

BLOODHORSE BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

DINNER AT HOTEL AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY

23RD MARCH, 1964

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

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues at the Top Table, excluding Alister McMullin, and Gentlemen :

I am here under false pretences. Part of them is attributable to Alister McMullin and part of them to myself because this man McMullin who masquerades as the President of the Senate - and I must say in past experience, can always be relied on to vote the right way (Laughter) - has for some years said to me, "Why don't you come to the Bloodhorse Breeders' annual dinner?" and I've said, "Oh, Alister, you know, really with great respect I notoriously know nothing about it. Even my political opponents regard me as being rather inbred." (Laughter, applause) Though, as a matter of fact, I'm not; the lines are good. Then this time he came around in that disarming manner that people acquire in the Senate. After all, they have nothing else to do (Laughter), except to acquire a disarming manner. And he said, "Now, I wish you'd come. They are all friends of mine", which I thought was a pretty bold remark. (Laughter) and "You know, it will be an easy, informal evening." He gave me to understand, though I can't pin him to the words, that there would be no speeches, and I thought, well, I have always wanted to go to a dinner where there were no speeches. Of course, it turned out that he had deceived me. Well, I have put him in possession of my views on that matter.

But the other aspect in which I am here under false pretences is entirely due to me. If you wanted to produce as an exhibit tonight a man whose degree of ignorance was perfection (Laughter), then you've picked the right man. The Chairman was good enough to make a reference to the fact that my distinguished colleague, the Treasurer, knows something about this business and has been seen from time to time at great events. Well, back in 1940 I think it was, Harold Holt spoke to me and he said, "You know, old man, it's all right about this cricket business and so on. Don't you realise that the greatest cross-section of the community is to be found at a racecourse. You must go to Caulfield." (I think it was to the Cup) Well, there was an election somewhere in the offing, (Laughter) and I succumbed and I went, and it was very agreeable. We had a splendid lunch with the Committee and one of the oddities about me is that I always know all the members of the Committee though I don't know what is going on. In due course, the main event was to occur, and in the meantime, I met a very well known man in Melbourne who was a great friend of mine, and we wandered off across the lawn and stood near some rosebushes and got deep into conversation - no doubt, as I was a party to it, frightfully highbrow. And it happened that when the main race was being run, we were so deep in conversation that we had our backs to the track and there we were and the moment the race was over, Harold Holt came across to me and said, "I'm sorry, old man, never come again." (Laughter) What I have designed as something that would build us up for the next election, you've converted into a positive disaster." So there you are. This demonstrates what a hopeless exhibit I am, but still I am not unaccustomed to this. There are a few things in life that I know something about. Occasionally I get the opportunity of talking about them.

But most of the honorific things that have come to me have come in the most queer garb. For example, when I arrived in Sydney this afternoon, I was wearing a lovely green necktie with coats of

arms on it and somebody said, "What is that?" I said, "I would have you know that I am a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons." This just rocked them because since I was a small boy in the country and chopped the head off a chook occasionally, I have never performed any surgical operations whatever and now I am a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons. I am a physician. (Laughter) I can't heal even a break in the Party. (Laughter) (Applause) The last time we had a Prime Minister's Conference in London, I was taken away at the end of one afternoon and taken around, on due warning, to the Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians and I was made a Fellow of the College. I had to turn side on and explain that my position was somewhat ambiguous because they might not know whether I was there as a patient or as a practitioner (Laughter). If I were called on by an angry wife to build a dog kennel, the kennel would fall over within five minutes, but I am an architect. Understand this, gentlemen? This is one of the few joys of public life - to be a physician, a surgeon, a gynaecologist, an obstetrician, an architect, a builder - yes, I'm a builder - I'm a plumber, and therefore I am not unaccustomed to masquerading in a sort of false capacity and I hope that these fellows like young Maloney here tonight, or even young Bob Heffron, if he were here, will not use this against me because life is something of a masquerade.

