



VISIT TO AUSTRALIA BY THE PRESIDENT OF
ITALY, SIGNOR GIUSEPPE SARAGAT

SPEECH OF WELCOME BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR HAROLD
HOLT AT PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON,
CANBERRA, A. C. T.

26TH SEPTEMBER, 1967

President Saragat, the President of the Senate, the Speaker, Ministerial Colleagues, Your Excellencies, Leader of the Opposition, Senators, Members and other Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It gives me very great pleasure, as I am sure it does all of you, to be able to join in this welcome here today to the President of the Republic of Italy.

This is a notable occasion in the life of this Parliament and indeed it is an historic occasion for the Australian people. This is the first time that we have been visited by a European Head of State. I don't, of course, exclude Her Majesty The Queen because Australia is part of her home, and so we don't regard that as an official visit of this sort. But this is, I repeat, the first time that the Head of State of a European country has visited us, and it is particularly felicitous that this visit should be made by the Head of State of a country with which Australia has such warm, friendly relations and which is of so much significance to us in relation to the building of our nation and in the trade from the Commonwealth to the rest of the world.

President Saragat is one of the great figures of post-war Europe. Being President of the Republic of Italy is a significant and eminent achievement in itself, but we honour him because as we study his record over the years we find an outstanding degree of courage and of wisdom, of tolerance and of adherence to democratic principles. Whoever holds the office of President of the Republic of Italy has a considerable influence extending beyond the formal limits of his political power, and the President's political record suggests that he will use his undoubted influence for the benefit of Italian democracy, for the cause of international co-operation, for peace and international co-operation for economic progress.

We welcome also Signor Fanfani who would have achieved distinction in his own right if he had not done anything else in the world but be an outstanding scholar. But in the company of Parliamentarians, perhaps what will strike us as even more impressive is that on no less than four occasions he has held the office of Prime Minister of his country. I question whether we could match that in the life of our Federation here in Australia.

I may say, Mr President, that studying the arrangements which apply in your Parliament, I found many things to envy, although one or two which I am glad we have avoided. I envy the fact that you have in your Parliament a five-year term for Members. The Australian electorate will not give us this period of grace, and I notice in New Zealand there has recently been a referendum which has destroyed any prospect of an extended term in that country.

But they also have a provision in Italy that you are not eligible to

enter the Parliament until you have attained the age of twenty-five years. I pointed this disability out to Andrew Jones a little earlier in the day! On the other hand I gather that the Minister of the Government doesn't merely have to explain his bills to one House of the Parliament - he must explain it in person to both Houses of the Parliament, and that is an amendment which we wouldn't adopt in a hurry in this country.

Our welcome extends also Senator Oliva and other members of the President's party.

Italy has for this country a very special significance in a variety of directions. There is the contribution made through the centuries to civilisation by the peoples of Italy. Eternal Rome means eternal Rome not only in Italy itself - Rome the Eternal City is Rome the Eternal City all around the world where men and women are sufficiently educated to know something of its significance. And it has a great significance for us.

There were 170,000 people last year who visited Italy from Australia. They weren't all Italians who had settled here returning home for a visit to the land of their birth. Many of them were Australians, attracted by the beauty, the cultural heritage, the richness of Rome and of Italy itself, and we are in your debt for the contribution you have made to civilisation, Western civilisation in particular and to the way of life we enjoy in our country.

But we don't speak of these things in terms of the grandeur of the past because over modern times the people of Italy have demonstrated vigorously a lively, inventive, enterprising, innovating spirit which still burns brightly within them. And you have contributed in these ways in modern times - what we eat, what we wear, what we look at, what we drive in, what we fly in - so many of the aspects of modern, civilised existence.

Perhaps in a parliamentary setting we should acknowledge the very early recognition given by the Italian people to the importance of Parliament. I think that the initial SPQR - Senatus Populus Que Romanus - the Senate and the Roman people which dates right back to the earliest period of Roman and Italian history, suggests the recognition of the importance of democratic institutions and the place that the people played in the life of the government .

