults, and quick wit. But it took a bit longer for me to learn about his achievements as Treasurer and Prime Minister.

I don't know if this book will change any die-hard Liberals' minds, but it might change some of those on the fence that don't know much about him. In this book he comes across as confident and self assured but I don't think he reaches arrogance. At times he's even quite gracious to those you might think he'd have a good reason to hate.

One of the things I appreciate most is once he became Prime Minister he didn't want to play it safe, to do his best to please the public in tedious polls and media appearances. For better or worse he wanted to lift this country up while his opponents often wanted to drag it back to the 1950's. He was one of the most socially progressive Prime Minister's Australia has had, and he was going to use what was left of his political capital to improve the country, regardless of the polls. His vision was long term, not simply gazing ahead to the next election like so many others.

Kerry O'Brien does an excellent job of steering the conversation through each era of Keating's public life, encapsulating each time period with an introduction to the chapter. He's direct and to the point, but allows Keating to tell his story in his own words.

Ross says

It's quite difficult to categorise this book. It's technically a biography, but I'd say 75% of the book is in Keating's own words, so I'd say it's more of an autobiography with masterful commentary by Kerry O'Brien at the beginning of each chapter.

This book is superb. I am young, I did not experience the Keating years first-hand, but this man was a real reformer. You gain an insight into the working of his mind, a glimpse of his genius. You also get a feel for his brimming confidence that occasionally bleeds over into arrogance. For a man that has achieved so much and changed Australia so fundamentally, I think that that arrogance is justified and can be forgiven.

I would recommend this book to anyone, from either side of the political spectrum, even from overseas. This is what political conviction looks like. Any politician could learn from this man. A visionary, a masterful and ruthless orator, and policy genius. That is Paul Keating.

Kathy Fogarty says

I hope one day that someone gives Keating the kind of eulogy that Noel Pearson gave Whitlam (not too

soon, mind). He was criticised in the lead up to the 1996 election for being too mired in policy with too little attention to the politics. One of those policy areas was indigenous policy, where he spent enormous amounts of his own time in negotiations with indigenous leaders and all the interested parties, turning the Mabo High Court ruling into workable legislation. He had a strong sense of justice and when he cared about something, he brought enormous amounts of passion and energy to it. He's one of a kind: gifted with a planet sized intellect and a passionate soul, a fierce drive to save us from the Tories and a killer wit. But naturally all of this came at great personal sacrifice to his family and to him: a beautiful image of laying down with his little daughter Alexandra who wasn't used to having her own room to help her fall asleep, falling asleep himself, and then getting up again at 9pm to a knock at the door to leave home and keep working on something of import. Kerry O'Brien was at his best in this book, needling away to try and get at the truth, and not let Keating off the hook with too much post-hoc revisionism. It's plain the two of them have regard for each other. I feel quite sated in my thirst for Keating history now.

Miguel Vidal says

Really enjoyed the insights of the best prime minister in my lifetime.

Blamp Head says

PAUL KEATING'S HIPSTER CAFE MENU

New takes on national dishes, crafted in our kitchen by P Keating

Keating outlines his approach to creating our menus:

NationsMenus get made the hard way. NationMenu-building is a hard caper and I had to make sure this slothful, locked-up place finally became an open competitive economy.

We try not to take offense at that!

Mains

Bespoke economy

Recreated from scratch. You'll be feeling like you've had surplus food just a few years after this!

Craft interest rates

*Before Paul came along, the government set the interest rates. There was no place in the world for our sister (albeit much smaller) cafe, **The Reserve Bank of Australia**, which now sets interest rates, prints money and looks after all your transactions daily! They carefully craft interest rates, and are, in fact, a mainstay on our menu, like it or not. They threaten to change the menu monthly, but recently haven't bothered, since they're worried if they do that the menu will become just too inflated with, umm, things.*

Banking smoothie

*Prior to Keating coming along, the **Commonwealth Bank of Australia** was government owned, and there were no foreign banks allowed into our cafe. Now, while it still looks like there's just four of them, that's almost certainly an optical illusion!*

1990 Recession

You simply must have this.

Title

This is a native dish.

Smashed tariffs

Protectionism went too far, so we've basically removed it! Local industry sucked hard, anyway. Well, so we're told.

Dollar surprise

Would you believe, we've now managed to make our currency float? If that's not magic, we don't know what is!

Eight budgets

Including such classics as the One That Brought Home the Bacon and the 24-carat budget.

Items removed from the menu

Hawke

Mainly this man has been spotted sculling beer since his time as Prime Minister. Wasn't needed.

Banana republic

No, you don't want this....

We understand that not all items are to everyone's taste. Indeed, some people would hate every single item! Fear not, there's some more modern cafes around the place.

Frankly, though, there's been some absolute Ruddy nonsense since we were established in the 1980s, and some completely Howardly acts. Modern cafes might try to Trump ours, but take it from us -- we are without a doubt the suppository of all wisdom when it comes to cafe choices!

Kirribilli agreement

You found the secret item on our menu! Well done! You shouldn't know about this... But, oh well, now that you're here... yes, it is that agreement where Hawke pinky-promised to step sideways, take his name off the lease and pray for his bond back; all to give Keating a shot at the lease in Kirribilli House. This might be hard to digest, though...

RitaSkeeter says

Calling it at page 170. Perhaps I'll come back to this in the future. Maybe.

At first I appreciated the structure as it allowed us to hear things in Keating's own words. I soon tired of this though as the same themes, the same information, kept repeating over and over. At page 170 all I still really know about Keating the man is that he likes music. All I know about Keating the politician is that he is an economic reformer. I just can't face another 600 pages.

Political biographies don't need to be this dry.
