

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF RETAILERS' DINNER AT  
HOTEL CANBERRA, CANBERRA, A.C.T.  
ON 18TH JULY, 1962

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

Sir, I would like to say, first of all, thank you on behalf of my wife. She has been out of action for the last two or three months, but she did hope to be here tonight, and then, by the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, she developed one of those sniffly, wheezy colds, in which she found herself intolerable company for herself and for other people. And so she decided, entirely in your interests, not to come and whistle out germs on you. But when I go back home, as I do occasionally (Laughter) and tell her what you said about her, and what other people approved of about her, I'm perfectly certain that within twentyfour hours, she will be saying to me, "Why didn't you insist on me going?" (Laughter) Because really you have spoken, I was going to say generously, but I would prefer to say justly, about her and I will have great pleasure in telling her what was said about her tonight and how you received it.

I would also like to say, Sir, that apropos of young Johnson, who has a genius so great that he ought to be working for the Government, (Laughter) (Make a note of that, will you, Hazel) (Laughter) I liked in particular, the second-last verse (Laughter) There are no press here, so I don't need to embarrass my partner and colleague, Jack McEwen, but he has been referred to, as you may know, as "Black Jack" and I occasionally address him as "Black" and, occasionally, when I am in a highbrow mood, I address him as "Le Noir". (Laughter) That's only when I don't want the other Country Party Minister to know what I'm talking about. (Laughter) And I love this verse --- "We've asked the swarthy, crony Jack." Now, John, you must admit this is the best description of you that has ever been put on --- "... the swarthy, crony Jack". And 'Hal' - now, really, if everybody would start to call Harold "Hal", we'd win the next election. (Laughter) (Applause) John, you and I must start this fashion --- "...And Hal, who's gi'en us mony a crack" (Laughter) and then, rather dirtily, (Laughter) rather offensively, he adds, "...At which yersel' ye're nae sae slack!" (Laughter) And I plead guilty, at once, to that. And then he says, "A fearsome trio". Well, up to that point, you might almost think you were reading the Sydney "Sun" (Laughter) or the Sydney "Mirror" (Laughter) or other humorous, juvenile publications. (Laughter) And then in brackets, young Johnson says, bowing in the direction of the balance sheet, (Laughter) "(But in a profit race I'd back Hosts Tam and Theo)".

Now this, I think, is the most superb verse written in lowland Scots since Burns himself. (Laughter) All that stuff about "Wad the Puir, the Giftie gie us" - it's very good. My father used to recommend it to me in vain for a long time. I mean the moral he used to recommend. But this fellow, Johnson, has in that one verse, concentrated the whole fury, and the whole glory, of Australian politics and the profit and loss account, (Laughter) of the Retailers' Association.

Now, the other thing I want to say to you is that you may be surprised to know that two such contentious fellows as John McEwen and I are here tonight. Well, I will explain it to you. I must begin on Monday. On Monday, I was in Sydney and on Monday night I went to a Dinner to celebrate the

Fiftieth Anniversary of what was called, in the plural, "The Commonwealth Banks" and it wasn't a very happy night. I received a moderate reception, modified rapture (Laughter). Under great pressure, I thought of one or two bright remarks that they laughed at. But, really, on the whole the Government wasn't too good on Monday night (Laughter) and we came back here, and yesterday morning, afternoon and night were discussing the Budget. Oh, I'm so glad there are no Press here tonight because if I even mention the Budget, with the press here, somebody, looking at the left eyebrow or the right, would say, "The Prime Minister gave a broad hint" (Laughter) You know what I mean - about this or this or this the poor old fellow hadn't thought of.

And therefore I'm lucky because yesterday, morning afternoon and night, we discussed the Budget or aspects of it; today, morning and afternoon, and when we were finishing up at six o'clock this afternoon, the Treasurer, who is not unconscious (Laughter) of what people say about him, though they could say it with much greater force about me, but some old inhibition makes them say, "Well, the old fellow, you know ...."; but, anyhow, he said, "I think we ought to sit tonight" and, obviously, we should. And so we made a little arrangement under which my swarthy friend and I came out to tea, having a pair, so to speak, and tonight, they're working on something or other; well, I hope for the best and so does he. And in the morning no doubt it will come out all right. And tomorrow morning, tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow night, we'll be at it again, and by midnight tomorrow night, we will all look at each other in the anteroom and say, "Well, I wonder what the retailers will say about this. (Laughter) I wonder what the manufacturers will say about it." To which I will probably add in my well-known cynical mood, "I wonder what we will say about it when we read it". (Laughter) And, anyhow, that's the way it goes.

I must make the apologies tonight, Sir, for my colleagues, most of whom would much sooner have been here tonight than whacking out arguments on the Commonwealth Works and Services Programme. Isn't that what they're on tonight? Yes. Overall is here tonight. Well, that's cowardly on his part because if he were there, they would chop his vote down by a million. (Laughter) That's the kind of thing that's going on.

