

INAUGURATION OF LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

17TH OCTOBER, 1964

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

Sir :

At any rate, we have added a word to the vocabulary of the country, because when I knew I had to do something about this new Lake, I wondered what it was - open it, close it, name it - what was it to be? Inaugurate. (Laughter) I think that's lovely. I declare this lake duly inaugurated. (Applause)

While I am making that sweeping gesture, I am happy to say that I am delighted to be able to do it not only in the presence of those who have been named so far, but in the presence of my old friend, Sir John Butters, the first and true founder of this city. I am delighted that he is here. (Applause)

The creation of this lake is the result of a pretty long struggle. I remember being very much in favour of it in the late thirties, but I was a humble, miserable out-voted Attorney-General at that time and there were powerful forces arrayed against me because there was a golf course (Laughter) and all the Heads of all the Departments belonged to it, and they took a fine pride in making the then Prime Minister the President of the Club (Laughter) and I fought an uphill battle for a long time. But after the war when I had an opportunity in my own right, I began to come back to this project because I have always believed, and never more than today, that you can't have a great city unless you have water in it.

You look around the world and wonder to yourselves what London would be like without the Thames, or what Paris would be like without the Seine. Indeed I have always thought that part of the dullness of Berlin - if I may so speak - was due to the fact that it had nothing but a miserable trickle of water running through it. Water, water in all the great cities of the world, and I have looked forward to this moment - or to a recent moment - when the lake was filled.

Now, I'm like the Minister who has made a speech in which he has covered all the things that I really wanted to say, but I'm like him, I don't mind a few blemishes on this thing. I uttered imprecations about the mosquitoes, but they've gone - not because of my curses but because of the skill of the Commission. We all uttered curses about certain faint odours to which he has referred.

Now I find that it has become rather a hobby of people to say, "There was a big storm last week and a bit of the wall fell in." May I offer a heresy? I don't mind if a bit of the wall falls in. I would rather like to see a few more patches around this lake in which the wall had fallen in and in which the rushes had grown and in which the wild fowl might have their nests because I see this lake ultimately not as something purely artificial in its surrounding but as a haunt of birds, as a haunt of wild life. Indeed, I am optimistic enough to think the day will come when tourists coming through will be able to feed the swans and this will be quite a feature of the city. So I don't mind. Let the walls fall in as long as they don't do it completely.

Well, now, the achievement of this lake has been a long struggle. I wouldn't like to go into the details of it, but at least twice during its history, having been abroad, I found when I got back that evil men had been at work and that something was being taken away from us and I had to be the humble instrument of providence to restore it. This is of the essence, this is the heart of the city, and I hope it will be a heart that will be quietly beating, not noisy, not uproarious - a quietly beating, restful heart for the rest of our lives.

Now, of course, it has been beautifully done. Do let me say that to you if it needs to be said, because a lake is more than a sheet of water. You can have a sheet of water if you spend enough money on it anywhere I suppose around about, even in the middle of Australia, but it is what is around the sheet of water that helps to set the beauty of the lake, and all the work that has been done on the foreshores, in the surrounds of this lake, all the additions of beauty that have been made will, I think, put us under permanent debt to those who have been responsible for their design and their execution.

Now, Sir, there is just one other thing that I want to say. I think that this lake, as Mr. Anthony has said, is of tremendous significance to Canberra. It unites this city. Some people thought it would divide the city - on the contrary it has united the city because it has given a centre and a heart to the city, and that is a very good thing for Canberra.

But may I add that it is a very good thing for Australia because what is good for Canberra, what makes this capital city a more lovely and attractive city, what enables this city to have directed to it the attention of millions of Australians is very good not only for Canberra but for Australia, because let us face up to it, we have a natural instinct, haven't we, in this country of ours, for parochialism, for thinking in terms of States and of State loyalties.

Now these are admirable things, but the nation is the great element in Australia. It is a hard and constant battle to make people understand that the Commonwealth is not a foreign power, that the Commonwealth is something that is interwoven through the whole structure of Australia and through the hearts and lives of all its people. This, though we understand it, is not easily taught, not easily understood by people who haven't bothered to consider about it.

And here we are now, in a city which was a village when I first came here, some time ago, and now it is a city of 75,000 people. In due course it will be a city of half a million or of a million people. When I first came here, one almost had to apologise for having anything to do with Canberra - "That silly place". Earnest men, in club armchairs, would debate with each other what ought to be done about Canberra, most of the suggestions being rather offensive and some of them faintly obscene. (Laughter) This doesn't happen today. Every weekend, thousands of people come in. Wherever I go in Australia now, instead of hearing somebody bleat about

Canberra and the wicked expenditure of money in this place, I have ten times as many people now saying to me, "What a wonderful place Canberra is. My wife and I went up there recently" or "We took the children up there last long vacation. What a beautiful place it is."

There is a pride in Canberra being developed and that's tremendously important, not for us because we live in Canberra - some of us temporarily - this is not just a matter of pride for us. This is a matter of national importance, because more and more as people understand that this is the capital of the nation, a capital of which they may be proud, then more and more will they begin to realise instinctively that the nation is more important than any part of it, and that the nation is symbolised by the capital of the nation in this place. In other words, this I think is doing a great deal to create a genuine national spirit, and therefore this lake is good for you and me, good for this city, good for Australia, good for the spirit of the nation, a spirit that will last beyond any of the prejudices of today.

And so, Sir, I am particularly delighted to look across here and to be able to see the two bridges that were built, as one might say, on dry land, because the last thing I want to do is to start a controversy, because controversy is hostile to my nature (Laughter), but I venture to say that those are two of the finest buildings we have in the Federal Capital, and I compliment those who were responsible for them. And from now on, here it is, a centre of recreation, a lake that will give completeness, for example, to all the scholastic facilities that exist and will exist in this city, a lake that will complete the amenities of life even for the academic staffs of the university, who will be able to go out on the lake in future and forget all about politics (Laughter) and have a good time. Really, there is something here for all of us. All of us. Politicians, as Doug Anthony has just said, will be able to look at the lake with a new significance in future, all of us will be the better for having this lovely centre in this lovely city.

And so, as I think I said at the beginning, I have a great feeling of official privilege, a great feeling of unfeigned personal delight in declaring this lake to have been inaugurated by me a quarter of an hour ago.
