



PRIME MINISTER

SATURDAY, 22 FEBRUARY, 1980

ADDRESS AT OPENING OF HELLENIC CLUB, CANBERRA

It really is a wonderful occasion, being asked to open this Club which has had so much effort put into it and which has been so evidently a very great success. To have a membership of 4,000, and a rising one, is really a tribute to those who conceived the Club in the first place and who conceived it not just as a place where Australian Greeks may come and enjoy themselves and make their friends, but as a place where all Australians might meet in the spirit of multiculturalism. So, all praise and all credit to those who have conceived and who have worked so hard for the establishment of this Club.

Indeed, it is quite common to open a building, or a Club, that has been used for a little while. This occasion is no exception. But I think this is the first occasion in which I have been asked to open a venture which has been so much a success that after the opening I have been immediately asked to go and look at the plans for expansion. Again, I think that is further confirmation of the wisdom and the foresight of those who have brought the Club to this particular point.

Hellenism is very much embodied in this Club's development, and the conception of it. As Gilbert Murray, in *The Legacy of Greece*, speaking on Hellenism and Ancient Greece described it: "a thing of the spirit, not dependent on the race to which a man belonged or on the place where he was born." It is very plain that that spirit is very much a part of this Club. That is the reason why I am so pleased to have been asked to participate in this opening ceremony.

Greeks in Australia have been very much a part of Australian history for a very long while. I have been able to find that the first recordings of Greeks in Australia goes back to the 1830s. A small group then from the Ionian Islands established a wine industry at Camden. In 1898 the first Greek Orthodox Church was established in Sydney. Now, there are 120 parishes, 80 odd churches and half a million members. It is clear that Greeks in Australia are a significant religious, cultural, social and economic force, very much part of Australia's life.

The contribution of the community to Australia has been great and significant in many different fields. The sons and grandsons of Greece have certainly served Australia well down through the years: Sir Nicholas Lorantis, philanthropist; George Polites of Greek parents; George Peponis, Captain of the Australian Rugby League Team; Greeks in academia and law and medicine, in pharmacy, in commerce, have excelled and shown how much they can contribute and are contributing to the Australia that we all know.

My most distinguished predecessor, Sir Robert Menzies, once said: "we are all Greek because the Western culture was spawned in Greece". That also I think is very true.

Scholars have argued that Ancient Greece made man aware of himself and of his infinite capacities. The contribution of Greece and its people, and their influence, has been embedded in the history of the centuries and it is embedded in today's society and in today's values.

Athletisism derives from the Greek concept of striving and contending. The great Greek athlete in ancient times, Hermes, is immortalised in sculpture. To the Greeks, Hermes embodies simplicity, balance, the pursuit of idealism, the joy of living in fellowship and the striving after perfection, and how much we should pursue that in these times.

The Olympic Games, as we all know, has been very much derived from these ideals; the lamps of ancient Greek art inspired the modern Olympics. The modern torch is given to and received by other countries as the Olympic Games have been held in recent times.

But the values of Greece, the values of Olympia and of the Olympic Games sometimes do get lost in propaganda; sometimes get lost in the use to which the Games have been put, not once in this century but more than once in this century. The Government has been giving some thought to how in the future the Olympic Games might well be able to proceed with propaganda and politics really apart from it, as is meant to be in the Olympic charter but which, if we face it fairly, is not so in practice - has not been so in practice - over a great many years.

The hopes and ideals of the Olympics have rarely been matched in practical effect. Perhaps the only way in which the Olympic Games and the spirit of the Olympics, the ideal of the Olympics can be preserved in the future is to make sure that the Olympic movement has its own permanent home, to make sure that it cannot be used for the politics of one country as a mark of approval or of disapproval in the years ahead. The suggestion, therefore, that the Olympic Games should have a permanent home in Olympia, a piece of ground dedicated by the Greek Government to the Olympic movement, as has been suggested by the Greek Prime Minister, I believe deserves the most serious consideration by the whole Olympic movement and by national Olympic Committees right around the world.

It is a decision that they would have to make. But I really believe that they do need to make decisions that will enable the Olympic Games to be held in future years fully in accord with the spirit of the Olympic movement and not paying lip service to that spirit as happens now and has happened so often in past years.

If the spirit of Hermes and of Olympia are to prevail down through the years, the Government believes that that would be the best way to achieve it. If that is the wish, ultimately, of the Olympic movement, and it makes a decision in principle that it is prepared not just to talk about it, then the Government will be prepared to provide practical assistance to help the modern Olympic movement find a permanent home in Greece. Government assistance would be available for that.

What is the spirit of the Olympic movement, as it ought to be, is very much a part of the spirit of this Club: bringing people together no matter what their background where they can learn to know each other and make their friendships.

Again, I would like to congratulate all those who have been a part of it. They have set an example which many others could well follow in the way they lead their normal and daily lives and I have very great pleasure, therefore, in declaring this new Hellenic Club officially open. I wish many thousands of people many hours of happiness and friendship within the walls of the Club. I will look forward to seeing the expansion of the development of the Club down through the years.

---000---