

EMBARGO: 9.00 P.M.

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT THE LORD MAYOR'S BANQUET, MELBOURNE TOWN HALL,
FRIDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 1973

IT IS JUST ONE WEEK SINCE I WAS SPEAKING AT A BANQUET IN THE GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE IN PEKING. NOW I AM IN THE GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE IN MELBOURNE. I ASSURE YOU I FEEL PERFECTLY AT HOME IN BOTH THESE GREAT SEATS OF POWER, AMONG THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THESE TWO POWERFUL RULING ELITES. ONE FINDS THE SAME WARMING INFLUENCES OF FOOD AND WINE TO BRIDGE THE GREAT GAP IN IDEOLOGY. ONE FINDS IN PEKING, IN MELBOURNE, THE SAME PERMANENCE, THE SAME SOLIDARITY, THE SAME SELF-CONFIDENCE WHICH CHARACTERISES ALL GREAT ESTABLISHMENTS. THE MANDARINS OF MELBOURNE ARE AT LEAST AS FAMOUS AS THOSE OF PEKING. AND ONE INDEED FEELS SOMETHING OF AN INTERLOPER, A MERE PRIME MINISTER AND ONE FROM SYDNEY AT THAT. I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL, LAST YEAR, AS I SAT LISTENING TO MY DISTINGUISHED PREDECESSOR, THAT A PRIME MINISTER FROM SYDNEY - EVEN A CONSERVATIVE ONE - WAS NOT EXACTLY TAKEN TO THE HEARTS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE MELBOURNE ESTABLISHMENT. ONE IS MADE VERY AWARE PRIME MINISTERS COME AND PRIME MINISTERS GO BUT YOU GO ON FOREVER.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE HAS BEEN SINCE YOUR LAST BANQUET A CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA'S GOVERNMENT. AS I LOOK AROUND, I SEE HOW MANFULLY YOU ARE BEARING UP UNDER THE WHIPS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE WHICH HAS PLACED THE SOCIALISTS IN CANBERRA. I MIGHT EVEN SAY YOU LOOK AMAZINGLY PROSPEROUS AND INDEED IF I CAN BELIEVE THE FINANCIAL PAGES AND THE ADVERTISING PAGES OF THE GREAT MELBOURNE DAILIES, MOST OF YOU ARE. AND I CAN TELL YOU WITH ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE, THAT YOU WILL REMAIN SO AS LONG AS I REMAIN PRIME MINISTER. I DON'T REALLY THINK ITS DIFFICULT TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH EACH OTHER, AND I THINK YOU MIGHT EVEN COME TO ENJOY IT.

I FOR INSTANCE, FIND I CAN LIVE WITH YOU PREMIER. I HAD OCCASION TO SAY YESTERDAY IN REFERENCE TO MY HAVING GIVEN UP THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO THIS WEEK THAT WE HAD GOT RIGHT THE GREAT AREAS OF OUR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS - WITH THE UNITED STATES, WITH JAPAN, WITH CHINA, WITH INDONESIA. INDEED, THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT UNSETTLED AREA OF OUR DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH A HOSTILE POWER IS THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEENSLAND. BUT YOU PREMIER WILL EVEN COME TO DINNER WITH ME. I KNOW HE HAS DIFFICULTY WITH SOME OF HIS MINISTERS, BUT WHEN WE SPEAK TOGETHER, AND WHEN HIS MINISTERS SPEAK WITH MINE, WE CAN WORK TOGETHER.

THE MOST IMPORTANT AREA OF CO-OPERATION CONCERNS THE PLACES WHERE MOST AUSTRALIANS, WHERE MOST VICTORIANS LIVE - IN THE CITIES AND CENTRES, AND IN THE AREA OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SO WELL REPRESENTED HERE TONIGHT. WE HAVE THE BOLD SOCIAL EXPERIMENT IN IMPROVING THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AND OFFERING A GREATER CHOICE TO THE PEOPLE OF VICTORIA AT ALBURY-WODONGA. WE ARE CO-OPERATING WITH THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT, IN ITS OWN PLANS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEELONG AS A GROWTH CENTRE. THE PREPARATIONS ARE PROCEEDING JOINTLY AND BOTH GOVERNMENTS HOPE WE WILL BE ABLE TO EASE THE PROBLEM OF MELBOURNE GROWTH EARLY AND SUBSTANTIALLY. WE HAVE MADE A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY AVAILABLE THIS YEAR FOR ACQUIRING STRATEGIC AREAS OF LAND FOR URBAN RECREATION AND CONSERVATION AT WESTERN-PORT BAY, THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA AND THE DANDENONG RANGES. WE ARE CO-OPERATING IN ESTABLISHING A CONTINUING MAJOR PROGRAM TO RETARD THE RISE IN RESIDENTIAL LAND PRICES IN MELBOURNE. WHEN THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY WE HAVE ESTABLISHED ON THE NATIONAL ESTATE REPORTS, WE CONTEMPLATE IMMEDIATE ACTION IN CONSULTATION WITH VICTORIA TO FOLLOW UP IN VIGOROUS SUPPORT OF THE STATE'S NATIONAL TRUST AND PRIVATE CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS.

