



OPENING OF ASSOCIATED CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE
BUILDING, BARTON, CANBERRA

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

18TH APRIL, 1967

Mr. President May, Mr. President of the Senate, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen :

Thank you, Mr. May, for the kind things you have said about the basis of co-operation which has at all times existed between the Commonwealth Government and this Chamber - or Associated Chambers of Commerce of Australia.

I would just like to make it clear that close though that association, and warm though that co-operation has been, no ulterior significance is to be drawn from the fact that you have established your building in close proximity to the headquarters of the Liberal Party.

You mentioned that there have been occasions - I am glad to hear you say they were rare occasions - when you found it necessary to disagree publicly with us, but of course there have been occasions when you found it necessary to disagree publicly with - I won't say "that rival party" - but that other very important Chamber - the Associated Chambers of Manufactures. And yet these days such is the pervasive and diversified influence to be found in the Australian economy, many members, I know, of this Chamber are also members of the other Chamber, and similarly in a sense, while from time to time you look upon us if not as natural enemies at least as a prevailing force to be contended with, so no doubt you entertain the same views to the other organisation.

But happily for Australia - and it is a feature of the Australian democracy - there is through all levels of the social and economic structure a degree of friendly co-operation which I think it would be difficult to match in any other country of the world. Undoubtedly our national strength, our national progress and our prosperity owe a great deal to that co-operation which we have been able to establish at all these levels. We, like you, have found value in the talks we hold from time to time, and for my part, I can assure you that these will be a continuing feature of our Administration. Certainly the talks have important influence upon the final economic judgments that we come to.

I congratulate you on the establishment here in Canberra of this fine building. It is, of itself of course, a tangible sign of the progress of Canberra, the recognition of Canberra as a firmly established national capital, and a sign also of your own confidence in the strength of your Associated Chambers and of the part you will play in the future of the nation.

The Chamber serves the nation well in a variety of ways. I pay public tribute to it, and as we see our own burgeoning economy and our own advancing nation progress, so we will anticipate the need in the future to perhaps an even greater extent than in the past of a body equipped as yours is, to service its members with information, to make public and private representations for them in official quarters from time to time, and to give articulate expression to the particular purposes for which the Chamber stands.

We can see in the years perhaps not so distantly ahead new problems, new opportunities arising for Australia. Traditionally over the past years, much of our trade has been with the United Kingdom. Through no desire of ours, but through the progress of economic events, that has been at least in percentage a declining factor in our trade and perhaps if Great Britain enters the European Common Market, there will be less emphasis in the future upon the trade here than in the past. I hope not, because it is our wish to maintain a continuing expansion of our trade with the United Kingdom and, indeed, with the other countries of Europe generally.

Whatever may be the result in that direction at least we can feel reasonably confident that if we turn our eyes northwards, there will be growing opportunities for Australia in the countries of Asia, and there will be new problems for men of commerce to face in their dealings with the economies and governments of these countries. We have only to consider the amazing development that has occurred in Australia's two-way trade with Japan over recent years to see an illustration of this. From a position shortly after the war when there was virtually no trade between us, Japan has now become, as you know, the largest purchaser in value of Australian exports. We are currently the third largest purchaser in value of Japanese goods. What is occurring and has already occurred in Japan may not be repeated on the same scale in the other countries of Asia, but certainly from my own recent journeys to that area over the last twelve months, I am convinced that we do face growing opportunities there.

On this most recent visit, for example, both in Taiwan, a country of thirteen million people, and Korea, a country of just on thirty million people, where they both possess annual growth rates ranking amongst the highest in the world, there are, I am sure, potentialities for development of Australian trade which have yet scarcely been scratched. In Korea I saw the largest fertiliser factory, as they claimed it, in Asia, and a petrol refining establishment. They told me they have already a consortium established for the creation of an iron and steel industry and would be looking for Australian iron ore in order to service the steel industry of that country. They were looking to us, they said, for plywood, since sources of plywood previously available to them were drying up. And these are only illustrations.

In Taiwan, there was a similar indication to us of a very substantial growth of their purchases of Australian raw materials and goods over the years ahead. Now these are growing economies, but the problems there may not necessarily be the same as those with which you have to contend in Europe.

There are the undeveloped countries of the world which, while their progress at the moment may seem slow, yet as more enlightened policies apply and more generous aid can be provided from the growing economies of more favoured countries, again there should be an expansion of demand which commerce will be able to put to its own advantage.

And so I think we can take a bright prospect of the future and, if only peace can be restored in this area of the world, that process will be greatly accelerated.

There are other developments which will occur to you. Australia, as one of the great trading nations of the world, relies very heavily upon transport by sea and to a growing extent by air, for the carriage of goods. We have been watching and doing what we have been able to encourage the new developments in the field of containerization of goods and the modernization of ports and greater efficiency in the handling of goods at the waterfront, and in these and other ways trying to assist you in the task of marketing your products abroad, or else importing the goods for sale here in Australia.

So from these few illustrations we can see not only good prospects ahead, but a continuing need for the kind of co-operation which we have already established. And I say in appreciation of what you have already been able to do with us that we look for that continued goodwill and teamwork in the years ahead, and in that spirit and with best wishes for the continuing growth and success of the Associated Chambers of Commerce ^{of} /Australia, I now officially declare this building open and shall have pleasure in unveiling a plaque.

Well, gentlemen, with best wishes from my Government to you all and may this building long continue to serve efficiently the purposes for which you have combined together.
