

MELBOURNE PORTS ELECTORATE

LIBERAL PARTY DINNER HELD AT
ST. KILDA TOWN HALL, VIC.



25 AUGUST 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

I would like to assure you, Sir, and everybody here that this particular function is one that appeals to me very much indeed, because I am here primarily - not entirely - but primarily to do what I can to get you to do what you can to help Kevin Randall win the seat of Melbourne Ports. And this is an entirely possible thing, based on the redistribution. On the figures for the 1966 election, if they are maintained, Kevin could win by 1,500. They may not be maintained because 1966 was an all-time record. But even if they aren't, I think that those of you who have seen the calibre of his campaign and who have planned the future campaign with him, would agree with me that even if the 1966 figures are not maintained, it is perfectly possible that he will win by 2,500. I think and hope he will.

And this depends not only upon what he does, or I do or you do, but on the message getting through to the electorate. We must make known the record of what has been done by the Party he seeks to support and the attitudes now adopted by the Party which he seeks to support. And we must provide a look into the future as envisaged by the Party which, when elected, he will support.

Even at the risk of boring you, may I, because it is so important, recapitulate some of those things which in a relatively brief space of time have been done. When I say "in a relatively brief space of time" I mean the time during which I have been entrusted by my colleagues with the leadership of the Liberal Party. You are familiar with the two decades of transformation under Liberal Governments and of the climate created by these Governments since 1949. It is this climate that has given us unprecedented prosperity, unprecedented employment and new horizons.

I do not dwell on that - that is of the record. But in the last seventeen, eighteen, nineteen months, there have been a number of highly significant actions taken by the Government which Kevin Randall is going to support, actions which are going to react on the future of Australia for generations to come.

There was the significant decision - to which I will refer again later when I mention the Democratic Labor Party - the significant decision regarding retention of Australian forces in South East Asia. This was not an easy decision in the circumstances in which Great Britain announced an accelerated withdrawal from the countries to our North and the circumstances in which the United States indicated that she would maintain an interest in those countries but showed some hesitation in committing troops to that particular area. So, I repeat, it wasn't an easy decision for Australia to make in all those new circumstances - to leave some troops in that area as a visible indication that we regarded ourselves as of the region in which we lived. Not as a nation that would move in to take Britain's place but as a nation which would seek to contribute by economic means, by technological means, by opening up the avenues of trade and by assisting in the event of external attack. That decision was taken and so we will have the air force, navy and army there to work in with the region which must help itself as an earnest of Australia's participation in the region.

There was a decision which in my belief will in a decade be shown to be one of the most significant Australia has made in the field of trade. That was the decision to enter overseas shipping with Australian ships and Australian crews; ships flying the Australian flag, plying between this nation and Japan, this nation and the United Kingdom, this nation and the United States. Only three ships so far, but setting an example which I hope will be followed by private enterprise and which, if it is not, will, I hope, be expanded by government. For we are an island continent, we do depend on trade and we do depend on exports. Our riches abroad are amassed because of what we grow at home, and we should not dissipate those riches by paying to others the freight for transferring what we grow to the markets where they are sold. And we should know, and know without question, what is a proper price to pay for those who freight cargoes from Australia abroad. There is no other nation yet which has grown great without having its own ships, and we have taken the first steps along these lines.

We have made an approach - in some ways pedestrian - not I suppose emotionally exciting, but nevertheless of great importance in that we have had a look at the whole road construction programme in Australia. For the first time we have tried to get a cost-benefit analysis of what returns will come from the building of what roads in which particular area. As a result, we have abandoned previous formulae and have set aside for the next five years \$600 million to be spent in urban areas to try and overcome one of the problems which so besets us. That is to get a free traffic flow, to enable freeways to be built, to allow people and freight to come in and out of urban centres without being held up and without frustrations and economic loss.

We have tried, and I think with some success in the time that we have had to advance along the road of providing for the ill and the old and the invalid and the needy. We said we would do this in the Governor-General's Speech from the Throne. And in the first Budget brought down we did take some steps in this direction. We did remove from those who had long-continued illnesses in hospital the fear that they would not be able to be looked after for the duration, though there are still things to be done in this matter in nursing homes.

We did pay attention to the needs of families without breadwinners. We did a number of other things with which I will not weary you. And in this last Budget again we raised the payments to those who were most needy, we paid particular attention to the needs of widows with children and we looked after those who had been most seriously hurt in war in the defence of this country. We did these in an unprecedented way in that never in the space of little over a year had such rises been made in basic pensions and in pensions for totally and permanently incapacitated servicemen.

