

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATIONS

OPENING OF LIBERAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS,  
CANBERRA

9TH NOVEMBER, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

I would like to say "thank you" to Phil McBride. He didn't refer to himself of course, but if you knew Phil McBride as closely as I have known him for many many years, you would know that he is a very hard man to dodge and the moment that he decided there ought to be a headquarters building, it was as good as done. True, he recruited all these other notable people to whom he has referred, but I know Phil and I am quite satisfied that but for him, we might not have achieved the result so soon. Always a difficult man to contradict. On the many occasions when I have in a small voice said, "Yes, Phil, I entirely agree with you," he has looked so taken aback that he has usually restated the proposition (Laughter) in case I had misunderstood it. He has drive, and of course he carries with him a reasonable amount of healthy South Australian bias. That's obvious from everything we have been told this morning. In fact, it explains why Tom Playford is here this morning, practically looking over the estate. (Laughter)

Now as we have been reminding ourselves in the last twenty-four hours, this is a national party, a national party that was made up originally out of a mass of fragments, a solid unified national party. Now that itself is a great achievement. And a national party is a party that has a national policy, and over these years we have been able to provide the country with policies which, open to attack as they may be in point of detail, have in the broad achieved great results for our country. So we had a national party with a national policy, and now we have what was lacking, a true national headquarters in the national city. This I think is a real landmark in the history of the party, a national headquarters.

You imagine it - in the past our national secretariat, our Federal secretariat has been scattered here and there, part of it in Sydney, part of it here in Canberra. Now it assembles here. It conducts its operations in research, study, in public relations, in achieving effective, close and natural contact with the Parliamentary party. These things are of tremendous importance and I want to say on behalf of my Parliamentary colleagues that we attach importance to the existence of this building and the presence of the Secretariat because we know that this will be a source of knowledge, a source of wisdom on many things, and that the levels of achievement in Parliament itself will thereby be raised. Now this is very good. Long distance communications are one thing, and failing all else, they do. But the close daily contact so that Members know what is going on in the mind of the Secretariat, and the Secretariat, importantly, knows what is going on in the mind of the Ministers, this is, I think, a tremendously important matter.

Now, I am not a controversial fellow and therefore I won't buy into an argument about the architecture. I think it's delightful, but then I am an old-fashioned reactionary Tory when it comes to architecture, and perhaps on some other matters for all I know. But it is a lovely building. It has charm; it reflects, I think, great skill in its architecture and magnificent achievement in its craftsmanship. The building.....

look around this room and you see the most astonishing craftsmanship which some people had begun to think no longer existed in a mass production period of time. So I like this building, and I defy the so-called modern architects who disagree. All I can say about some of them is that if they had their way, they have a free hand in the great cities of the world over the next fifty years, nobody will know what city he is in because they will all look the same (Laughter) and I like to believe in a little character in a city. Fancy taking away the character of London, for example, by putting up a series of glasshouses. It gives me the horrors. And therefore when we were told that we were to have a building that looked as this one does and didn't look like a dairy (Laughter), I was delighted and I still am.

Over there in the corner somewhere I think is, if not a storied urn, at least an animated bust, I believe. All I can say - because I am not going to anticipate what Sir William Anderson will be saying about it, all I can say about it is this that to the extent that it resembles me, it will be a sign and a warning to those who come after me. (Laughter) From that point of view, it will turn out to be a very useful addition to this room.

I am very greatly honoured that this room should have been named after me, very greatly honoured that I should have the opportunity of opening the building. I concur in everything that Sir Philip McBride said. I merely added a few words on my own account because that seems to be the thing to do. History will be made in this room. Year after year, decade after decade, good history will be made in this room. It must be good, otherwise the new generation will have failed to maintain their vision and I don't believe that they will. We are a party with an enormous destiny. That is a thing that has to be remembered - a creditable history. Twenty-one - but a great destiny, a great responsibility, and the existence of this building and the meeting of the people who will meet in this building, these things will make a contribution I am sure to our country, our greatly loved country which will be quite imperishable.

Sir, I have great pleasure in declaring the building open.

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