

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
AUSTRALIAN ALUMNI DINNER

IN SINGAPORE

18 JANUARY 1971

Members of the Australian Alumni :

I found the introductory speech absolutely full of interest. I listened with great attention to the suggestion that there should be much more Australian investment in Singapore.

But you know there is Australian investment here. I think I have heard of the Hume Pipe Company. Perhaps, Sir, your remarks - which I have taken note of - might also be directed to a number of investors in Singapore, because there is great investment in Australia from people in Singapore. They are constantly building buildings, buying land and indeed, I met a gentleman the other night who had such foresight that he had invested - not in Australia - but he did own 90 per cent of the brewery in New Guinea. This indicates that there is a flow of investment and investible funds generated from Singapore, which could well perhaps be used here if the requirement for investment is so great.

But I don't know that the requirement is so very great. I come here from time to time, and every time one comes, one sees immense changes in the skyline, and one sees a city really growing and growing apace.

I don't know whether there is unemployment - but I gather there is very little unemployment, particularly as far as the young is concerned. I gather there is a shortage, indeed, of skilled labour and unskilled labour.

I had thought of Singapore as one of the success stories - not only of this part of the world - but one of the success stories of modern times, comparable in many ways with Venice of old - a city state, a state depending largely on commerce, on export and on import, situated where the trade routes of the world cross. But with this great distinction, that it has no danger of sinking beneath the waves, but rather is demonstrably day by day reaching for the skies.

And this is the feeling one has of Singapore.

It is possible - I put it no higher than that - it is possible that Australia itself may have contributed a small amount to the capacity which had led to this success story. I think that you members of the Alumni are living illustrations of what I hope will be an enduring link between our countries - though we may from time to time criticise each other, as the previous speaker criticised me and as I propose to criticise him later on - but also I hope and believe that it is an illustration of one very successful means of international co-operation.

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In the last twenty years, Australia has welcomed more than 10,000 fellows and scholars from Asian and African countries under the Colombo Plan and such Government aid schemes alone - not counting private students. Six hundred and forty-two of these scholars have come from Singapore. Australia provided the facilities for training of all kinds. But Singapore students took advantage of those facilities with diligence, with success, so that in 1969, 96 per cent of Singapore Colombo Plan students doing undergraduate courses in all years passed their examination - 96 per cent.

Now anybody who has a knowledge of the normal pass rate of Australians and others in Australian universities would realise what an unusually excellent result this is. We tend to have a 40 per cent failure rate in the first year, of Australian students, and yet 96 per cent of the people from Singapore - Colombo Plan people - passed their courses.

I think that this is a compliment to the calibre of the students that have been selected by their Government to come to Australia, and I think that it is a compliment to the students themselves that they have taken full advantage of the opportunities so provided. And it is clear proof that the cost of the Colombo Plan courses, which now totals some \$40 million, is being fully productive - which all aid schemes are not - and is fulfilling the purpose for which it was designed, which all aid schemes do not do.

As an illustration perhaps of this, I am informed that that magnificent conference hall in which the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference is now being held was in fact designed by an architect who took his first degree in Architecture in Melbourne, in Australia. He then went somewhere else, I gather, to do a postgraduate course, but clearly because of his undergraduate course, was able to design a building of such excellence.

Apart from the Colombo Plan itself - Government-sponsored students, those of whom I have spoken so far - there were some 10,000 privately-financed students from Asia, Africa and the Pacific in our schools and universities and colleges last year. I haven't got the figures on the pass rates of the privately-financed students but I do know that they are not as good as the figures of the Government-sponsored Colombo Plan students. Nevertheless they do come back and they do practice as accountants, lawyers, doctors, and engineers with a technical knowledge which must be and obviously is of advantage.

This kind of operation seems to me to be one which stands high in any attempt at international co-operation to raise the economic and living standards of the countries of the world. For the aim of economic assistance, and this I believe it is important to understand, the aim of economic assistance should never be to provide a hand-out. It should be to provide resources, it should not be to provide resources for consumer spending or for dissipation. Because if that were to be the concept of international aid, then it would merely result in a requirement for a continuing dole, and that would be as repugnant to the receiver as it would be to the donor. And it would do nothing whatever to tackle the real problems of underdeveloped countries.

The real aim, surely, ought to be to provide capacity in the form of technical expertise, professional expertise and capital, so that industries can be developed, or - when insufficient is produced in any country for its internal consumption - agricultural production can be increased. In fact, the aim should be to provide developing countries with the means to produce and to try to see they have the opportunity of selling any such increased production.

What better way can there be to provide the means to produce than to see that the elite of a country, as I believe you intellectually are, have the greatest possible training in all those fields which, if applied to the growth of a nation, can accelerate that growth and see that it goes in the proper direction. If, when this has been done, when this kind of assistance has been provided, the resulting improvement - and there always is a resulting improvement - the resulting improvement is swallowed up by an unrestricted increase in population, then I am sorry, but that is a problem for the country aided to solve.

