

CIVIC RECEPTION, CASINO, N.S.W.

20TH MAY, 1963

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. Mayor, Parliamentary Colleagues, Mr. President and Ladies and Gentlemen and Boys and Girls :

I don't mind starting by telling you that this is the biggest Civic Reception I ever had in my life. (Laughter) (Applause) It is not peculiar simply for that reason because when I looked at my programme this morning, I found - "Civic Reception. Four gentlemen would speak and the Prime Minister will make a brief reply." (Laughter) Although I have had a long experience, I was silly enough to believe it (Laughter) until I was put on warning, as you have just heard, by the previous speakers.

In fact I might tell you that at all sorts of civic receptions I am an old hand. You have heard a reference to my longevity in my present office. I don't like hearing these references to how long I've been Prime Minister because I remember vividly that eighteen years ago I was walking along a street in Perth and a few bright boys were trundling along in a car and they saw me walking along the street and you know what they said to me? "Cheer up, grandpa" (Laughter) And that was eighteen years ago. Now, in Melbourne, if they have a civic reception, you have a hundred carefully-chosen people; you go into a room, you stand on a little dais and speeches are made, I regret to say. In Sydney, in my experience, if they give you a civic reception, you stand near the door with the Lord Mayor and you shake hands with everybody and there are no speeches. This, I regard as the most civilised form of civic reception that I have so far encountered.

One other little preliminary remark I would like to make and that is that the Mayor was kind enough to produce a brochure - "Message from the Mayor of Casino" - I did get this in Canberra and I studied it and when I had finished reading it, Mr. Mayor, I wondered what I had done to deserve the honour of visiting such a remarkable place, (Laughter) (Applause) "The Hub of the North" - "The Crossroads of the North" - I've been acquiring the language ---- and high time too, as somebody said, because although I have flown over Casino and I have passed through Casino by train in those happy days when we were allowed to travel by train, I have never, in fact, been inside the town before, and I have been delighted with what I have seen.

You know, I think ladies and gentlemen, I ought to tell you so that there will be no misunderstanding, that I wasn't always a city slicker. I was born in the bush myself, in the wheat country up in the north-west of Victoria, and I grew up there and I know a little at first hand of the problems of the man who is on the land growing wheat. I don't profess to have anything else but acquired information and knowledge about other rural industries. But I would like to say this to you : Here I come into a country town, a sizable town - what, 8,000 - something of that order, in the town itself. It has a great district around it. It's the centre of four or five remarkably important primary industries. And yet it, as a town,

and its people as its citizens, are producing services for the man on the land, marketing facilities for the man on the land, a meatworks, a butter factory, all this kind of thing. You know, this is worth thinking about. It's commonplace, no doubt, to you, but it is a very important commonplace. It demonstrates the complete interdependence of the people who live in cities and towns and the people who carry on their productive labours on the land itself. Interdependence.

I remember when I was a small boy in the part of the country in Victoria that I have mentioned, I used to hear arguments - because people will argue wherever they are - and the first political arguments I ever heard about were between protection and free trade. This would be relatively early in the first decade of this century. If you were a protectionist you were the enemy of the man on the land and if you were a free trader you were the enemy of the man in the city. The arguments went on with immense ferocity, and as I subsequently came to understand, with singularly little intelligence. I have lived long enough to find how well understood it is by all the people in the Commonwealth Parliament and many hundreds of thousands of people outside of it, how well understood it is that there is an interdependence between manufacturing industries, tertiary industries, primary industries, because unless we all manage to hang together, we will, in the famous words of Lord Melbourne, hang separately.

Let me illustrate this a little. One of the great problems of government - I am not going to make a political speech, I don't think this is the occasion for it - but one of the great problems that any government in Australia has, or will have, is to reconcile the vital interests of the country with the need to expand the population by a large stream of migration and further, with the development of secondary industries, to employ an increasing population. Now this sounds very easy. It is, in fact, the most complex problem in the world. No government in the world anywhere can profess to have solved the problem completely. Shortly I shall find myself talking with the President of the United States. He won't have the complete answer to this matter. I will be talking to the new Prime Minister of Canada, who is an old friend of mine. He won't have the complete answer to this matter. This is infinitely difficult, and above all, when governments approach these problems, they must not just settle down to a dogma in their own mind; they must have flexible minds, they must be willing to make changes from time to time, so that they may preserve the balance of considerations that I have referred to.

Now let me pursue that a little further, even though I am stealing my thunder for tonight. We have, in Australia - and it is common to both parties - a policy of large migration into Australia which this year will mean a total of something over 125,000 migrants. Add that to our natural increase of population, and for years and years now the population of our country has been increasing rather more rapidly than the population of Japan. It is worth thinking about that. This has been a tremendous accretion of numbers. You can't bring people to Australia and dump them down and say, "Well, now, heaven help you." The state of the country must be such as to enable them to engage in gainful employment, in gainful occupation and establish themselves as citizens in our community and, for the overwhelming most part, they are very

willing to do that and have been very industrious and contributing people. But you can't employ more than a mere fraction of them on the land because in the great primary industries, the development of whose production has been, I think, quite outstanding, there has developed, particularly in some of the industries, an increasing mechanisation. The increased output, whether it is in beef or mutton or lamb or whatever it may be, has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of people working on the farms. You all know this to be true, and therefore if we are going to have employment for many thousands of migrants each year, then we must encourage the development of secondary industries and service and transport industries which can provide expanding opportunities for employment. Nobody really quarrels about that.

