"ROUND TABLE" TELEVISION INTERVIEW
WITH THE RT. HON. THE PRIME MINISTER,
SIR ROBERT MENZIES, ON QTQ CHANNEL 9
TELEVISION STATION, BRISBANE, ON
23RD APRIL, 1963.

Members of the Panel : Dean Baddeley
Ex-Senator Condon Byrne
Mr. H.J. Summers,
(News Editor QTQ9)

DEAN BADDELEY : Mr. Prime Minister, may I say how much I adore every minute of the four and a half years I have been in Australia. One of the things which I find awfully fascinating here is to see the sort of various levels of influence coming from other parts of the world - the American influence, the European influence and the Asian influence. Now, in the present situation, all of these influences are of tremendous significance to our whole way of life. I wonder if you would like to comment how you think this pattern will take shape in the future, whether we shall gear ourselves more to one or the other to Europe, to the United States, or to Asia.

PRIME MINISTER : Well, you know, I think that there are some influences which are superficial and therefore obvious. There are others that are perhaps more profound and it is very difficult to forecast which will fall into that group or which into that group. The influence of America on Australian habits and speech is, of course, obvious, largely as the result of the moving pictures in the earlier days and still, to an extent, to television and what-have-you; and the vocabulary in Australia tends to be garnished with American expressions. All that's quite true. How far that is permanent, I wouldn't like to say. It is equally true that with a lot of immigrants coming into Australia, particularly from the European countries, we are beginning to take a little interest in cooking - food - new dishes - new styles, and I am sure that the impact of these new citizens on what you might call the "restaurant habits" of Australia is immediate and obvious. But all these things, I think, are on the whole, superficial. They are interesting, certainly; they are sometimes very engaging, but they are superficial, if I may repeat that word. Our habits of mind are pretty deep down in us and I think it will take a long, long time before the instinctive processes of thought derived from Great Britain are altered. You know, I frequently say to myself and to other people if they will listen, that the British habit of mind is inductive. We argue always from the particular to the general and this is deep in our consciousness. It is the history of our parliaments; it is the history of the common law, whereas Continental countries are deductive and America, to a remarkable extent is the same: Lay down the general principle and then deal with the particular case. It is a different habit of mind.

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QUESTIONER : Would you say this is because in the English way of life there is a tremendous value set upon individual enterprise, individual thought, individual ingenuity?

P.M. I think that's right but it is not the entire explanation. I think this goes back to the fact that England developed a process of civilization which wasn't entirely dominated by the old Roman ideas. Except for a fleeting century or two, they were never in the Roman Empire and if you go back to the roots of our legal system, our parliamentary system, you will find something that you won't find in Justinian, speaking legally, or in the codifications of Europe, speaking politically. Yes, I think there is a profound difference.

Q. We proceed, Sir, from the particular case to the general principle and don't rely so much on codes of law like the Code Napoleon or the Justinian Code.

P.M. I thoroughly agree with you.

Q. Down from precedent to precedent.

P.M. Yes. And, of course, the fact is that our systems have been worked out on encountering a problem and saying, "Well, now, what's the thing to do about that. What makes justice and sense about that," and it's decided to do it this way. And in a hundred years' time, some clever graduate comes along and does a study on this and discovers that certain principles have been evolved. But the people who did the things weren't much concerned about the principles that they were evolving, as in the intrinsic justice and practicability of what they were doing.

Q. What about Asia?

P.M. The Asian influence, I would have thought at the moment, was very slight. Of course it is quite true that, geographically, we have an intimate association and will have a more and more intimate association with Asia. I don't agree with people who say that means that we are now to be regarded as an Asian country. I don't think that's true. I think that we will continue to be a country with all our basic principles, our basic ideas deriving from the old world. But more and more, we will have to learn to live with the Asian countries, to understand them - not only to keep the peace with them but to establish positive goodwill with them. This is not going to be an easy or quick process.

Q. There is their cultural and trade associations in Malaysia.

P.M. Yes, and we have much to learn from them and they will have something to learn from us. I say all that and I believe all that, but I don't accept the proposition that we ought just to go around saying, "Well, we are an Asian country now in Australia, with no connection with the Old World," but we have.

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Q. But you cannot escape geography, Sir.

