

SEVENTH ANNUAL MEATWORKS CONVENTION

HELD AT CASINO, N.S.W.

20th MAY, 1963

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

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen :

I speak here tonight under a certain disadvantage because I have to make a speech about the Seventh Annual Meatworks Convention and I am not a meatworker, nor indeed in any non-human sense do I drive any cattle (Laughter) and I am up here with an acknowledged Australian expert who has just spoken to you, but I will try to survive this handicap.

Before I begin to survive it, I must tell you that I looked at this pamphlet, somewhat ambiguously coloured orange on one side and yellow on the other (Laughter), to have a look at what you were going to discuss, and at once I felt at home - "Country Meatworks Effluent" (Laughter). Nothing could make a chap like me feel more at home instantly (Laughter). "The Tallow House" - that awakens echoes in my mind. Then, of course, remembering some of the debates in which I have taken a hand - "A Meat-cutting Demonstration" (Laughter). And remembering division lists and divisions in Parliament - "Belt Conveyors for Handling Meat" (Laughter). Really, I must say, Sir, that in the whole of my public life I have never known such superb tact exhibited well in advance in the selection of the topic.

Now, as you have already been told, and I will repeat it because that is one of the habits of my trade, this is your Seventh Annual Meatworks Convention and the sponsors, the Country Meatworks Association, are twenty-one today, so that this is at one and the same time, a relatively recent organisation and a relatively experienced one. You really stand in a very happy stage of your development and your work, and I know what your purposes are - I think I know. You want to bring people together from the various country meatworks all over the State, executive people and so on, and let them get to know each other and let them get to learn something from each other because we all have something to learn from other people, pooling our knowledge and improving our technical efficiency.

It is the improvement of technical efficiency that I want to talk to you about - not at undue length but for some little time. You will be surprised, looking at my youthful appearance, that I first went into Parliament in the State Parliament of Victoria thirty-five years ago. I just almost whisper that. Thirty-five years ago. And thirty-five years ago in my own State, the one thing that you could get a heated argument about instantly was inland killing establishments, because we had about three and they were all broke (Laughter), and whatever government was in office, they had to go along to it and say "What about a little subsidy?" I learned at that time that they were not financially successful because they didn't have a long enough killing season, they didn't have a sufficient variety of commodities to be handled, they had all the disabilities of long-distance transport to the principal markets, they had the problem of an extra handling.

So all the wise men - including myself, no doubt at that stage, who had ambitions to be wise - said, "This is hopeless. You cannot have establishments of this kind except at the main ports." Now, Sir, I think you will agree with me that this was almost a received doctrine at that time, thirty-five years ago - having a quick look at you - before the lifetime of a considerable number of you. And yet here you are celebrating your twenty-first anniversary and celebrating it in an atmosphere of high confidence and remarkable achievement. This, I think, deserves to have a chapter of its own in Australian history - the thing which was thought to be doomed a failure by sceptical people has now proved itself a magnificent success.

It hasn't done that by accident. Times have changed, of course. Our production is a long way up. There is a much greater through-put. Export markets have been opened in the most remarkable fashion. We have better markets at home and abroad and we, indeed, have much better transport than we had at the time that I am talking about. All these things have added together to produce the foundation for what you are doing, but only the foundation, because no system of this kind can succeed unless you have individuals in government, if you like, scientific people, experts in the service of government, individuals in the industry looking after the managerial side of the industry, and individuals who are in themselves producers in the industry. All these people must get together if you are to achieve success, the kind of success that you have so far obtained.

I want to elaborate that. One of our problems in Australia is that we have never quite got to understand the system of government under which we live. We know, don't we, that we have a Federal Constitution. There are some people who can remember the great battles in the 90's of the last century to introduce it - "one people, one flag, one destiny" - these old slogans come back into the mind. So we became 62 years ago, a nation - a nation which embraced within itself six separate States with limited powers, just as the new national Parliament had limited powers but of a wider, national character. And beneath those, we have had the local governing system in Australia, a system with a proud history and a remarkable record of service to the people.

But here we are - Commonwealth, State, local government, the individual. There are very many people to be found in Australia who, whatever the problem may be and whatever the power of the Commonwealth may be - it may be non-existent on that point - always speak first of going to the Commonwealth. This troubles me because I am a federalist. I believe in States. I believe in the distribution of power, but as I have had occasion to say before today, if we drift into the habit of mind of saying that everything is, in financial terms, a Commonwealth responsibility, then the day will come when the people will say, "Well, if the Commonwealth, the central government, the central parliament are to have all the financial responsibility, then perhaps they ought to have all power." This is a great danger, but it can happen. Therefore, I want to put it to you that if we are to have this federal system of ours working properly, we must begin by understanding the individual responsibility of each arm of government - what is its responsibility, what is its power? What is the power of the State? What is its responsibility? What is the power of some local authority or some statutory body? It sounds like a lawyer's exercise, but it isn't. It is the very essence of understanding our own country and its problem.

