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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, AUGUST 17 1981

QUADRANT'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

I am very happy to be here tonight to celebrate with you the 25th anniversary of Quadrant. Little magazines traditionally suffer from a high rate of infant mortality and few of them attain their majority. That Quadrant has done so, that indeed it seems set to go on to a vigorous and robust middle age, is very much a matter for congratulation.

The extent of Quadrant's success in pursuing its goals and the status it has achieved in the Australian community - and overseas - are reflected in the composition of this gathering tonight. May I say that I am particularly pleased to see so many leaders of the business community here to pay tribute to an intellectual journal. It reflects a very healthy state of affairs.

As I have sought to emphasise on a number of occasions over recent months, it is of the utmost importance that businessmen should realise the relevance of ideas, of theory, to their activities and interests. If the market economy is to survive and thrive it must rest on the support of people, on a clear and widespread understanding in the community of its great merits and also on an awareness of what threatens it. And, in turn, if the market economy is to enjoy that support, the intellectual case for it - and against its enemies - must be made, clearly, forcefully and repeatedly. Ensuring that this case is made, and supporting those who can make it effectively, is not an 'optional extra' for business, not a matter of engaging in a bit of high-minded patronage. It is essential. I am glad that this is being understood by an increasing number of leaders in the business community.

From its inception, Quadrant has sought to promote and exemplify excellence in literature and the other arts, and I am told by people better able to judge than myself that it has succeeded admirably in this respect. But it has been concerned to do more than that: it has sought to explore explain and defend the conditions necessary for culture and intellectual activity generally to flourish freely. It has understood and has insisted on emphasising the essential nexus between cultural freedom, a liberal democratic policy, the free market and effective defence against external tyranny.

As far as this aspect of Quadrant's activity is concerned, I do not need to depend on anyone else's judgment to arrive at a conclusion. I am sure that in stressing the interdependence of these components of a free and open society Quadrant is absolutely right. Cultural freedom is one of the highest human aspirations and an indispensable condition for a civilised society. At the same time it presents a great and permanent challenge to mankind. In some sense it is always under threat, always in danger.

The most obvious threat to it comes from the totalitarian mentality, and wherever totalitarians have come to power they have given the highest priority to trying to crush it. In terms of their own perverted standards they have been right to do so, for it represents a fundamental challenge to their attempt to exert total control over the whole of society. The successful resistance to their efforts represents the most noble and heroic story of our epoch.

In démocratic societies cultural freedom substantially exists, but its existence should never be taken for granted, should never be a matter for complacency. There are always forces which in the name of received truth, morality, order, tradition or simply a quiet, comfortable life would seek to circumscribe it.

The strength of Liberal pluralism is that it distributes and limits power in ways which prevent any of these forces from prevailing and which allow a substantial and continuing competition between ideas. The concept of a free market is as valid in this sphere as it is in the economic one. The authority and power of the state are not available to any particular group; instead they are used to hold the ring, to ensure that all groups and viewpoints are allowed to compete freely, to promote opportunities for unfettered creative activity.

Beyond this danger lies, and those who argue for a positive, large-scale commitment and involvement in culture on the part of the state are displaying a fundamental ignorance not only of liberalism but of culture itself. James McAuley, the founding editor of Quadrant, once satirised such a view:

"By the waters of Babylon
I heard a public works official say:
"A culture that is truly Babylonian
has been ordered for delivery today"."

It is a familiar error: if something is good and desirable the state should provide it. To which the Liberal reply is: if something is good and desirable, people should be left free to pursue it with the minimum of restraint.

Political arrangements can remove impediments and threats. But beyond that cultural freedom depends essentially on a positive commitment to a way of life on the part of individuals. It is a way of life which is characterised by a commitment to truth over convenience; to liberty over comfort and security; to creativity and production over consumption; to the autonomy of cultural activity over supposedly overriding social and political needs. That is the way of life which Quadrant has stood for and promoted. The survival of Quadrant over 25 years has not been due to a lucky accident. It has been due to the dedication and conviction of a group of people.

I note that the seminar you have just held in Canberra had the title, "How the tide has turned". Well, for most of Quadrant's life the tide had not turned. Whatever was true of the community at large, in many intellectual, academic and cultural circles it was common during much of this time for liberalism to be described as 'exhausted'; for any concern with defence to be equated with 'militarism' or 'paranoia'; for any concern with subversion to be condemned as 'McCarthyism'; for any solidarity with allies to be described as 'subservience'.

At the same time, faced with any domestic social or economic problem, the reflex action of many intellectuals was to demand action by the state to remedy it - and to advocate the giving of more power to the state for that purpose.