But the one thing that I would like to say to you is this, that ignorant as I am, brutishly ignorant as I am of the fine points of your great enterprises, like all amateurs, I have my moments. In the old days when we travelled by train at the weekend to Melbourne and back on Sunday nights, I had two people on my staff and a then Chairman of Committees of the House of Representatives who sat in the same compartment and who read pink papers all the way from Albury to Melbourne. They all had lead pencils and they were, I understood, engaged in that rather esoteric exercise of studying form (Laughter) and by the time we were within twenty miles of Melbourne, they would turn to me hopefully and say, "Well, what do you think will win the main race today?" I would say, "Well, how would I know. Give me your papers." And I would look at them and by some metaphorical process of putting a pin in a piece of paper, I would say, "Oh, Dogsbody, of course, obviously will win today. Dogsbody is improving right along the line." And Dogsbody used to win. (Laughter) I used to receive the most tremendous accolades from my staff for this almost diabolical knowledge that I had of form.

I have lived a long time and I have been in politics a long time and I've been Prime Minister now for an almost deplorable amount of time and I had enough sense to know that when I had done that four times running, that was the time to retire (Laughter) and never again did I offer any advice.

But I have been talking tonight to Mr. Crowley about your great exercise. Very international. He has had people here from a number of Asian countries. I venture to believe, knowing some of the people concerned in it, that Australian racing authorities have done an enormous service to racing right round the world. (Applause) That is not to say that they would ever take me with them except as "Exhibit A", but really it is a fascinating thing in a world in which so many occasions of difference arise, so many brawls going on, either public or subdued, so many quarrels, so many well advertised differences of opinion, things that really make you feel anxious about the future of the world, that one of the great counterbalancing activities has been international sport in its various forms. (Applause) This is true. I hope I won't be thought to blaspheme if I refer to the fact that we have recently had a cricket team here from South Africa. Now, there have been all sorts of

arguments about South Africa. Nobody in Australia who saw them or met them will argue about the superb quality of the South African cricketers, their courtesy, their character. They were tremendous diplomatic representatives of their own country.
(Applause)

As you move around the world, as I do from time to time at your expense, once a year, sometimes twice a year, you really become astonished to realise how many of these sporting activities, games activities, are going on which tend to bring nations together. Sometimes they don't of course, sometimes there is a bit of a brawl and of course a brawl is something that is completely foreign to my nature. But by and large, all round the world there are more and more people who think of another country in terms of their own particular sport, whether it is racing, whether it's cricket, whether it's soccer, whether it's football, whatever it may be, and this is to me one of the great hopes of the world because I don't believe that we will ever solve international problems by cold reason. I don't think they will ever be solved by the people who write books and who conduct dialectical exercises. They will increasingly be solved if we understand each other, if people around the world get to understand that exciting truth that human beings are human beings wherever they may be (Applause) This is a tremendous and exciting thing. Whether it means that in some far-flung corner of the earth I have to encounter by accident some deplorable character like Bill Dovey and say, "How are you, Bill?" and he says "Have a look at this next race"; I have a look at it and wonder what on earth has happened. Whether it's that way or on a cricket field or on a football ground, whatever it may be, even in the field of lawn tennis (Laughter) if I may refer to such a non-controversial matter (Laughter), in all of these things, I believe that the world makes progress because the world gets to understand itself and the people of the world get to understand each other better. This is, I think, a matter of great moment.

And so, Sir, I hope you will allow me to make my apology. Everybody knows that almost on everything that matters I am completely ignorant. I never attend a businessmen's dinner, whether it is manufacturing or commerce without being given to understand that while I am an agreeable sort of fellow, it is a pity I don't understand what's going on in their particular world. But the longer I live and I have now lived a fair time - or an unfair time - the longer I live the more I realise that the proper study of mankind is man and that the proper answer to most of our problems is to know the other fellow, to understand the other fellow, because the moment you do that, reconciliation becomes so much easier.

Now of course, there are a lot of seriously-minded people in the world who regard sport as something a little below the salt. You musn't be too interested - in horse-racing - in cricket of something of that kind - this won't do, this lacks gravity. I think the world has had enough gravity, quite enough to carry it on for a long time. What the world needs is a growing sense of fun and happiness and it is because I feel that way that I was cajoled by Alister McMullin into coming and, as it turns out, if I may say so, have enjoyed myself enormously.