Of course, the answer to it is not to be standing off fighting about various things: "That's your business - that's my business - that's your business - that's my business." The answer is to establish a system of co-operation so that each of us, each form of government will bring its own power, its own authority to the common pool, in order to achieve a common social result. Now I hope you don't think I am being academic about this. I'm not. I've been trying to run a federal system for more years than anybody else in the world and this is the kind of thing that constantly comes up into my mind. We must have a system of co-operation.

Let us apply this, Mr. President, to this great organisation and the kind of thing that you are engaged in. You can't hope to produce the development in the meat industry that you want and that we want unless, year by year, there are people engaged in research in the laboratory, on the farm or wherever it may be, and unless there are other people who take the results of the scientific research and who take them to the man on the land who must put them into practice if the results are to be achieved.

Finally, we must have the man on the land willing to receive this information and to put it into effect. Now this sounds very simple. I venture to say it has proved in practice to be an amazingly difficult thing: scientific research, extension services and a willingness to receive them and to practice them.

Sir, I remember when I was a boy of about twelve, I suppose, being up in the bush in the north-west of Victoria in the wheat country in which at that time there was a deficiency of scientific knowledge and application - it was marginal country with a somewhat dubious rainfall. I remember going out as a youngster and standing behind a ring of good, solid farmers in the district. On a little mound in the middle was a notable agricultural scientist from the Victorian Department of Agriculture and he was standing there - he was a most practical chap - and he was talking to them about when they ought to burn their stubble and when they ought to harrow and that they would all do well in this particular sandy loam in that area by putting a hundredweight of super on to their ground. They looked at each other - I could see them. Little pitchers occasionally have long ears - I didn't miss much that day. You could almost hear them saying to each other, "Well, I've never done that before. What is this stuff, anyhow? And what does it cost?" The scientist was magnificent. He was practical and convincing. I was twelve years old. He made me understand it crystal-clear, but of course I didn't have a farm to put the super on. (Laughter) There were three farmers in the district who were first-class men, recognised to be the best farmers and they were persuaded but not completely. So they said, "Well, you know, it's a bit of an experiment. What did he say - a hundredweight. Well, we'll try a half a hundredweight." (Laughter) And they used half a hundredweight of super and in that country with that soil and that rainfall, when the harvest came in, they were all three bushels to the acre better off than their neighbours. Of course, the news got around and within three or four years, everybody was using super and not being frightfully afraid to use a hundredweight and some bold spirits were using a hundredweight and a half.

Now I merely tell you this little story because this is, in a small compass and in a small boy's memory, the

whole problem of extension services - somebody at the middle to discover it; somebody on the scientific side to be competent to analyse soils, to discover what the deficiencies are, to discover what aid must be given to that soil, and then other people who can take this precious, carefully-garnered scientific information and make it available to the people, and thirdly, the man on the land willing to receive it. You see, my little story has a moral in it, because most of them weren't willing to receive it. This calls for immense skill on the part of the man who is running the extension service. He must have a clear mind and a persuasive tongue and he must be backed by the research work done here or here or here.

Now, Sir, I venture to say that this has a complete application to the meat industry. I remember that before the war, I went over to England. I was then Attorney-General, but a sort of useful rouseabout chap, you see. I went a couple of times to argue about what? - to argue about meat, the export of meat to the United Kingdom and we gave an awful lot of attention in those days to freight advantages that the Argentines had - you know, shipping freights and distances of voyage and these were very important. But perhaps at that time we were not giving enough attention to how you were to improve your breeds of cattle and accelerate their periods of maturity, not only by the genetics of the cattle industry but by developing pastures, by producing appropriate legumes in particular parts of Australia. These things were almost in their embryonic stage. These are the things that have been worked on; these are the things that have produced such an enormous development in the meat industry that with the slightest push, you would supplant wheat and flour as the second-greatest export from Australia.

Sir, I think this is a great work and I wish it well. We have discussed it a great deal in my Cabinet with my colleagues, indeed we have one or two papers coming up in the lift at this very moment on it. I, myself, have had long discussions with the Chairman of the C.S.I.R.O., Sir Frederick White, who is tremendously keen on this, not only in connection with extension services in the primary industries but also in the secondary industries.

You know, it is a remarkable thing in our country, but we produce scientists of the first rank - we needn't be apologising for the native intelligence or the capacity for scholarship of the Australian young man or woman. This is quite clear. C.S.I.R.O. and other bodies of a corresponding kind conduct research into rural problems, into manufacturing problems. C.S.I.R.O. researches into wool, on which I opened a new institute that they have created in Geelong only the other day, operate both ways.

If wool is to be sold and if the woolgrower is to continue to have an expanding market at a competent price which is, of course, an entirely different matter - but if he is to have that, then wool must sell itself around the world. I know there will be people to sell it but it must sell itself, it must have a quality which commends it to the hundreds and hundreds of millions of people around the world who want to be clad and kept warm. Therefore the C.S.I.R.O. has done the most remarkable series of research jobs into shrinkage, into creasing, into moth-proofing, into all these things which affect the sale of wool and, happily in the case of that industry, they have in quite recent times been able to establish a complete communion of spirit and of understanding with the

wool industry. Sir William Gunn and Mr. Vines and these other leaders in this field are now absolutely in touch, mentally and physically, with the C.S.I.R.O., and the result is that the work they do in that field can go out.

