

CIVIC RECEPTION, MANLY, N.S.W.

14th MARCH, 1964

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

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Wentworth and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I wouldn't want to describe this as a big moment because it is a rather truncated moment. I was given a programme this morning and I metaphorically have an eye on the clock. Now, might I just begin by thanking you and referring to one of the last observations made by Bill Wentworth. He described me rather rashly as the "P.P.M." (permanent Prime Minister). I would like to have you know that the wife of a former Governor-General of Australia, Lady Gowrie, always in writing a letter to my wife, addresses her as "Dear P.M.M." not P.P.M. but P.M.M. which means "Prime Minister's Missus" (Laughter) but then later on as it became more and more clear that I wasn't entirely my own master on these things, I think, Pat, she began to address you as "P.M." too. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, today - and I must mention this before I forget it - we have had three rather splendid events and some of them may not have been observed. One is that when we arrived over the road, we had the pipes. Now, I have a good deal of Scottish blood, my wife has a most diabolical mixture of Scottish and Irish blood, but whichever way it goes, it is always a great thrill to hear the pipes and to hear them played so well and I would like to say "thank you" to those who attended us in that way.

And there is a second thing about my clan, the Mingies clan if you care to address me properly. The clan colours are red and white and we have both been delighted to find that you have given us that compliment in the table decorations along here. The slogan, if I remember correctly, is "Geal 'us Dearg a suas" which is my approximation to Gaelic and it means, "Up with the white and red" (Laughter). In Melbourne they have always thought that that made me an absolute certainty to be a supporter of South Melbourne in the football (Laughter) but I never have been. Then when we walked in down below, we had all these rather dwarfed, anaemic-looking characters (Laughter) representing lifesaving clubs and that was a great compliment and a great pleasure.

As a matter of fact, I didn't realise until I was coming across here this morning from the airport that surfing, to put it no wider than that, is an extremely modern art. I thought that it went back to time immemorial in this greatest of all surfing States, but oh no, one of my Secretaries was able to tell me, as an old Sydneian, that it is within living memory that some lawless citizen, he thought a bank manager, plunged into the surf and was prosecuted (Laughter) because it was a breach of the law. Very interesting that this thing one always associates with Manly should have been of such modern growth.

He also told me, Sir, and you have repeated it, that this was once known as "The Village". Certainly, of all cities of this kind, it has a unique character and I was wondering with him as to why it had this unique character until I realised, as an ignorant man from Melbourne might be forgiven for not knowing, that it is within the memory of men of middle years that if you wanted to come by water you came by the ferry so that this was a relatively isolated community, though I am bound to say that the

first time I ever came here as an ordinary respectable citizen many years ago, and got off the ferry and went along the Corso and went over on to the beach and gazed on the people, I didn't observe as perhaps I should have this simple, unsophisticated, unworldly character which I now gather the citizens of Manly possess. (Laughter) Still even then, allowing for all that, it was great fun. As for the quarantine station, I must mention this.

I don't know very much about the quarantine station. I don't remember that in my current incumbency we have had any case put to us about the quarantine station. I don't recall it. You check up on it. You will get the same answer no doubt (Laughter) but any rate, I remember years ago - and not so many years ago at that - if I were in Sydney, I occasionally went out in a yacht with a very well-known Sydney man and we found our way around the harbour and I studied the first rudiments of keeping the boat half a point off the wind with great skill - I have always been indebted to him for teaching me that because, by jove, I've been keeping it half a point off the wind for a long time now politically (Laughter) (Applause) Well, we always arrived at lunch time and dropped anchor just near the quarantine station and even then I used to look at it and admire the utter solitude of the place, not a human being to be seen and, as far as I can tell, not a germ to be seen (Laughter) We ate our food and had a drink of something or other, then we up-anchored and went back to the other side of the harbour. And so, Sir, I was surprised to hear you say there is still a quarantine station. Has it been used of late? (Voice in background - "No") Well, think of the advantage. There you have a lovely bit of parkland with a few harmless old buildings on it and if you had your way, you would have all this thrown open and you would cover it with red-tiled roofs, wouldn't you? (Voice in background - "No") Oh, that's out. (Laughter) When you bring that next deputation, make a point of that, will you? (Laughter)

But, really, ladies and gentlemen, all I want to say to you on behalf of my wife and myself is that we are very grateful to you and we are very glad that in an official capacity we are able to come to this famous city. You know, one of the things that has been going on in the world which attracts the attention, I think, of a great number of thoughtful people, is that in the modern world, let me make it more narrow still, in the world since the war, since these great movements of national independence have been occurring right through Asia and through Africa and elsewhere - in this world there is a great disposition, which I think is a wrong disposition, to create self-government from the top. The disposition is to say to a country - it may be Ghana, it may be Kenya, it may be some other country - "You are now given independence", so we in effect pass an act of Parliament and we say, "There you are, now you create a Parliament and you are self-governing, independent and all other things will be added to you." There is a great disposition to say this, a great disposition to do it in many international bodies, to start at the top and say, "Create a National Assembly in this country" and then you have done the lot. It can work the future out as it likes.

