

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON HUMAN
RELATIONS

Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne



Opening Address by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

8TH MAY, 1967

The association of human relations and technology is vitally important. It is a supreme challenge for us, because all the wonders of science and technology cannot enable us to live by computers alone. A mechanical heart may keep some of us going in future years, but the creative ideas, the emotions and the impulses of man cannot be duplicated. Man remains the master, and it is with his task to see that the application of technology to the business of living is so ordered that the change it brings makes for peace, for prosperity, for happiness and for security.

The title of my address is Technology in the Service of the Nation, and I want to say something of what we are doing as a government, and what Australia is doing as a nation. I will select some samples, rather than attempt to open up the whole emporium of our national effort. The range of technology in the service of the nation is wide indeed, and we have achieved much by ourselves alone, through universities, and by partnerships with industry.

We live here in Australia in a free society, and my government believes firmly, as a philosophy, in free enterprise. It is opposed to the confining and inhibiting limitations of a socialist bureaucracy. The forces of change operate in many directions and at various levels. We are not so bound by doctrine that we cannot see virtue in government institutions, in government activities, but basically ours is a free enterprise philosophy. And these forces of change must be able to play freely.

With these principles in mind, we have been conscious as a government that, nevertheless, there are heavy responsibilities on us to ensure that the impact of technological change is made in the right places with benefit to all, and as far as that is humanly practicable, with hurt to none. We cannot discipline the fact of these changes in an absolute way, but we can give some direction to the course they take, and we can help to co-ordinate some of the national responses which have to follow.

The government has done much; it cannot and should not be expected to do everything. There is a matching responsibility on industry to make this technological revolution peaceful and productive. The government can take limited initiatives in education, in research, in the promotion of essential partnerships with others, in the exchange of knowledge, and in the marshalling of capital. Beyond that it is essential for industry to play a full part, and this is one that must enlarge rapidly in the year ahead.

Australia has a small population as great countries go, and we do not claim yet to be a great country, although in some directions we not only aspire to greatness, but we feel that we have achieved greatness. We have a vast continent with this small population, a continent approximately the size of the United States, if the Alaskans will excuse me once again for leaving them out of the picture. And Australia should, if we are to take the long-sighted view, broad and statesmanlike view, we should welcome

automation with open arms, because it is through technological improvement, through automation, that we can enable this small population to achieve things which otherwise would only be possible in a country with many times the numbers that we possess. And we have not waited for others to do this job for us.

We are not a spendthrift nation, we devote nearly 30 per cent of our gross national product to capital investment. In a guest of honour broadcast during his visit to Australia, Admiral McDonald, the United States Chief of Naval Operations, Australia, pointed out that our capital investment, as a proportion of our gross national product, is more than one and a half times the rate of investment in the United States of America, or of Great Britain. We rank, I believe, second only to Japan.

We have something of a dilemma here, because we are at the same time proceeding with a programme of large scale immigration, and if immigration is to be successful, then you must have job opportunities quickly and plentifully available for those whom you attract to the country. But I think it says something for the skill with which these matters have been handled - and I am not speaking now merely of governments, but of the community as a whole - that throughout this quite lengthy period, running now to just on twenty years of large-scale immigration, Australia has been able to maintain a level of sustained high employment which is not surpassed, I believe, by any other country in the world.

We have achieved this to a degree as a result of the contact and co-operation which Australian governments have been able to maintain with industry. We do conduct regular consultations on a basis of consultation early in the year, and then just before the Budget session, with representative spokesmen of industry. But these are quite apart from the multitude of ad hoc consultations that go on through the year. We have regular discussions, in particular through the Department of Labour and National Service, with the organised trade union movement.

And I think that assisting all of this is the Australian temperament and character. We, as visitors to Australia will find, a friendly people. We like to get on well with others, we like to get on well with each other. And in particular, we like to do what we can for those who are finding the going tough, or who have their problems, in our community. This has contributed enormously to the success of the immigration programme.

We have each year a Citizenship Convention, to which we invite representatives from all sections of the community life; not merely trade and industry, and the trade union movement, but social organisations, religious bodies, the whole gamut virtually, of the Australian community existence. And through the year, quite apart from these regular gatherings, which occur annually, there is the work of the Good Neighbour movement in each community, helping us to assimilate the new settlers who come to live with us.

PARTNERSHIPS

So far as government is concerned, we try to maintain a three-way partnership, with management and with those whom they employ. The relationships I believe are good, and are steadily improving. For particular problems which arise, we do have certain ad hoc groups, which are able to take charge of the situation in respect of some innovation, some technological innovation, which could otherwise be disruptive, both of good relations and the employment situation.