It is not an argument for more and more aid from donor countries. And there is no place in which this is more realised than in this State of Singapore where, I do not have to tell you, measures have been taken to ensure that increased production, that increased prosperity is not dissipated by an unlimited increase in population.

So when we say that the gap between the richer and the poorer countries should be reduced - and this is something I have heard a considerable amount about in the last couple of days - I believe that that means that the richer countries should provide the poorer with the means and the opportunity of closing that gap, and it is then up to the less developed countries to use those opportunities to close that gap by their own efforts.

And can you find a better example of that being done than is evident in this State of Singapore? As your own Prime Minister so cogently said: "The richer countries cannot be expected to adopt the role of being forever their brother's keeper".

And some of those in the less developed countries will have to cease to adopt the role of expecting as a right that somebody will keep them no matter what they do. But though we may not and should not be our brother's keeper, we must be, and we try to be our brother's helper - and then it depends on the brother who is helped what the end result will be.

So in providing the advice and the technical education which we in Australia are now able to do, and in seeing the graduates of these courses contributing so greatly to their countries' own advance as we see it here, we have in action a proper plan of assistance properly used by its recipients and resulting in that economic advance and that self-reliance which must be the real, ultimate aim of all plans of assistance.

And I believe, quite genuinely, that I can congratulate Singapore because I think the principles which I have enunciated have been understood and applied and that such assistance as has been given has been used to the full and that the results of that use can be seen all around us.

So I congratulate you.

But the benefits of this kind of international co-operation don't stop there. There is the advantage to students, and let us again take Singapore, of being educated not only in one country, not only in Australia. Some go there, some go to Canada, some go to the United States, and some stay in Singapore. And this leads to the opportunity for a cross-fertilisation of knowledge for people studying particular practices with slightly different systems in different countries, and then coming back and being able to marry the best of what they have got from each of the countries in which studies have taken place.

Over and above that, there is, I think, the enduring advantage - that people who live in any country for a number of years come to know that country in which they live. If they don't know a country from personal experience, they may read about it and they may get a completely false picture. But if they have lived there, they know it. Some don't like it. Most of them do. And knowledge of a country is the beginning of understanding, and understanding between countries will be a most significant "spin-off" from the educational facilities provided.

Later, in the years ahead, one may hope for a cross-fertilisation of students - Australians coming to Singapore, Singaporeans coming to Australia, and so on. This is perhaps, at this stage, a dream. And yet we are at the moment in the middle of a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference where Heads of Government are meeting to try to see if they can overcome the exigencies and exacerbations of the present and keep together in order to have a chance of making ideals and dreams come true.

I believe that it will be useful if this Heads of Government Meeting says what the Commonwealth is. And I hope they will say it properly - and that means they will say what I believe. I believe that the Commonwealth is an association of free, independent nations with some common tradition, meeting without decisions being taken by vote - there are no majority opinions binding on any member of the Commonwealth, there is no consensus which has any binding effect whatever on any member of the Commonwealth who does not agree with the majority who have a consensus.

Rather it is an association through which people can exchange their ideas of what should be done, and in what fields it should be done. And there has developed during the course of this Conference clear indications of what all members of the Commonwealth feel are the fields in which action should be taken.

Looking forward through this decade and into the future, what are the problems likely to face not only the Commonwealth but nations generally? It appears, and I agree with this, that most believe that one of those problems is the maintenance of peace in the world. Some think peace is threatened by a disparity of wealth in countries. I beg leave to differ. I do not think Cambodia was invaded because she was poorer than the invaders.

I do not think that the wars we have seen since the second great war resulted from a disparity of income. I do not think that the Five Power Pact which we - Britain, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand are to enter into - is designed to try and protect this region from an attack by people who are poorer.

Rather do I feel it is an ideological urge for conquest, then that ideological urge will be able to be met, and more importantly, more hopefully, that those who may have such an ideological urge or nationalistic urge will see that the game is not worth the candle. At any rate the maintenance of peace is one of the items which the Commonwealth Association sees as significant for the future.

Another is the freeing of trade. I don't want to go into this in any great depth because nearly every country is thoroughly in favour of freeing trade and reducing tariffs - except for the commodities which they manufacture. But they can see the unarguable principles in favour of doing it for the commodity other people manufacture.

But there still is a need to see what can be done so that new countries who are pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, who are using the technical knowledge they get to produce more, will have an opportunity at least of selling their produce. And this is another matter which all those sitting around the conference table in Singapore believe it will be difficult to solve ~~this~~, as I think it would be difficult to solve it.

But does that matter so much if the problem is first isolated and then, difficult or not, attempts are made to seek to overcome it.

There is next the question which I have touched on before, the provision of aid between country and country. I don't think I need to add anything to what I have said as to how I and my country approach this problem. But it is not one-sided. And as an illustration of this, may I give you a brief anecdote of what happened this morning during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference. (I shouldn't do this, I know. I am breaking secrecy but there is nothing much in it, as you will see when I have finished.)