The President will be welcome to all Australians because we feel our own sense of gratitude for the arrival here of some 300,000 settlers from your country since 1945, and I am glad to say that they have produced, Mr President, between them some 160,000 children since that time!

After the British inflow, Italian migration is actually the largest migratory movement in the history of this country. It didn't begin just after the war. It began about 120 years ago, and many of the Italian people came to us from the Southern part of Italy and from Sicily. They found Australia as do the migrant settlers of today - a land of opportunity, with political and economic stability conducive to rapid national development. They find an environment in which they can breathe freely, where their freedom is assured to them and where there is ample scope for their own initiative.

Australia's Italian settlers and their children now number - and this may interest our Italian visitors - about the same as the citizens of Florence, Bologna or Venice, which range from Italy's seventh to ninth cities. The Italians who have come here have settled, prospered and become part of our way of life. They are making valuable contributions across the entire continent to industry, trade and development : the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and to our community and cultural life.

It is evident, as you will have gathered from the warmth of the welcome you received yesterday that they preserve a deep affection for Italy, a pride in Australia and its achievements. They love the land of their birth and they have an affection for the land of their adoption, and it is fortunate and certainly felicitous that the new Agreement on Migration will be announced in the course of your visit, and we are able to report the establishment, as evidence of our growing relationship - of a new consulate in Milan.

But it is not only because of the personal ties that I refer to that we have warm links with Italy. Both countries rank high among the trading nations of the world. You in Italy rank eighth, we in Australia twelfth. Our exports to your country have increased rapidly over recent years. Our purchases from Italy have trebled over the past ten years from \$12 million to \$53 million. And I have already mentioned the number of Australians who have visited you in the course of the year and who find Italy a strongly attractive country from the point of view of their interests.

Our Governments consult at the United Nations on matters of common interest to the free world. You are a member of the European Launcher Development Organisation for which we have the privilege of conducting the operations at our own range at Woomera.

Your journey, Mr President, has taken you to three countries already which have derived their democratic institutions from British Parliamentary democracy, countries which nourish the principles of national liberty and personal freedom. You will be able to assess for yourself the value of the contribution which Canada, the United States and Australia are making to a better world order, the cause of peace and the growth of international trade.

Our people, you will have observed, are primarily of European extraction, but we have in Australia a special significance for the free world from our geographical position, and our growing relationships with the countries of Asia. Even putting it in the material terms of trade, this has grown since the 1950's from 15 to 40 per cent. of our total trade.

But the success of our immigration programme is not to be measured by numbers alone or the additions that are made to our country's work force. We measure it, as I think you would wish us to measure it, by the happiness, the prosperity, the progress that our migrants find here in Australia, and in this as in other ways, we believe Italian settlement has been among the most successful of all the nationalities to whom we have given a welcome to this country, and there are more than forty countries represented in Australia.

Your stay, Mr President, will be brief in Australia. You will be visiting Melbourne and Sydney before you leave us on Sunday, and as you fly over much of the country during your journey, you will be able to appreciate for yourself the vastness of the country, the sparse population and the desirability on our part of encouraging continuing settlement from good people such as

those that we welcome from your own country.

It is not possible, unfortunately, for anything more than a fraction of Australia's Italian settlers to see you for themselves, except on the television screen, but on behalf of them, and all Australians, all here wish you a happy and not too strenuous visit and a safe return home.

Your visit will focus an interest on Australia amongst your countrymen which we believe will be of mutual benefit, of value to the relationship between us. It cannot fail to add warmth and interest to that relationship and your presence here itself is a contribution to a deepening of the warmth and friendliness of the ties that link our two countries.

We hope that Italian/Australian friendship will long endure, and as it persists, it will go on in warmth and strength to the growing mutual benefit of our two countries.

And now I am going to ask the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, Mr Whitlam, to support me in these words of welcome to you, and this is one matter at least on which we can find no room for disagreement and can join in a common vote of support and applause.