All I want to say -- I don't want to say anything about the Budget except one thing perhaps. We've had the great advantage, Tom (Pettigrew), of hearing you and other people on the state of the economy. I even heard two or three people say that this was a year in which the Government might take its courage in both hands and Budget for a deficit. If you'll allow me to say so - I'm not addressing your wives who are much more sensible - I'm addressing the rest of you - "Could anything be more funny?" We are not facing a problem this year of whether we ought to budget for a deficit or not; we are facing the problem of how much it ought to be (Laughter) and this is not all that easy. I don't think anybody could ever accuse me of ignoring the views of what I might loosely call the ordinary man, the man in the street, the man who runs a business. I've never been one of those people who pretend that he can run a great business better than the people who run it. It has never occurred to me. But my business happens to be the business of the nation and on this, after many, many years, I think I might modestly claim to have served an apprenticeship. (Hear, hear).

The business of the nation. And this is not only social and international but it is financial. It is all these things. And all I want to say to you is, I have no hidebound rules in my mind, I haven't been given orders by anybody, but I have an acute sense of responsibility, not only to my own country in 1962, but to my own country in 1963 and 1964 and 1965. (Hear, hear) Because the job of the politician is to say, "How many votes can you win next week". I've had it; I've no interest to serve on this matter. When they throw me out, they will throw me out. I won't mind. But the job of the statesman is to say, "What is happening to my country and to the world not next week but next year and the year after and in ten years' time?" (Hear, hear) (Applause)

We in Australia are not responsible for the future shape of the world. No, but we have some influence over it. It's a great mistake to think that the great countries of the world go by the headlines. They do not go by the headlines any more than I do, but they are influenced by people from the great countries in the world, and we happen to represent one of the great countries. Don't think that I am suffering from any form of illusion that 10½ million people count as much in the world as 200 million. I do not. But I'd like to tell you that in this very year of grace my distinguished colleague, what's he called - "swarthy crony Jack" - he and I have both been in London, in Europe, in the United States of America, and I will undertake to say that between us, we have put ideas into people's minds (hear, hear) which they didn't have before we went. (Applause). And in that sense, we in Australia exercise an influence.

But for ourselves, in Australia, our prime responsibility, look, do let me say, our task, is not on any Budget or on any measure or on anything else to please you, to please John, or to please Bill or to please Tom. That's not the job. The job is to develop this country, 10½ million people - a vast area - to develop it as fast as we can into one of the significant countries intrinsically in the world. What have they in America? 130, 190 million people. This is colossal. The same sort of area as we have ourselves, and we have 10½. We are not going to have 10½ forever. The day will come, perhaps not in my time, when it will be 20, the day will come when it will be 30 or 40.

Provided we exercise our genius and produce energy, enthusiasm, a sense of devotion to our country, there is no reason why, at the turn of the century, Australia should not be intrinsically one of the great nations in the world, or, at any rate, one of the very great nations in the Southern Hemisphere. And, really, as one grows older, one thinks less of the next week or of the next election, about which I couldn't care less. One thinks more and more of what kind of country one's grandchildren are going to live in or one's great-grandchildren are going to live in. This is tremendously important. And what kind of a country is it? Not one in which everybody lives on the Government. That's a dependent country, not an independent one. A country in which we have made ourselves grow, in which we have understood that the great industries - take the manufacturing industries - must expand, if we are to expand our population, if we are to have more and more people; one in which the tertiary industries are expanding, one in which the primary industries, which are the very root of our international existence,

succeed, grow, increase their productivity and do it at a cost level which does not price them out of the world's market. It is simple to state it, isn't it, in that way and not very simple to achieve. Not very simple to satisfy the demands of the manufacturer and at the same time keep the woolgrower, the wheatgrower and the rest of them out of trouble. Not so simple.

The interesting thing about Australia, the great challenge about Australia is that every section of the economy has its own demands, its own ambitions, which somebody might call selfish ones, but in which all of these must be reconciled, made less selfish, made more conformable with the general set-up of the country, so that when I've been given my inevitable State funeral twenty years before, people will be able to sit up at peace in Australia, have friends to dinner at peace in Australia and in security and say, "You know that in the last twenty years, this country has developed to an extent that even the Americans, in the sixties of the last century, didn't think of."

Now, Sir, this is a great ambition, and all of us who preserve our sense of responsibility, contribute to it. I am a great admirer of what is done by the manufacturers. I am a great admirer of what is done by the importers. I am a great admirer of what is done by the retailers. You may go right down the list, and I have never had any stupid ambition to try to run their business for them. But all I hope is that all of us will never get so far out of balance that we think our particular interest is to be preferred to the interests of other people. I would hope that over the years to come, difficult years, tremendously difficult years; I am not only talking about the Common Market or something of that kind, but talking about the difficult years in front of this country down in its rather remote corner of the world. I hope that in all these difficult years we will, as far as we can, forget to be sectional and practice increasingly to be Australians (hear, hear) with one nation to serve and one end to produce for our children and our grandchildren. (Applause).

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