

AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION DINNER

SYDNEY, 12TH JULY, 1961

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Sir, Your Grace, Chief Justice, Your Excellency and ladies and gentlemen:

I think this is one of those occasions when, as an entirely non-contentious person (Laughter) devoted to nothing more deeply than to a quiet life, I ought to make a few points about some of the people who are sitting at the top table. (I'll say something about E.K. White later on - and I hasten to say entirely in his favour) (Laughter) But I do want to tell you some secrets of the charnel-house knowing that they won't go any further. (Laughter)

When I accepted my invitation to come here - the fish at last landed, you know - I did so under the firm impression that, like so many of you I would wear a nice soft shirt and black tie and be at home, and comfortable. Then Mr. President Yorston said "No, no. Reinforced concrete is the order of the day". (Laughter) I protested and my secretary protested and the President gave all the imitation that a man of his type can of being the injured innocent: "But my dear fellow, Sir, you know, we can't, you know..." So I devoted, or rather my wife did, the last hour this afternoon to getting me encased in concrete. And when I arrived here tonight and met Yorston I rapped him on the chest and I said, "My dear boy you are wearing a semi-stiff shirt". (Laughter, applause)

I'm of course delighted - I don't need to tell you - to arrive here tonight and see His Grace the Archbishop. You know there is nothing that brings such balm to the spirit of a man who is occasionally in trouble himself (Laughter) ... Well I don't need to finish my sentence do I? Therefore I want to say to His Grace the Archbishop "Thank you, Sir, thank you for having been so considerate to a mere Presbyterian. This brings the union of the Churches closer and closer and closer." (Laughter) (Applause)

Mind you, Sir, this is not as irrelevant as you may think because after all the object of this magnificent association is unity, bringing us together. And I tell you that I wouldn't be a bit surprised after this, to find the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church getting together - I've no doubt to the enormous advantage of the Presbyterian Church. (Laughter) But anyhow we shall see.

Then, of course, I have a particular pleasure in seeing here a man whom I may almost regard by now as an old friend - the very distinguished Chief Justice of the United States. (Applause) He and I have - you will be surprised to know - a certain amount in common because some years back we flew together from Washington to Dallas. You were then, Sir, Governor of California, a tremendous dignitary and you were going to a Governors' Conference. We sat next to each other and you were frightfully kind to me. I was delighted, of course, to see you. At that time you, having been a lawyer, had become a deplorable politician and I, having been a lawyer, had become a deplorable politician. You have the advantage of me because having become a deplorable politician you not long thereafter reverted to your legal character (Laughter) and became a distinguished Chief Justice - something that the legal profession in Australia is delighted to know will never happen to me. (Laughter)

You know I can't imagine a happier conjunction of the planets than that Chief Justice Warren should be here in Australia, not only because there is a great legal convention, but because there is this 25th birthday party of the Australian-American Association. I have had the great opportunity and pleasure, now, year by year, of

eating at the expense of the Supreme Court of the United States, having lunch with the Justices, many of them very great and close friends of mine and, if I may say so Chief Justice, nobody could exemplify in himself, more than you do, all the qualities that we in Australia think that we share with the United States of America. (Applause) As a matter of fact he could pass off as an Australian. Look at him. What a wonderful leader of the Opposition he would make! (Laughter) Sir, we couldn't be more delighted than we are to see you here.

Now I know that it is the fashion to make speeches on these occasions in which all is sweetness and light. All we have to do is to have a jolly good dinner, reaffirm our belief that we are exactly the same as each other, and go away in a slightly mellow haze of sentiment. I don't think that is quite true. I have been reminded by Mr. Yorston that I have, on quite a few occasions, spoken to the American-Australian Association in New York, first of all under my friend Hobins, as Chairman, and then under the auspices of that taciturn friend of ours, Floyd Blair. And the only time I ever could get going effectively was when Danny Kaye was kind enough to come. From the moment I stood up he interjected and we had a conflict in which I was so tolerably successful that he offered me a place in his troupe. (Laughter)

But there is a disposition to believe that the British, the Americans, the Australians, the New Zealanders, whoever they may be, are bound to think the same way because they, broadly, speak the same language. There are certain dialectical differences - and certain differences of dialect. But at any rate, yes, we understand each other; we understand what the other man is saying. Perhaps that is one of our dangers. It is easier to quarrel with one another in a common language than it is to quarrel through an interpreter. (Applause) I know that because I had an hour and a quarter with Khrushchev last November in New York and we had an interpreter and we were almost "matey" at the end of the time. But that was because the interpreter took the crackle out of it. But of course you can quarrel readily with people in your own language; and of course we have differences. The greatest thing that any Australian-American Association, or American-Australian Association, or Anglo-American Association, has to discover and to preach is that we have masses of differences. Your job, and my job, and the job of every other person of good will and intelligence, is to bridge the differences, to make them intelligible on each side.