DISCUSSIONS ARE NOW WELL ADVANCED WITH THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL COUNCILS ON SPENDING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE DEPRIVED WESTERN SECTORS OF MELBOURNE. LOCAL COUNCILS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN FORMING AMONGST THEMSELVES A WESTERN REGIONS COMMISSION. WE ARE ALSO WORKING WITH THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ON A JOINT STUDY ON THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE PROVISION OF LOCAL SERVICES ON A STATE-WIDE BASIS. I PERHAPS SHOULDN'T MENTION SO INDELICATE A SUBJECT HERE BUT WE ARE WELL ADVANCED IN REACHING OUR GOAL OF OVERCOMING THE BACKLOG IN SEWERAGE BY 1980. I REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST HAD THE TEMERITY TO RAISE THIS AS A NATIONAL ISSUE, JOHN GORTON SAID I SOUNDED LIKE A MAYOR OR A SHIRE PRESIDENT RATHER THAN A NATIONAL LEADER. I DON'T KNOW IF I WAS MEANT TO BE INSULTED, BUT I WASN'T. THE NEW GRANTS COMMISSION IS IN BEING TO HELP MEET THE GROWING NEEDS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TO REDUCE INEQUALITY BETWEEN REGIONS.

SO THERE HAS BEEN THIS WIDE RANGE OF CO-OPERATION ON URBAN AFFAIRS. WHAT WE HAVE TRIED TO DO IS TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE CONVENTIONAL IDEA THAT THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE STATE GOVERNMENTS ARE LIMITED TO THE FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIP IN TERMS OF SECTION 96 OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BRINGS TO THE CONFERENCE TABLE MUCH MORE THAN ITS CHEQUE BOOK. IT BRINGS NATIONAL ATTITUDES, A SENSE OF NATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES. IT BRINGS NATIONAL ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT AND NATIONAL ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES. OF COURSE OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS DON'T ALWAYS AGREE, BUT ALREADY IN THIS YEAR OF 1973 THERE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED A NEW AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND VICTORIA IN A CONCERTED THRUST TOWARDS SOLVING OR AT LEAST REDUCING THE GREAT PROBLEMS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, SO CENTRAL TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE VAST MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE.

I MIGHT JUST SAY THIS: ONE OF THE REASONS WHY MANY PEOPLE, PERHAPS EVEN SOME OF YOU, FEEL DISCOMFITED BY THE PROCESS OF CHANGE, IS JUST THAT FUNDAMENTAL FACT THAT THERE WAS NO CHANGE FOR SO LONG, THAT THERE WAS NO CHANGE FOR 23 YEARS. IN THIS WE WERE UNIQUE AMONG THE ENGLISH SPEAKING DEMOCRACIES. THERE HAD TO BE CHANGE AND PROBABLY THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN MANY OF THE SAME CHANGES MADE, PARTICULARLY ON MATTERS AFFECTING RESOURCES AND INVESTMENT EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT CHANGED LAST DECEMBER. THE SEEMING STABILITY OF THE PAST WAS LARGELY ILLUSORY, ARTIFICIAL, REFLECTING AN ESSENTIALLY ABNORMAL, THOUGH LONG ENDURING, POLITICAL SITUATION. IT IS CHANGE WHICH IS NORMAL AND NATURAL IN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY. I THINK IF YOU ACCEPT THAT BASIC FACT, YOU WILL FIND LIFE UNDER LABOR PREDICTABLE AND REFRESHING AND IT MAY EVEN BE, AS I CERTAINLY FIND IT, EXCITING AND EXHILARATING FOR US ALL AS AUSTRALIANS.