It is worthwhile reflecting, Mr. Mayor, that that hasn't been our historic process, either in Great Britain or in Australia and if there are any people in the world who ought to understand Parliamentary self-government, it is the British because, after all, our ancestors invented it. But they didn't invent it from the top. They invented it from lower down in this structure of organisation, from the old shire moot, from the old "hundred" moots in England, from the little organisations of local government spreading out into some sort of county organisation and ultimately

by slow and painful degrees, over the course of centuries, into a Parliament which was the apex of this structure of self-government. But it is an apex which could not be sustained without the sub-structure, so that I don't believe that any State Parliament could be effective or even survive without a sub-structure of municipal government and I certainly don't believe that a national parliament and government could survive without a sub-structure. The whole thing about local government is not only that it attends to local affairs much more effectively than far-removed people could, but that it gives people experience in the art of self-government, it gives people the opportunity to be elected, not to some great office of profit but to an office of service, to an office in which they are responsible to people for a variety of matters and in which the people look to them and in which they look to the people and they come and they go and they may be voted out, they may be voted in, but this is part of our genius in the business of government. We take it for granted, but it has been completely ignored many many times in the last twenty years.

You take our responsibilities in New Guinea and Papua - not so remote from us, from you. There are plenty of people in this world who think that the one thing you have to do in Papua and New Guinea is to set up a parliament and then walk out and say, "Well, now, it is all yours. You are completely self-governing, you are independent. We leave you to it." That is not our tradition. For years now, we have been helping to create in those territories local governments, the equivalent of our municipalities, with a lot of the indigenous inhabitants getting experience, first in a primitive way and then in a more advanced way, in the government of a particular area for particular purposes, and the longer this goes on, the more completely do they come to understand local government, the more fit will they be to engage in general self-government through a parliament when that day comes. Now, Sir, I don't want to be tedious about this matter. This happens to be a proposition that I have uttered not only here but in many other parts of the world. I think there is a great lesson in it and that means that every time an Australian like myself has the opportunity of going into a municipality, of touching even lightly and casually the system of local municipal self-government, one is reminded that this is not only historically but functionally one of the great things in a democratic world.

Therefore, Sir, I use no mere form of words when I say that I am delighted to be here and I am honoured to be received by the Mayor. This is, of course, to us an elementary truth, but to many people it is completely unknown.

I wonder, Sir, if I might just before I conclude say this to you: that there are people who are so young as not to remember a time when I wasn't Prime Minister. I can remember it very well. (Laughter) The first contact I ever had with what we are pleased to call politics was when I was a small boy in the bush, living in a country shire in Victoria and my father was one of the shire councillors, and on shire council meeting day which was perhaps once a fortnight - it may have been once a month - in those days down a rather rough track from the town twenty miles further north came a horse and buggy, the wheels rattling over the gravel or the unbitumenised macadam, as the case might be. Anyhow, it came rattling and groaning, and my old man, having addressed my mother and the rest of us powerfully on the burning issue of the day in the Dimboola Shire Council about which our own heat was less than his, would mount up into the buggy with this other man and they disappeared into the night

for another twenty-four miles down the road to a town called Dimboola and there they met and conducted their high mysteries. And a couple of days later, they came back and shed each other. Now this was my first introduction to the business of government and when I look back on it and I think how primitive everything was, how rough and crude the roads were, how utterly limited were the facilities and I look back on those men who devoted a good deal of their time and no small fraction of their energy to going down, considering these fellows, arguing with the shire engineer, being instructed as every sensible councillor is by the shire clerk (Laughter), when I think of that, I think that wasn't a bad introduction to the art of government. It preserved one from having delusions, it made one understand that matters of less magnitude than may be engaged in by a parliament are still matters of great importance and that they are not to be neglected and it is on that foundation, vividly remembered by me that I think my earliest interest in political affairs arose.

I admit there was one other factor and that was that my father who ultimately went into the State Parliament of Victoria was, unlike me, greatly given to argument. (Laughter) He was willing to argue with anybody about anything and in those early days if you lived in the country, you were a free trader automatically. The old man wasn't. Having ascertained that all the people in the district were free traders, he became the highest protectionist my family has ever known. (Laughter) That was good experience too, wasn't it, because there is very frequently great virtue in being different.

Now, Sir, we must go elsewhere as you know. I want to thank you very much for what you have said and if I may say so to you, on behalf of both of us, it is clear that as was written in old times, the prayers of a righteous man avail much, (Laughter) because yours were in reality both well answered.

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