But we did more than that for basic to the Liberal belief is an assertion that we do not want to have a welfare state conception which believes that people should be looked after from the cradle to the grave without being required to make some effort themselves, without being required to put into the nation rather than just take out. And we do believe, as a part of Liberal philosophy, that those who have in their lifetimes practised thrift and self-help should not thereby be penalised when they come towards the end of the race of life. So we have made a breakthrough there in this Budget of great significance not yet I think fully realised in the community, in which a single man or a single woman can still receive some benefit from the state until his or her income reaches \$44. A married couple can still receive some increase, some benefit from the state until their income reaches \$80 per week. There is incentive now to earn more, even if you are on a pension, to contribute to superannuation, to save in other ways and this in itself is good and right and proper from a Liberal point of view. But it also, I think, has the practical advantage that in time to come there will be less and less call upon social service payments because there is this incentive to thrift and to self-help.

In other fields, too, we have not been idle. In the areas of defence and foreign policy - I have already spoken of the great decision to involve ourselves in joint defence of the countries to our North. And at this point, Sir, may I express some slight surprise at what the Party known as the Democratic Labor Party has, I gather, been saying about us in the last few days. Indeed, wherever I have gone today, it seems to me some reporter has sprung out from behind some pillar or from behind some door and poked something into my face and said, "What is your reaction to what the DLP or Senator Gair or Jack Little or somebody is saying?". And I haven't bothered to answer them because I was saving it for tonight.

I think in short compass that my reaction is this and ought to be this: That the Democratic Labor Party is a properly constituted party in Australia, that it had its genesis in a real fear of the infiltration into the Labor Party of communist ideas through the unions which the communists controlled and which were represented at the Labor Party organisation and through the unwillingness of the Labor machine and the Labor Political Party to attack communism in the unions or in public or indeed at all. And the men who formed that party were men of principle and they laid their seats in Parliament upon the line because they were men of principle. Many of them must have known that they would lose those seats when they took this action fifteen years ago. But they acted because they believed what they were doing was right, because they believed the ALP as it stood - and I interpolate "as it stands" - was bad for Australia, was infiltrated, had no interest in the defence of Australia and had a wrong foreign policy. It was because they believed all these things they stood on principle and formed a new party.

Since that time they have supported Liberal principles and Liberal approaches because these were more in line with their beliefs than were the approaches of the Labor Party. And now it is up to them as a political party operating in freedom to decide which approaches they wish to support at this coming election.

There are two things, however, of which I am sure and in which I believe most of you would support me - I think perhaps all of you would support me. One of them is that no great political party such as we are should tailor its policy or change its policy from what it thinks to be right merely in order to attract some support which ought to come to it anyway. Nor should it submit to what could be described - although I do not so describe it - as political blackmail.

And the other points I want to make are these. You will remember that I said just now that those who formed this Party were men of principle who believed that what they were doing was good and right for Australia. What is their choice in this election now coming up? They are interested in the defence of this country. They are interested in the foreign policy of this country. Can they support candidates from the Labor Party who would immediately sign a Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty without waiting to see whether Australia's interests were adversely affected by doing it; and could they reject a Liberal Party candidate who would want, of course, an effective and efficient treaty of this kind but would not wish to sign it until he was sure it was effective and efficient and that our interests were not jeopardised by it. Could they support a candidate from the Opposition Party who would quibble and haggle and argue with the United States of America over whether a defence base of joint interest to our two countries could be established in Australia? Would they do this in

preference to a Liberal Party candidate who would say the ANZUS Treaty is the strongest guarantee Australia has got for its future survival, and if we are to have that treaty and make it work properly then we are required, not by a Treaty's written terms, but in decency required to help to provide a joint defence - defence bases which being of interest and importance to the United States are therefore of interest and importance to ourselves. Could they support the Opposition's attitude on that as opposed to a Liberal Party attitude?

Could they support an Opposition attitude which says that National Service training would be abolished at once should they be elected as against the Liberal Party attitude which says that we will in the future need to keep, post-Vietnam, forces of such a size that National Service training must be retained? It will need to be retained for the purposes of defence itself and - this is secondary - for the immense benefit it brings to those young men who go into National Service training and come out so much better citizens than when they went in.

Could they support an Opposition candidate who would at once support in his Party the withdrawal from Malaya and Singapore of all our forces - ground, air and naval - who would immediately scuttle from the area and once and for all indicate that we were not concerned with what happened? Could they support that as against a Liberal Party candidate who would, while not being prepared to inherit the burden that a great power, Britain, previously took on, while not being prepared to enter into mini-Vietnams, nevertheless was prepared to keep a force in being there to help against any extraneous invasion which might come?