P.M. Oh, no. Exactly. But I thought the point I was trying to make was that, geographically, there we are : Indonesia next door, Malaya, Laos, Viet Nam, Burma, India, Pakistan, China, all these countries, they are in our section of the world, and I don't ignore geography. I think that how we get to understand them and how we can perhaps influence the way they go about things may have a lot to do with our future. But I can say all that and still be, as the Scots would say, Robert Gordon Menzies ("Mingies") (Laughter)

Q. Sir Robert, that brings us on to another aspect of the whole situation and it is this: Presuming that Australia does retain the hard core of the traditional British point of view, traditions and culture; now, we find a new British Commonwealth emerging, new Asian nations, coloured nations, black nations, with different ethnic ties; we are going to see a completely new British Commonwealth. Can this new Commonwealth, in its new form, assume the place of the old one? Australia obviously can fit into the pattern, but can they? Therefore, what part do you think, Sir Robert, that the new emerging British Commonwealth, with all these vast differences that are now injected into it, can play in the new world?

P.M. Well, you have now put what I believe - but the Dean will know better than I do - the $64 question. Because, I don't think really, that anybody can answer that question. You see, my memory goes back a long way. I remember attending a Prime Ministers' Conference - it wasn't then called such - in 1935. A long time ago. I wasn't Prime Minister, but I went there to represent my Prime Minister, Mr. Lyons, who was ill at the time. And there were five of us, sitting at the table, that's all. We were all the same kind of fellow, we all spoke the same language, we all had grown up on the same body of ideas. All this was quite simple and the last one I attended, last year, there were - what, fourteen or fifteen of us, together with five or six or seven observers who next time will be Prime Ministers themselves. And it would be idle to contend that it is the same sort of thing. It isn't. It's a very strange mixture, this new Commonwealth, because some of us are in the direct allegiance to the Throne and others, who recognise the Queen as the head of the Commonwealth, but are, themselves, republics. The Queen's writ doesn't run in their countries. And, of course, some of them are pretty rich in experience. You take a statesman like Mr. Nehru. He is as rich in experience of public affairs as anybody could be. And take President Ayub of Pakistan or the Tunku in Malaya - these are people who by long association really do think more or less as we do. Then you get some new countries, just emerged, with the echoes of their struggles still in their ears. You can't expect them to be looking at things in the same way and, in fact, if we all looked at things in the same way, it wouldn't be much of a Commonwealth, would it? I must say, I still find myself saying every now and then, "I wish I knew what he had in the back of his mind," and perhaps he is saying the same thing.

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Q. Isn't it a fact Sir Robert that each one of those countries is changing, undergoing a process of change? Australia, itself, is undergoing a profound process of change. You would agree on that?

P.M. Oh, entirely. And as a matter of fact, what you say just reminds me of this. We are a little bit tempted to lump them all together. To take all the African countries, for instance, that have emerged and say, "Well, now, the African countries think so and so." It's silly because they are all different. The first thing that we have to learn, if we are to be wise, is to know that they are different, that there is a world of difference, from the point of view of the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Balewa, and Nkrumah in Ghana, and probably a great deal of difference between them and Tanganyika or wherever it may be. These are not the same countries. You just can't apply a simple rule and say, "Well, that's where they fit in," because the fact that they have become independent means that they all have their own national aspirations. Difficult enough to persuade a New Zealander that he's the same as an Australian. (Laughter) Much more difficult to persuade a Ghanian that he's the same as a Tanganyikan.

Q. Sir Robert, do you think any common point of view - British Commonwealth point of view - can continue to emerge among these nations? That again is purely speculation.

P.M. Well, I must say I am optimistic about this because at several recent meetings - I am practically the oldest inhabitant now, you see .....

Q. You are the doyen of the corps.

P.M. ..... and at the last meeting or two I have noticed acute differences of opinion, then some discussion and I have been interested to see how much advance is made to a more common point of view, a more common understanding. You can have a conference at which people begin by emphasising their differences and at the end of a week they are emphasising the matters on which they agree. And that is the spirit of the Commonwealth. So I am no pessimist.

Q. It's encouraging because the British Commonwealth should have a tremendous part to play if it can retain its integrity, its unity in the new world.