It is quite foolish for people to say - as I have heard them say - "But of course we are bound to be friends because we have the same system of Government". We haven't. We have utterly different systems of Government. They say we must be friends because we have the same history. Well, up to a point, we had the same history; up to the late part of the 18th century we had the same history. But it then became a little abruptly divided into two streams. But do we have the same system of Government?

I find that I have had an immense experience now of these things around the world, and I also find that so many people, for example in Great Britain, don't understand that what a Secretary of State may say to a Congressional Committee under cross-examination, in the presence of the Press, is not to be taken as the final view of the Government of the United States. We don't have this kind of thing. I'm not summoned before Committees and put on oath and told to explain to them how my mind is working. Dear me, that would be a task, wouldn't it? That would be to explore the unknown with a vengeance. We wait, under our system, until we have had discussions in Cabinet and then we announce to some appropriate vehicle what the policy is. But in the United States the whole business - I'm not quarrelling about this; this is a system that they have devised and that they understand - is to have these things thrashed out, to have a man go before a Committee, to have him answer, to have him, if you like, think aloud about it.

Ultimately by this process, which, from the point of view of our American friends is a superlatively democratic one, of thrashing out policy, the result emerges and that is doctrine for the United States. And indeed, when it emerges, how many times it has been so wonderful for the world. But under our system things are done differently. That is why, when I am in England and I meet some man whom I know, some prominently placed man, he will say to me "Did you see what so-and-so said the other day in America? You know you can't trust these fellows. Really that's too ridiculous old boy". And I have to say "But that is not his final word". I have had to explain once or twice Chief Justice, and I hope you will confirm my recollection on this, that if a Secretary of State for example is up before a Committee and somebody puts a question and he says "Well, perhaps, I think, yes, that might be the answer to that", the gentleman from the Oklahoma "Blunderbus" writes that down and whips it out: that's in line with his policy. Ten minutes later the man before the Committee may be saying exactly the opposite - as we all do when we are thinking to ourselves - and this produces in the other parts of the English-speaking world a sort of confusion because we just don't understand, or most of us don't, that we are dealing with a different system of Government.

Now I do beg of all Australians, and of all Englishmen, to understand that the differences in systems of Government can easily give rise to hostilities where none need emerge at all. Because of all this I have had friends in the United States, in Washington, who, having read the remarks made by a prominent private member of the House of Commons say "Ah, that is what they are thinking". Whereas of course, if I may speak as an expert, as a former Leader of the Opposition, what a member of the Opposition says isn't what the people are thinking at all. (Laughter, applause)

So, Sir, really what I want to say to you is: let us recognise our differences; let us overcome our differences; so that the resulting strength will be all the greater. Because unless, between the United States and the rest of our world, there is understanding, a knowledge of differences, a willingness to overcome them, a concentration upon all the great matters of unity, unless this happens nobody will be attending the 50th Anniversary of this Association.

Let us make no mistake about it. We are in a world in which all the forces that are hostile to our way of living are on the march. They will never be met and defeated by disunited people. No war was ever won by disunited forces. It is our great moral responsibility, not to be too clever, but to be united, to get together, to say "We must have unity; we must understand our great purpose". And our great purpose, Sir, is not one of aggrandisement - God knows it has nothing to do with aggrandisement - our great purpose is to be allowed to live as we now live, as you now live in your country, freely, happily, or unhappily, but to live our own lives. This is the great issue in the world. And I would abandon proposition after proposition, myself, I would concede point after point in a discussion, so long as I felt that at the ultimate point we, and the United States, all the English-speaking free people around the world, were at one. (Applause)

Sir, the last thing I want to say is this. This Association was established 25 years ago by my friend E.K. White, a man of enormous integrity of character and driving ability and enthusiasm. (Applause) I am perfectly certain that when it began in those days before the war, when the United States didn't know so much about us - and, to tell the truth, we didn't know so much about the United States - when it began in 1936 I am sure that E.K. White was sustained by his enthusiasm rather than by any concrete hopes. He has seen it pre-war, during the war, something that made such an enormous difference to our relationships with the United States, postwar, where we find ourselves almost as favourite nephews. I think

that is true in the American mind. And as you look back over 25 years of this I am sure that you, like me, will give immense credit to the man whose imagination founded it, and whose ability and drive brought it on into its maturity. (Applause)

You are now going to hear Mr. Ambassador Sebald and when you have heard him, who is a man well worth listening to, then with his permission I will stand up a second time and give you the toast of the Association. (Applause)

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