But there are other people concerned. What about the manufacturer? He can't conduct research into wool. He may do it in a very trifling way, but he can't conduct the great researches into wool, into all these aspects of it, and therefore he is one of the people to whom the extension service must go. C.S.I.R.O. do a lot of industrial research work. They produce ideas. They find there is a little difficulty in bridging the gap between what happens in their labs. and what happens in the factory. Therefore, believe me, we all have to go out and sell this idea of extension of scientific research into the ultimate field of action, whether it is a factory, or a farm. This is, I think, of tremendous importance. And it is because, Sir, I know how warmly you agree with this general approach that I have ventured to say something about it to this great and very important convention tonight. Very important, because you come from all over the State. Very important because in the very nature of your occupation, you are in a position to influence the minds - every one of you - of scores of people and perhaps hundreds of people.

I am a species of Prime Minister and I have been there a long time and there are those who say that I am not improving with age (Laughter) and no doubt they are quite right. I wouldn't dare to dispute it, but at least I have been there long enough to have some pretty clear idea of the problems of my country. This is my country and it is yours and I want to help to solve its problems because, like you, or some of you, I have children and grandchildren and look to the future. Now, this being so, what do we do about all this. We have at the moment - I repeat something in a different form that I said this afternoon - in this country an enormous period of development going on. I am not going to make a party political speech - there are some who think it should do better and some who think it couldn't, but, anyhow, we have had an enormous period of development and we're having it and in the course of this time, thanks to the policy instituted by Mr. Calwell when he was Minister for Immigration, and pursued by us, we have had a great order of immigration into Australia. I saw this morning in the newspaper, which perhaps was right, (Laughter) that we have now had two million post-war migrants. All I know is that the rate of increase in our population in Australia is quite formidable, quite formidable. We have a bigger percentage net increase from both natural increase and immigration than Japan has at the present time and as I took the opportunity of saying to the American Congress on the last occasion that I was invited to address it, we are receiving more migrants into Australia, per thousand of our own existing population, than America did in the heyday of her immigration after the Civil War. It's worth remembering that.

You can't have this enormous increase in population, with all the demands that it sets up, without having certain results. One of them quite obviously is that if you are going to have migrants, they must have work to do, and if they are to have work to do, it is equally obvious that a mere fraction of them can hope to find it on the land, on farms, for reasons that I needn't discuss with you. Therefore, you must have manufacturing industries and tertiary industries, service, transport and the like. And all this is good. All this puts a tremendous pressure on the resources of the country. All of this means that

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you have to develop new things, whether they are a vast affair like the Snowy Mountains or whether they are beef roads in Queensland or coal-ports or something somewhere else. You must keep on developing the resources of the country, and this takes a lot of money and all of these things added together put a great pressure on the currency of the country. A great pressure.

Unless it is watched, it can become an inflationary pressure and produce a rise in costs all round. That's why every government has to say to itself, at least once a week - and indeed, I say it to myself more frequently - "Our international solvency depends on what we can sell to the world to match what we buy from the world." What we sell to the world, although there has been a very healthy increase in manufacturing exports, is still predominantly the product of the farm and the station. Because that is so, one of the conditions of our international solvency and with it our prospects of future development, is that the cost level should be kept as stable as possible.

Now, everybody will agree that this is a great problem. So it is. You don't solve that problem merely by thinking in terms of wages or arbitration systems. You will help to solve it very materially by increasing productivity which means that the overheads are spread over a much greater turnover; increasing efficiency in the means of production, increasing efficiency in the means of handling, because these are elements which counter cost increases and which enable these great industries to continue to stand on their own feet and look confidently to their own future.

And by that route again, I come back to what I was saying to you - efficiency - efficiency is not something you read about in a book, not something you necessarily achieve by practising yoga exercises in the morning - which I don't. (Laughter) Efficiency for this purpose is something which derives from increasing knowledge of the problems of the industry, increasing knowledge of the scientific aspects of the industry, whether they are biological or physical or whatever they may be; increasing efficiency in the treatment of the product, the handling of the product, in the marketing of the product.

Sir, I hope that nobody supposes that when your organisation has a convention people just come along because they are going to have a picnic and meet each other and have a good time - because I hope they will have all those - but I am perfectly certain behind all this is your determination that in spite of the eccentricities of politicians - and there are some occasionally (Laughter), you are firmly determined that your industry is going to become more effective in itself, more efficient in itself and therefore meet the problem of its growth and of its costs.

Sir, that is, I think, what I wanted to say to you. I think it is a great compliment to be asked to come up here. I'm going back afterwards, I hope. We have a Cabinet meeting in the morning. Life's just one long routine, you know, (Laughter) in politics, but if the boys look at me in the morning and say, "You know, P.M., you've got a bit of a gleam in the eye this morning," I will refer them to you (Laughter) and attribute all credit to you. Thank you very much for having listened to me, thank you very much for having invited me. I wish you well and, for once, I am going to remember what I stood up to do - I am going to declare the Convention open.