P.M. Tremendous, and the less dominating it is in the physical world, the more influential it can become in the world of the spirit. It can indeed, presenting quality, wisdom, character and experience.

Q. Speaking of the changes in Australia, Sir Robert, nobody would have seen as much experience as you. In all Australian history, there hasn't been a man who has so long held the Prime Ministership as yourself. Nobody would be in a position more than you to judge the change, gradual, but ever so constant change in this country. Viewing it as from today, what would you say are the most significant changes in Australia's development, over the span of your political life?

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P.M. Well, that would be a difficult one. We have had, of course, the most tremendous internal physical development and that goes on. But I think, on the whole, the greatest development has been in the position that we occupy in relation to other countries. I do think that we can say without boasting that we have a significance now with other countries, a significance in London, a significance in Washington, which perhaps we didn't have before except by fits and starts. I think there has been a very great development of an understanding in those places of us and of an understanding on our part of them. This, I think, has been a great development.

Q. Do you think, Sir Robert, that our significance is somewhat out of proportion and greater than our physical strength, our population?

P.M. I am sure of that.

Q. And even our remoteness?

P.M. I am sure of that. Our remoteness may perhaps be a contributing factor.

Q. We stand a bit aloof from the scene?

P.M. Oh, yes. Here we are; we attract the attention of some of the old Western powers by the very fact that we are remote and that we are carrying on in the old traditions, and I think this is a source of strength for us.

Q. There are of course the changes developmentally. There are changes in the emphasis on Australian development. You would agree I think - we Queenslanders like to think that it is so - that there has been a greater emphasis in recent times, very recent times, on the potential of the north and the development of the north.

P.M. I think that over the last five years, the growth of emphasis on northern development has been quite remarkable, and it is not just all a matter of government or governments' point of view. The discovery of uranium at the time was most exciting and attracted a great deal of attention; the great bauxite deposits in the north; the phenomenal mineral developments in Mount Isa, the increasing emphasis in the public mind on mineral wealth as a source of Australian development. All this has happened in just a few years. And of course, oil..... This oil discovery in Queensland is, of course, of dramatic importance and if it is followed by other discoveries, as I think we may reasonably hope.....

Q. In other parts of Australia?

P.M. Yes, or in Queensland or wherever it may be. If this happens, of course, this could revolutionise the Australian external economy by reducing the drain on our overseas resources. I think it is in the mineral field that you have had the dramatic and exciting things over the last five years and they have all lifted eyes to the north. There is no doubt about that.

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Q. Unfortunately, Sir Robert, we are suffering in Queensland from the fact that we do not seem to be attracting the migrants here. Apparently migrants are attracted to those areas where there is heavy industrialisation. We are a magnificent primary-producing State. It would appear that some conscious and determined effort by the Commonwealth, the State and the private sector of business will be necessary to redirect the trend, otherwise we become the victim of circumstances and the gap between us and the industrialised States gets wider and wider. Would you think that is the position?

P.M. I think that is the position. It's quite true. I read with great pleasure about certain industrial developments that are occurring here. There is, I think, not the slightest doubt that migrants will go where there is a prospect of industrial employment. Indeed, unless we have increasing secondary industrial activity, I don't think we can sustain the flow of migrants because there is not much additional employment to be got in the rural industries. Every authority on the rural industries will admit that.

Q. Particularly with increased mechanisation?

P.M. That's right. With increased mechanisation, and therefore if you are going to have a hundred thousand people coming into the country each year, there must be a sustained development of secondary industries. Well, I think I can look back to a time, you know, many years ago, when industrial development wasn't frightfully encouraged in some States. I think that's right.

Q. That's perfectly true. The sugar industry for one.

P.M. So far as I am concerned, I think that every State that has the potential within itself ought to be encouraged in industrialization, so that it has a balanced economy. I remember the time when South Australia was a purely rural community, and during the war when I was Prime Minister, we put a number of munitions establishments into South Australia. South Australia is now, in terms of percentage, one of the most highly industrialized States in Australia and that's why the proud moment came when Sir Thomas Playford was able to say, "We are no longer a claimant State".

Q. And, Sir Robert, do you visualise that that position might develop here with the concentration of effort in those three centres?

P.M. I do. Well, I don't mind telling you and I am not just saying this because I am in Brisbane that a lot of people in England have spoken to me from time to time, "Where do you think So-and-So ought to go to get in on the great stream of development in Australia?" I always say Queensland.