We have been able to go through these processes of change with remarkably little dislocation. In my own time as Minister for Labour, the considerable mechanisation that went on in the coal-mining industry produced a displacement of labour, but the problems were minimised by consultation with owners and miners, and the industry has had a better industrial record since those days, than it had before.

We have other examples which perhaps I could mention; the extensive use of computers, in particular in the insurance industry. The displacement of clerical labour which this has produced in some areas has gone by with again remarkably little dislocation. Automatic control mechanisms in important industries, such as the steel industries, the petroleum industry; the growing degree of mechanisation and automation in the automotive industries; the significant part these modern processes are playing in the development of our oil resources and will be, with our natural gas; the problem with which we are grappling at the present time of containerisation on the waterfront; the introduction of mechanical cane cutting, and in particular of bulk sugar loading in Queensland, which I recall vividly from my own days as Minister, and which confronted us with problems of the re-absorption of labour displaced on the waterfront.

All these are examples of technological change, and the way in which we, with our small population, are trying to make the most in terms of production of the resources we have.

We have shown our concern for human relations in industry in a considerable variety of ways. We played a prominent part, for example, in the establishment of the Duke of Edinburgh Study Conference on industrial relations, and the next conference is to be held in Australia in 1968. When it came to the establishment of Churchill Scholarships, Australia proved to be the highest contributor per capita of any country invited to join in that particular scheme.

There has always been much emphasis given to industrial relations in Australia. It has had a political content, of course, because both sides of politics have given a great deal of their attention to industrial relations issues, but quite apart from that there has been this feeling that the worker in his job is entitled from the egalitarian approach that Australians bring to their community life, a fair deal, a fair go, and he enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world as a result.

Our arbitration system involved us in a good deal of pioneering in this field. It had its critics; those who preferred collective bargaining; those who felt that management could be best left to work out its problems with its own employees, and while we do not ignore the important place which management must still play in direct personal industrial relations with those whom it engages, the Australian arbitration system has brought confidence to the wage-earner that his conditions would be reasonable, and that there would be a fair remuneration for the contribution he makes to the industry in which he is involved.

We have been gratified to find that, increasingly over recent years, there have been studies made from the United Kingdom and the United States of the way in which we handle these matters. I could speak also of the concern we have exhibited to ensure that those who have special problems, the disabled, the returned servicemen, the children of servicemen who are given such generous and thoughtful treatment by Legacy and the Returned

Soldiers' League - all these are illustrations of the emphasis which we place in Australia upon good human relations, and then in turn relate those to the problems of our technology.

It has been said that we are missing the bus in the technological sense, that we are depending too much on imported knowledge. This simply is not true. My government has cast a very wide net indeed here and in all the significant centres of technological activity abroad, to ensure that we are up to date in our knowledge. It is right to say, of course, that we have imported know-how from other countries. But is this wrong? Does it not make good sense, while going on as best we can within the limits of our own resources with research and development activity, that we should turn to the very much more extensive research of which countries with very much larger populations, the United States, with 193 millions, the United Kingdom, with more than 50 millions, Japan getting up to the 90 million mark, or thereabouts, that they are able to make in their own industries?

Australia has benefited from this activity, which others have carried out. It makes sense for us to learn all we can from others, and to use the superior skills that are thus produced, where they can be made available for us. We are acquiring new skills all the time, and building up a formidable sum of experience. The benefit of this experience can be rated in terms of the per capita production measured by our gross national product. For example, India, with 42 times our population, can point to only twice the size of our gross national product; Indonesia, with nine times our population, has only a third of Australia's gross national product, and this, of course, is one of the principal factors why Australia counts as a trading nation, and a factor in the world, despite the comparative smallness of our population.

We have tariffs to protect Australian industry, but we do not propose to impose tariffs on ideas. A nation which is wrapped up in itself makes a very small parcel indeed. That is why, as I said earlier, we welcome the results, fruits of research and better techniques which come to us from other countries. We are, in relation to our population and resources, doing well, and man for man, project for project, we believe we are measuring up in skills and knowledge to the efforts of other countries of greater size and greater wealth.

This does not mean that we cannot do more, and I do not wish to introduce any note of complacency. We must do more; the pace quickens, and the demands on us as one of the affluent societies must increase as we live more intimately with our Asian and our Pacific environment.

THE NATIONAL RECORD

Let us look briefly at what we are doing. Take education. The roots of our technological activity are, of course, in our educational system. The States are primarily responsible for education, but the Commonwealth Government is taking an increasing interest and giving greater financial help in areas which are complementary to their systems.

We have recognised the significance of education in the technological age, by appointing a Minister for Education and Science. He is a member of the Cabinet, and he directs a newly-created department but, of course, our efforts began long before that.