But it was suggested by a great friend of mine from a Caribbean country that sometimes donor countries came to these conferences with a rather patronising kind of approach - you know, "What can we do for you " sort of thing, one that I thoroughly understand. But it just so happened that Australia is a sugar-producing country, as the Caribbeans are sugar-producing countries, and England is going into the European Economic Community and is going to seek, I think, to look after the interests of Caribbean sugar-producing countries, but not necessarily Australia as a sugar-producing country.

But the Caribbeans are inclined to help us. So I was able to point out to my friend that we didn't go there with a patronising air at all. What we went there for really was to ask him and his Caribbean brother to help this brother within the Commonwealth, and was able to paraphrase those remarks of the late President John Kennedy that we do not come here to ask what we can do for Barbados, but rather to ask what Barbados can do for us.

And this is an illustration of the two-way traffic which can take place in this field of trade.

Another matter which will occupy the Conference for long is under the heading of racism, which I think you described, Sir, as the White Australia Policy. Heads of State are prepared to say, as I am, that racism is an unmitigated evil, and it is. I am prepared to say and mean that we will abolish racism within Australia.

I don't think that those of you who have been there will have noticed any racism unless you were extraordinarily unfortunate while you were living in my country. There is legal discrimination still in some Australian States against Aborigines, but my Government has told those States that those laws will be repealed by those States within two years, or if they are not, we will move in and repeal them. So there will be no Governmental discrimination inside Australia. I am prepared to say that and to mean it.

I think there are other countries where racial discrimination may be more pronounced than it is in my own. I know people always tend to talk on this subject as if it were just a matter of Negro versus European that was involved in the word "racism", but I think all of you will know that it is not. I think that all of you will know that there are grave strains in a community when there are two races or more each forming significant proportions of the population.

You are a lucky State. You are able, quite properly, to call yourself a multi-racial society, and get the good feeling that comes from being able to say that. And if one replies and says yes, but you are 90 per cent Chinese or 85 per cent Chinese and therefore Singapore is homogenous as we will keep Australia homogenous, that nevertheless still enables you to say you are a multi-racial society.

Well, we are moving a little bit that way. There were 6,000 non-European people who became Australian citizens last year - we probably have a little higher percentage of homogeneity than Singapore but there is a good deal of similarity, I do assure you.

As far as the application of an immigration policy is concerned, I have no hesitation in saying what I am now going to say, and I propose to make no apology for saying it.

Looking around the world, I see social problems between Negro and European in England, I see grave danger to normal living in the split between the races in the United States. I read not long ago, of some riots between races not far away from where I am standing now, riots which could easily have spread to Singapore.

I am not going to allow that kind of danger to occur in Australia. There are racial tensions, and whether there ought to be or not doesn't matter. We live in a world of reality. We don't live in a world which would be different if we could shatter it to bits and then remould it nearer to our heart's desire. And in reality, there is - though there ought not to be - tension between races when there are

large numbers of different races living in one country, and tensions between peoples from different regions.

Sir, in reply to what you said, I can only say this. As far as I am concerned, any Governmental discrimination of any kind on grounds of race will not exist in Australia. It will be abolished. I cannot say that feeling won't exist because that is not under the control of Governments. It will take time and education for the vast bulk of a population to have no difference feeling whatever when they are talking to a Negro or somebody with a different colour skin. It will take time.

At the moment, there are brighter people from any race you care to mention, and less intelligent people from any race you care to mention. The bright ones have no trouble, have no difficulty. They are on the same wavelength. They get together, but it will take some time before we attain the ideal which I think I share with you in common, where even those who are not so bright will not feel prejudice towards people who are different.

I think that the course which we are following holds great chances of achieving real racial tolerance. I think it holds better chances than if we were to risk the kind of racial conflict that other countries have. I think that if we build up gradually inside Australia a proportion of people who are not of white skin, then, as that is gradually done, so there will be a complete lack of consciousness that it is being built up, and a complete lack of consciousness of difference between the races. And if this can be done, as I think it can, then that may provide the world with the first truly multi-racial society with no tensions of any kind possible between any of the races within it. At any rate this is our ideal.

And if we are misguided in the way in which we are seeking to attain it, then all I can say, Sir, is that we have got the responsibility to try and do it. We have got the responsibility to try and explain it, and for my own part, I don't propose to apologise for it.

Now I think I should finish where I began by saying once again what an honour it is for me to be here with you who have, I hope, happy memories of my own country, who have a true knowledge of my own country, who may assess it differently from me, but who I hope would have a friendship for Australia, as I have got a friendship for Singapore.

When I first came here there was no wall that was not pock-marked with shrapnel. When I first came here, my friend the Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom had close acquaintance with Changi when it was quite a different building from that which it is now. From that time I have been here occasionally - not often enough - met many people from here and steadily grown to admire and like this State. It provides stability. It provides a success story.

And for all those reasons I thank you greatly for this opportunity to talk to you tonight.