Q. Splendid.

P.M. Because I think Queensland has a greater potential for future development than any other State in Australia. I do. And it is beginning to come.

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Q. One of the great contributions that Queensland has made, it seems to me, is in the export market and I think I am right in saying - and you must correct me if I am wrong - that the contribution made by exports from Queensland last year - and previous years too, exceeded by far anything else that any other State made.

P.M. You mean per head?

Q. Yes.

P.M. That wouldn't surprise me at all. You take sugar, for example. The export of sugar from Queensland, ten years ago, twelve years ago, was about half a million tons. Today it is a million and a quarter tons. This is a very big item. The Mt. Isa developments alone will produce an export income which nobody dreamed of seven or eight years ago. The bauxite deposits, all these things, coal exports now - why, it is only the other day that we were importing coal. You see? And now exporting coal, and of course the big industry, the cattle industry in Queensland, has suffered from time to time by droughts and one of the counter-agents to the drought is to have effective means of transporting cattle out; and beef roads that are going on now - all these steps I hope - will continue and continue and mean that the exports of beef from Queensland will grow and, I think, quite phenomenally.

Q. I shall think you are a Queenslander in a moment, instead of a Victorian. It's very heartening.

P.M. Well, I'm a Queen's Counsel. (Laughter)

Q. It is very heartening for us in Queensland to hear you say these things because we talk a great deal about the future of Queensland and think of oil and bauxite and so on, but I don't think half of us quite realise the tremendous contribution it will have to the future of Australia.

Q. Well, against this background of the future of Queensland and of Australia, so very very bright and so very promising and now starting to get under way, comes the whole question of Australian defence, the integrity and security of the country. Mr. Prime Minister, would you care to comment on this? Do you think Australia is regarded as a sort of Southern bastion of the American defence arc, or do you think Australia and America reciprocally have common security engagements, each as important, significant, perhaps indispensable for the other.

P.M. I think our relations with America must be regarded as reciprocal. It would never do if we underplayed our part in defence. I think we constantly have to revise what we are doing in the defence field. We are doing it now, at this very moment in the Cabinet, because we can't just leave it to the other fellow. If we want America to stand by us in a time of crisis, we must stand by America. It is as simple as that. You can't have one-way traffic on this matter and, really, I have been very upset by some of the isolationist tendencies which manifest themselves in some of this recent talk

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P.M. (Contd.) about a nuclear-free Southern Hemisphere; whether the Americans ought to be allowed to have a signalling station in the north-west of Australia. I think this is just old-fashioned isolationism, and quite inconsistent with our treaty arrangements with the United States.

Q. It is something that is giving the Australian people cause for very grave thought.

P.M. I am sure it is.

Q. In the course of your long and very distinguished service as Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert, you must have also seen great changes in the world of education.

P.M. Yes, I think I have. This is, of course, the evergreen topic. I even find myself being attacked for not being interested in it. I think it is a little ironical.

Q. I remember a speech you made at Queensland University....

P.M. But really it is phenomenal when I look back at my own schooldays, going to a country State school and then to a State School in Ballarat, going to a secondary school, going to a public school and then to a University, and think of the relatively primitive arrangements that existed then and the relatively small amount of money that was spent in State Budgets on education. I really thank heaven that things have changed so much. Of course, we can always spend more but the rate of expenditure today is, I think, quite exciting. And, of course, in the case of the universities which I have made rather my own special responsibility, well, when I spoke to Sir Keith Murray in England and said, "Would you come and be the Chairman of the Committee?" and finally stole him from Harold Macmillan who was then his Minister and he came out, I wasn't even game to tell the Treasury what I was doing. And we got the report and this, of course, ran into almost as many millions as people had been thinking in thousands, and each three years it doubles itself and I don't grudge a penny of it. But I think there is a terrific challenge to us in Australia. We are either going to become an increasingly highly-trained and well-educated people -- technologically, yes -- scientifically, yes -- culturally, in the humanities, perhaps, much more important than some people think. We are going to do this and become more and more influential and responsible in the world or we will become not only remote but second-rate and that's no good.

Q. Do you think that the fact that the system of education is very much bound up with each State is a weakness or a strength?