We have, over a period of years, encouraged and aided the States to build new universities, some like Monash in this city with a bias towards technology. If I could give you just a few examples. Eleven colleges of advanced education received interim capital grants up to December 31st, 1966. In the 1967-69 triennium, 30 colleges of advanced education are to receive capital and recurrent grants, and in addition, 12 are to receive recurrent grants only. Altogether 163 technical colleges have received grants under the Federal Government scheme.

Practically every State secondary school in Australia in which science is taught has received some science teaching apparatus under the Federal Government scheme. At 225 State schools throughout Australia science laboratories are either completed or under construction. So far, 400 independent schools have benefited from the scheme, the degree of benefit varying from the building of multi laboratory science blocks, to the provision of apparatus for one laboratory.

We have made possible the introduction of a new area of tertiary education, complementary to our universities, and are helping the States to develop this system so that there is a general extension of standards and greater opportunities for young people to have higher education. We have given Federal aid to science blocks in denominational schools, and increased the number of scholarships for secondary students, with special provision for technological students. We have increased taxation concessions in the education field. These have a significant bearing on the end product of technological development, and are vital to the further research which has to be undertaken.

In the field of research, through the Ministry of Supply, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and other agencies are active in many fields, and getting sound results. I do not think the average Australian realises how much we have done. In recent months, we have taken a fresh look at the needs of industry, to see where we could help, and the government recently announced an incentive scheme for financial help in research by companies in the manufacturing and mining industries. This, we felt, is the best way to give top management the encouragement to test new ideas, and to give full rein to the enquiring minds of our young technologists in industry.

Recently I opened a new tracking station at Honeysuckle Creek, not far from Canberra. This station is one of the latest examples of the application of our technological skills, in the assembly of a highly complicated apparatus needed for tracking satellites in outer space. It was specially established for the United States, and in co-operation with them, as part of the facilities required to service the planned attempt to land men on the moon in the 1970's.

It may interest you to know that on the Apollo project, there are three stations which will be assisting in this tracking; one in the United States, one in Spain, and the third here in Australia. Altogether this is the sixth tracking station here in Australia, and it is just ten years since we established the first of them, during the 1957 international geophysical year.

They are all operating now. They are to be found at Carnarvon, in Western Australia, Cooby Creek in Queensland, Woomera in South Australia, and at Tidbinbilla, Ororral Valley, and Honeysuckle Creek in the Australian Capital Territory. These stations make up the largest complex outside the United States to be directly involved in that country's space programme.

And quite apart from the practical function they perform in space flights, they represent a place for us in modern technology in an advanced form. We get a rub-off, as so many of you around this room will know, in specialist technical fields. They reflect our capacity to hold our own in skills and knowledge with nations greater in wealth and size.

More and more men and women are being trained in Australia to handle complicated equipment associated with space technology, and their experience is spreading through the services of the Government, as well as through industry.

We have already had, for example, the first telecast between Britain and Australia by way of satellites in outer space, and by the same process, will see the events of Australia's special day at Canada's Centenary Celebrations in Montreal next month. In Australia today, 95 per cent of the nation's population is within reach of telecasting.

We have our scientists and explorers in the Antarctic and they have kept us well in the van of research and development in that area. We have established a place in the front rank of world astronomy, and we are adding to the facilities we already have at Mount Stromlo and at the Radio Telescope Centre at Parkes by deciding in partnership with Britain to set up a new 150 inch optical telescope at Siding Springs in New South Wales. This will be the largest in the southern hemisphere and the second largest in the world.

When I run through lists of these achievements - and these are just a few examples - one can talk of what we are doing at Woomera with the development of the special weapons there, like Ikara and Malkara and others of that sort - I do not find myself counting any years that the locust has eaten. But there is more to be done.

If we leave space for a moment, and the other examples I have given, and go to the other extreme, that is to the wealth of our natural resources in the hard earth of this ancient continent, we find that here too the technologists have blazed new trails in the past decade. This is where we have had some of our most spectacular successes in national development, and inevitably the demand for skilled manpower has increased heavily.

You all know of the discoveries that have been made in the iron ore country in the west and north west of the continent, and of the millions of tons which lie there to be exploited to enrich the nation, and of the bauxite and manganese that is now being taken from the gulf country. In these remote areas, all the skills of the scientists and technologists are required, because the areas are thirsty lands, uninhabited for the most part, and lacking ports and sources of fuel and power.

Yet the challenge has been taken up, settlements are developing, and now ports are being established on barren coasts. The petroleum search in this country which began in earnest twenty years ago, is having its first successes. We now have commercial oilfields in Queensland and Western Australia, and while they provide only a fraction of our needs, they may well be seen as signposts to further discoveries.