The 25 years of Quadrant's existence have been years of intense ideological conflict, a fact of which I am well aware as those years coincide almost exactly with my own political life. The magazine came into existence at the height - or was it the depth? - of the Cold War in the mid 1950s. It was the Australian manifestation of an effort throughout the Western world to rally those intellectuals who believed in the values of liberal democracy to the defence of those values. There was an urgent need for such a defence. At that time, astounding as it may now seem, there were still many in the West who suffered from the illusion that the Soviet Union was a force for progress and hope. There were many more who were undermined by doubt and confusion, to such an extent that not only were they unable to defend their own societies but often felt constrained to attack those who did. It is to the great credit of those, like the Quadrant group, that they refused to be intimidated in this atmosphere.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the position represented by Quadrant faced a different kind of challenge - the challenge of a trendy, 'progressivism' manifesting itself in a cult of protest and an indulgent concern with 'self-realisation'. Paradoxically, the unprecedented prosperity produced by the private enterprise economies of the West after the Second World War led to a denunciation of those societies as materialistic and selfish, the denunciations coming mainly from those elements in society who had enjoyed most of the benefits. In the face of this assault, many who should have known better lost their nerve and betrayed their values. In the eyes of the 'racially chic', what was fashionable prevailed over what was true. If all this took us by surprise, it should not have done.

In an astounding perceptive and prophetic book written in the late 1920s, the Spanish writer, Ortega y Gasset had foreseen the essence of it all. He had predicted the coming of what Tom Wolfe labelled the "me generation" by identifying the "psychology of the spoilt child" as a fundamental trait of mass society - the psychology, that is, that leads men to believe themselves exempt from all restrictions and responsibilities and claim an overriding priority for "the free expansion of their vital desires".

As far as the irrationality of the cult of protest in the 1960s is concerned, perhaps he said all that needs to be said in one sentence when he observed:

"In the disturbances caused by the scarcity of food, the mob goes in search of bread, and the means it employs is generally to wreck the bakeries."

The book I refer to is, of course, *The Revolt of the Masses*, and I commend it to you.

As far as international affairs of this period were concerned, things were different in some respects, in that the trauma of the Vietnam War led to a legitimate and genuine difference of opinion about a real issue. But here, too there was intellectual corruption - in the form of an attempt to revise history in such a way as to hold the West responsible for the origins of the Cold War - and illusion - in the form of a naive belief in 'detente' as the solution for the conflict between free and totalitarian systems.

During most of this period therefore the editors and contributors of *Quadrant* have been swimming against the tide in upholding traditional liberal values and institutions, insisting that the West must be prepared to defend itself and in exposing the intellectual emptiness and danger of many prevailing trends.

In doing so, I am sure that they have paid a price in terms of acceptability and reputation. We should all be grateful that they and some others - not too many - have been prepared to do so. For if the tide has indeed now turned, and I agree that there are good grounds for believing that it has, it is not simply because of the ineluctable working of some impersonal historical 'forces'. It has required the commitment of individuals. There is no substitute for such commitment.

And if it is true that things are in many ways significantly healthier now, as I believe they are, this is because people now have a clearer idea of what is at issue, because we have put illusions aside. The first task in overcoming these difficulties and problems, is to perceive the threat clearly. Much of the problem of the last 25 years has been that many people failed to discern the nature of an issue which is essentially simple. And if more people are now seeing the truth as it is and the facts as they are, we owe it, to a considerable extent, to the influence of *Quadrant*.

But ladies and gentlemen, if in terms of the attitudes and beliefs current in Western societies things are healthier now than they have been for years, the challenges facing our societies are still very formidable. The Soviet Union's military power is greater than it has ever been and given the combination of problems and opportunities which face it, it may be tempted to exploit that power if it is not confronted by a resolute West.

The need to create a co-operative, constructive relationship between the rich and poor states of the world remains and is urgent. Without it there will be increasing discord and instability. Internally, countries of the West face serious economic and social challenges.

This combination of problems is certain to provide a severe test of nerve in the coming years and we can be sure that, rather than face that test, many will look for explanations and solutions based on illusion and appeasement. The job of countering that tendency, of holding and building on the ground that has been won, remains and will in fact always remain.

There are so many battles that must be fought and re-fought so that while we may win today, we know that we shall have to fight again tomorrow. If we were ever to think that we had won the fight for political, economic and cultural freedom, so that the struggle could be put aside, then we would lose our freedom.

Quadrant has always understood that truth. With that in mind, I ask you to join me in a toast: To Quadrant - the next 25 years.

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