P.M. No, I don't. I think it is a strength. I don't believe in uniformity on these matters. I don't want to have a Commonwealth power over education. I don't want to have some centralised bureaucracy at Canberra deciding what is a good system for North Queensland and what's a good system for South Tasmania. Really, it doesn't work. That's no good. Education is something that you do to

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P.M. (Contd.) the individual, not to the mass. It is the individual that you are dealing with and therefore there must be a tremendous lot of individuality about State systems of education and regional systems of education. No, Heaven forbid that we should have uniformity in this.

Q. What is true there, Mr. Prime Minister, is true also in the general sense, the general administrative, executive and political sense.

P.M. Quite right. This is the case for Federalism. I'm a Federalist. I think it would be a bad thing if we had everything centralised. You know, my dear fellow, we have both met these fellows who say, "I believe in centralisation of power and decentralisation of administration." As you would say, Dean, "Hooey". (Laughter)

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, would you think that perhaps the Commonwealth Constitution is requiring some amendment in some particulars that may centralise some aspects of power more.

P.M. I think that there are some amendments that could very well be made to the Constitution but the difficult is to get any five people to agree on them.

Q. And certainly to carry a referendum?

P.M. Yes.

Q. What about the other method, Sir Robert, of the States under the appropriate section transferring powers? They are most reluctant to do that I would think.

P.M. Oh, we have had an almost unbroken failure on that front because if one State does, another State doesn't. You can't have a Federal power that limps along, operating in three States and not in three. But it is high time we got over this idea that the States are all separate bodies, that they are sovereign, because as you know, they are not sovereign. They exercise sovereign powers just as the poor old Commonwealth does. We all exercise sovereign powers in our sphere of them, what has been given to us. But we ought to preserve Federalism, but to cultivate the habit of thinking nationally a little more than we do. The two things are not irreconcilable.

Q. Do you think, Sir, that even though the States lost a great deal of their sovereignty once the power of direct taxation was substantially accumulated in the Commonwealth, that there is still a residue of sovereignty that is well worth preserving and is most valuable and salutary.

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P.M. Well, you know, this word "sovereignty" is rather abused. You don't have a sovereign State in a Federation. That was settled a hundred years ago. You have sovereignty in the community as a whole divided up, some parts of the sovereignty going to the central Parliament and some parts remaining with the States. This is the whole essence. Sovereignty lies in the nation. And I think that if we just begin to think that way a little and to be first of all keen on what happens to the nation, we can still be pretty strong Federalists. I am myself. I don't want to see unification in Australia. I am a Federalist, but I am also a Nationalist in the sense that I believe in this nation. Indeed I ought to. They have been trusting me with the business of looking after them for a long time.

Q. Do you think it will come off? Her Majesty The Queen will have a residence in Canberra? She will be resident here for say, two months of the year?

P.M. With very great respect to His Grace the Archbishop, I think this rather sweeping, a sort of bravura gesture, because an awful lot has to be worked out, you know. You can lay out a lot of money and have a residence and who lives in it except for a month when The Queen comes and what do you do with it? Oh no. All I say is that these proposals are well worthy of some study but they don't admit of a kerbstone reply.

Q. I shouldn't have thought it was practicable. If she did it to Australia, she would have to do it to New Zealand, she would have to do it to other parts of the Commonwealth. She would never be at home. So it does seem a little bit unrealistic and I am quite sure that we all feel that the recent visit of Her Majesty was an unbounded success and that Australia is as loyal to the Crown as ever before.

P.M. No doubt about it.

Q. I am sure you are basking in your Thistle.(Laughter)

P.M. Basking in a thistle is not a prospect that appeals to me. (Laughter)

DEAN BADDELEY : Well, I think on that rather humorous note, I am afraid we must draw our programme to an end. Mr. Prime Minister, will you please accept the gratitude of our viewers and listeners and the immense gratitude of this station and particularly of Messrs. Summers, Condon Byrne and myself for honouring us with this visit.

P.M. Thank you.

DEAN BADDELEY: We always feel it is a jolly good thing for Southerners to come and sniff some of Queensland's sun and the expansiveness and fun of it all and I hope that you will go away a little refreshed by your very short visit to Queensland. Thank you very much indeed for coming.