In recent years too, there have been some important inland gas strikes in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. Last year we had the dramatic discovery of substantial gas

flows from the three offshore wells on the Gippsland shelf in Victoria. This has opened up a new phase in petroleum exploration, and has provided a new challenge to the technologists to handle the complicated task of extracting gas from below the seas and bringing it to your home and mine, and to the industries of this country.

The more I look at these events, and over the wide sweep of national development, the more I realise that the needs for the future are not only in skilled manpower and in sane co-operative human industrial relations, but in capital requirements, in new techniques and at all levels of management, if we are to secure maximum results.

The extent to which overseas capital is being applied to our affairs is a subject of regular and continuing controversy. It is only fair to say, though, that the initial impetus to the development of some of our new-found mineral resources would not have come, had Australian industry not had access to substantial quantities of overseas capital. Just on 90 per cent, certainly 85 to 90 per cent of our investment in Australia, comes from our own sources, and that extra 10 to 15 per cent has had a great value for us.

We have got off to a good start, but it is important to spell out once again some principles which the government regards as of first importance. I could summarise them best this way.

We will continue to need overseas capital, and we will need to have it in a regular and substantial way. Just on 90 per cent of it has come to us from the United Kingdom and the United States, and both those countries at the present time have found it necessary to impose some restraints on their capital inflow. We have seen this reflected in a good trading year in the drop in our overseas reserves, because the capital inflow has fallen sharply below that of the year before.

We have an obligation as a government, and you have an obligation as leaders in industry, to ensure that where practicable an Australian equity is established. And I am glad to say that this attitude of ours is becoming increasingly appreciated by those who bring their capital, their skills, and accept the hazards of investment here in Australia.

In the last few weeks the government has announced a plan, drawn up in association with the private banks, to help industry finance major capital works. Most of the capital will be generated within Australia. Overseas capital will also have its own useful place. This is one of the measures which the government has been considering for a long time, to ensure that we have sufficient funds to develop our resources and to have an Australian participation in their ownership.

The government certainly does not want to discourage overseas capital, but it is deeply conscious of the anxieties that have been expressed in the past, and my Government will do what needs to be done to ensure that there is no wastage of an Australian entitlement to our vast natural resources.

THREE POINTS TO NOTE

There are some points I would like to make by way of conclusion, which I feel are important, as you discuss the application of technological changes to our society.

The first is the need to know. By this I mean that a government's readiness to help in the technological field and to assist in the translation of new methods into our society, can be effective only if governments and industry are clear about what they want to do and where they are going.

It is, for instance, no good giving lip service to our drive for new markets, unless exporters are ready to try their products in these markets, instead of waiting until the other fellow has opened the door. The same applies in the technological field.

The second point is readiness to venture. It is not in anybody's interest to hold back until a government umbrella is spread over a new enterprise to protect it from all risk. By the same token, I think that the Australian entrepreneur can take some stimulus and encouragement from the way in which others with capital to invest from overseas have taken on difficult projects, even with hazardous or dubious prospects, and shown that there are opportunities here and if we show the enterprise to take advantage of them.

I do not say that the Government never opens an umbrella over industry. It has very special responsibilities. For example, in the preservation of an effective tariff system. It also has responsibilities for subsidies in specific areas, and for wide-ranging incentives, not only by direct grants, but by taxation concessions and other methods. But there remains always a large area of self help, and this is not only an industry responsibility, but an individual responsibility.

The third point is the level and competence of top management and this goes for governments, mine included, as well as for industry. There are unexploited opportunities here and I am glad that this is implied in your selection of subjects for discussion. There is a growing sophistication in our industry; this is amply demonstrated in so many ways and it is important that top management should have the appropriate qualifications to deal with it.

I feel our universities and our industrialists can, together, do a great deal to secure this objective. It would be fatal to all we seek to do if there were a "brain drain" from this country at a time when we need the skills of the technologists and the competence of management most. Fortunately, at the present time Australia is attracting more scientists than she is losing.

There is one final word. I have recently been in Asia for the third time as Prime Minister. This is our region of special interest and for more than a quarter of a century we have been giving technical aid both in manpower and materials to the underdeveloped countries. Under the Colombo Plan we have given, in technical assistance (as distinct from economic assistance), something like \$40 million to African and Asian countries. Through SEATO we have given over \$14 million, mainly in the technical field, and through a number of other agencies, bilateral and multilateral, we have contributed several more millions.

This may not be large when matched against the total need but this direct help is continuing and increasing and stands as a constant reminder that our technological assets are sufficiently high for us to be able to export them to needy countries. Is there any better bridge between humanity and technology, than this? Is there any better service to the nation?