Sir, if this Party, the DLP, with its basic principles, professing the beliefs it still professes, could back Opposition candidates supporting the policies I have put before you in preference to Liberal candidates supporting the policies I have put before you, then the principles on which it was formed will have been repudiated and the reason for which it came into being will no longer exist.

And so, it is up to this Party to see, this Democratic Labor Party to see whether the choices being what they are, they can support people who stand in defiance of all they have said they believe, as against people who stand not for all they believe but much more so than do our opponents of the Labor Party.

There has been in the last week or ten days much discussion about what the newspapers have defined as some great change in policy by this Government towards the Soviet Union. I am always interested to read and know the difference between what some man says in Parliament - in this case the Minister for Foreign Affairs - and what the newspapers say he almost said in Parliament and make it the news. What in fact was said by the Minister for External Affairs was this.

He pointed out in his speech that the Soviet Union stands condemned for its invasion of Czechoslovakia, the anniversary of which is now with us. He used the words that the Soviet Union adhered to the pernicious doctrine of only limited sovereignty being allowed to those communist states who were around the periphery of the Soviet Union itself. He pointed out the need to be on guard against the Soviet Union, not to be lulled, to be careful all the time in all dealings with that country. But he did go so far, and I think that this is sensible, as to say that we in Australia had things we wished to see happen in the smaller Asian countries to our North. We wished to see them retain their independence. We wished to see them grow economically. We wished to see the benefits of that economic growth passed down to the peasants and the workers from the higher strata. We wished to see the avenues of trade opened to them so that they could help themselves. We wished to see them left in peace against extraneous attack. And he then said that we had so far not heard what the Soviet Union proposed about these countries, but they had spoken of some ideal of collective security that they hadn't spelt out. If their idea of collective security should turn out to be on all fours with what we in Australia want, if the Soviet Union should cancel some of the debts which are owing to it from these countries, should help them economically, should help them technologically, should help them to retain their independence, then we would - because these are the same objectives as we have - be prepared to examine such proposals with interest. That cannot surely in any man of commonsense be said to be a change in policy but rather an expression of hope, hedged with careful doubt - but an expression of hope - that perhaps the objectives we have for the safety of the countries to our North and therefore for our own, might possibly be brought about. At any rate, I see no great change in emphasis there, no great change in policy but merely an acceptance and an understanding that there are changes happening to our North and we will need to examine from all sources whatever may be put before us to help our own objectives and no-one else's.

Well, that is my reaction to the approach of the DLP.

What now remains to be done in this country? I have sketched quite briefly some of the things we have done. I've set out our attitudes and the facts of foreign policy. I've made an excursion into how those approaches in defence and foreign policy may affect another Party, but what remains to be done when we get re-elected, as we will?

First, (I do not put these in any order of priority) but first, there is undoubtedly a need to build up our own defences in this country - on land, on sea and in the air. But we will not go to the point of diverting to that build-up all of the increased prosperity of Australia. I do not believe we will need to put more of our GNP into it. We will need to put more money into it. We will need to increase it. Perhaps as time goes by we will need to increase it even faster but for the moment we are

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ourselves under no imminent threat of attack. We must assume that attack can come in the future. But for the moment, having said that that must happen, there are other things to do. There are more steps to be taken along the road of helping those who are in need, particularly I would suggest large families on low incomes. And there are a number of other highly significant steps which ought to be taken and which I don't propose to tell you about until we make the policy speech in October. These will be spelt-out steps I will then put before you.

They will in themselves be important but what will also be important are the objectives which they seek to attain. And these will be the continuing objectives of the Liberal Party only changed as "the times they are a-changing"; the continuing objectives of creating a climate for material growth and to see that to the greatest extent possible the savings of Australians are allowed to be put into the development of Australia. There will also be the objective of creating a climate, apart from the purely material kind, which provides individuals with the opportunity to develop themselves and their internal capacity - to be an actor, if that is what they want, or a scientist or a horticulturist or whatever it may be. To enable them to express their own personality in whatever it is. . . . even if it happens, as in the case of Kevin and myself, that they should want to be politicians and persuade other people to put us where we want to be.

Sir, I don't think there is any other party in Australia, I don't think there is any other group in Australia, I don't think there are other men in Australia who can achieve what we can if you give us the opportunity to do it. This decade ahead promises to be the most exciting in the whole of Australia's history, promises to give us the greatest growth in manpower and material benefits and in industrial muscles in Australia's history. It is a decade in which we will come of age, but come of age in a Liberal way if the people choose as I believe they will.

We have candidates I ask you to support. We have Kevin Randall who I believe will be elected with your support. And if he is elected, then he will help Australia and he will help the Government and in that way, in the long term, perhaps contribute to the creation of a nation that will be the admiration and the inspiration of the world and of great assistance to all mankind.