One point then arises. I must say to you, quite frankly, I never permit myself to lose sight of it. We are not to do these things irresponsibly so that we push up costs and prices because the man who suffers from increased costs and prices is the farmer himself and he can't pass them on. Somebody else may in a city, somebody else may running a service of some kind, but the man on the land, controlled as he is, directly or indirectly by the world's markets, must at all effort, prevent his costs from rising; have those costs prevented from rising, where possible, by government action. Now it is a source of some satisfaction to all of us that in the last two or three years the costs have not risen - I am taking the broad state of affairs in Australia. But unless governments continue to be careful, astute to watch this element, we could easily see costs rising, and rising against the man on the land. This is one matter which my distinguished colleague, John McEwen, the Minister for Trade, is discussing at this very moment in Geneva in the important trade talks that he has been having.

Can we by all the efforts in the world persuade the great industrial countries in the world - Great Britain, the United States, Germany and so on - can we persuade them that it is essential from their point of view that the countries which are large exporters of primary products should have stable and payable prices for the things they produce? This is not easy. Great Britain herself has had a policy of cheap food. One can understand it for she is overwhelmingly an exporter of manufactured goods. The United States has had extremely high tariffs, even against wool, as we know in Australia. The President of the United States, I think, has a fresh mind on this matter. He wants to negotiate with the world - and he has now been given power to do it by his Congress - to make flexible arrangements, to enter into commodity agreements with the rest of the world. This is what we are fighting for. Let us have a true, sound, international commodity agreement in relation to meat or wheat or butter or whatever it may be - sugar, as we go further north, and this would do more to stabilise the costs and profitability of primary industry than anything else that I can think of. Well, it is a hard job. My colleague is as capable as any man I know in the world in arguing that case (Applause) but I will lay odds that when he gets back in a fortnight's time, he will be looking pretty drawn because this is a tough assignment.

I mentioned that to you to illustrate the point that I was making. It is a good thing to be in a town like this and to be reminded of the fact that we all depend on each other, that not one of us in the town or out of it can live without the other. This is tremendously important and when you get an illustration of that in some country centre, it is vivid because it is close to you.

You know, ladies and gentlemen, it is a very interesting thing in the history of Australia, to notice how many people who have been significant in our public affairs have come, either from the country itself or country towns, from areas outside the great metropolis of whatever State it may be. If I could talk to everybody in Casino and talk to all the youngsters in Casino, I'd say, "Don't be in too much of a hurry to think that there are hardships in living in a place like this." You may ask, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in Sydney?" or "Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in Melbourne?" Forget about it. Some of the men whose names are household names to us were born in smaller places than this and lived in smaller places than this, but because they had fresh minds and imagination and close experience, they became significant people. I could refer to a dozen people of moment who came from quite small centres of population. There is a great privilege in living in a place like this. A wonderful privilege and I hope that nobody here, particularly the very young, will cease to understand that.

Now, Sir, you have been extraordinarily good to me. All sorts of very generous remarks have been made - I've even been tempted by you, Mr. Mayor, to say something about New Guinea. Well, if you don't mind, I do an awful lot of work at the weekends. I have to because I don't get much chance to do it when the House is sitting. But one job I was doing during this weekend was to prepare myself a statement on the review of Australian defence policy. In the course of that I will perhaps say a few things that will be of interest to you. Well, I won't say it until I get up in the House and deliver it - I don't know when - perhaps tomorrow. Depends on what time I get back tonight, or Wednesday, or conceivably Thursday.

Nor, Sir, I want to thank all of you who have come here this afternoon. As I tell you quite seriously, I have never had a civic reception like this before and if some of my critics are right in what they say, I'll never have one again. (Applause) At any rate, I have had the advantage of really a quite human audience of men, women - women have the divine faculty of not being hostile to you, except at a political meeting (Laughter) -- and children. I hope your prayers will be with me tonight when I have to address myself to the meatworks authorities of the State of New South Wales - hardbitten men who will be looking at me, expecting a message and seeking to convert me, if they need to. (Laughter)

I'll conclude by saying this. Flying up today from Canberra, we came low over Kempsey and circled low - 500 or 600 feet (that mustn't be used against us) - over Grafton. I realise that I did not see these floods at their worst because it was clear, looking down, from the watermarks and so on that the floods had subsided perceptibly. But there have been disastrous floods and they have the habit of occurring with almost dreadful regularity.

There is no doubt about it that a lot of heads will have to be put together, not just to consider this matter as an occasional exercise of some relief of distress, accept the flood as inevitable; we have to put our heads together to see how this can be prevented or mitigated on a permanent basis. (Applause) I won't say any more about that. It is a matter

that engages the sympathy of all of us, but I know that the local authorities in assembling their views - I understand that they are going to put it to the State administration which of course has the primary responsibility on such work, and if experience counts for anything - and I have had a good deal now - I anticipate that at some stage the State will say something to the Commonwealth. So I will wait until then. All I say at this time is that this is one of the problems in Australia which really ought not to be dealt with on a shin-plaster basis.

In fact when they tell me to get up and be excited because another rocket is going around the world or a capsule or something and that it costs a couple of hundred million pounds to put it up, I find myself saying in a dull and unimaginative fashion to myself, "A mere fraction of that year by year and I can solve most of the developmental problems of my own country." (Hear, hear, applause)

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