

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.  
MENZIES AT CENTRAL METHODIST MISSION ON SUNDAY,  
6TH SEPTEMBER, 1959

I was reminded, and kindly, by a newspaper yesterday that this will be the 26th appearance of mine in this rostrum, in this pulpit - that's a long time isn't it?

When I began my second chapter of these appearances about 14 or 15 years ago, Dr. Benson used to pretend that I came here to say something about the anniversary of the second War, but since then, in the last few years, he's become rather "Father's day" minded. I don't mind telling you that I had no idea it was Father's Day until just before lunch when three turbulent grandsons, and one turbulent grand-daughter, arrived to have lunch with us, and each of them, with that magnificent gesture of generosity that has been hinted at by Dr. Benson, presented me with the noblest of all gifts: a bag of peanuts in the shell. I got a great kick out of it. They all came in, one after the other and said: "Hello, Grandpa, Father's Day present". And of course you know what young grand-children are like - at least some of you do. Having presented you with a bag of something edible, they stand around expectantly and so a good time was had by all (Laughter).

In spite of it being Father's Day I still like, when I come here, to say something about the state of the world. It is full of problems. I had the great good fortune earlier this year to go around the world and to have long talks, and intimate and friendly talks with no less than ten heads of Government. This is, of course, always a very illuminating experience.

Each year one imagines that one understands what the problems are for the next 12 months, or two years, but it never quite works out like that. Today's red hot problem is out of the news in six weeks, because some other problem has taken its place. You just look back a little and remember that it isn't so long ago that we were reading anxiously about matters affecting Quemoy and the Matsu Islands off the Chinese coast, with Formosa in the background, and wondering how this might blow up trouble in the world - trouble not very remote from us because we have had a faculty, and a very proper one, of becoming involved in the world's problems, right through the lifetimes of all of us. And then that just dropped out of the news, though it didn't drop out of existence, and we began to read about Laos and the great troubles they are having in that small, but not so very remote country in South East Asia. Just as that matter was beginning to lodge in the minds of a great number of thoughtful people, there was trouble on the border between India and Tibet, and my distinguished friend, Mr. Nehru, found himself compelled to say things and to contemplate things that he had hoped never to say, or to contemplate.

So the world is shifting and changing in detail all the time, and somebody who understands these problems, or hopes that he does, today, may, unless he takes care to pursue them, find that he knows nothing about them in 12 months' time.

I mention that to you because I want to establish that this is a very strange, shifting, uncertain, uneasy sort of world. But if life is strange and shifting and uneasy it doesn't make us enjoy it any the less. What we need to do is to have a look occasionally at the things that are not changing or shifting, so that we may get our sense of balance when we contemplate world affairs. And therefore, today I'm not going to talk to you in particular, but I want to talk to you a little in the broad about some of these matters.

I remember, Dr. Benson, that during the war when I had the not unhappy task of being Leader of the Opposition, having been Prime Minister - a post which, no doubt, if I read aright

I will once more occupy some day - and I well remember at that time a very earnest man from America being in Canberra. He was one of those men - you have occasionally met them - whose earnestness overwhelms their sense of proportion, who are wishful thinkers, who feel that whatever happens next must be good and right and, therefore, it will happen. And he said to me: "What would you think would be the state of affairs in the world 10 years after peace?" and I admit that somewhat lightheartedly, I said to him: "Well I would think that ten years after the war I would think that Nationalism would have grown greatly at the expense of Internationalism. I would think that freedom would be enjoyed by rather fewer people and I would think that on the whole tariff barriers would be higher". He almost collapsed. He said to me: "What a dreadful series of remarks to make." And I said, "Well, I thought you wanted to know what I believed; if you only want to know what I think will please you, of course, all that is wrong".

I mention that because we will not properly understand this world that we are living in, this world, in which we in Australia are a small and highly exposed unit, unless we face up to the facts of what has happened since the war. It was a war to defend freedom and a very just war to defend freedom, and it was a war to defend it against one of the most wicked dictators that the world has yet produced.

But since the war hundreds of millions of people in this world have become members of dictator countries, largely against their own will. You think of countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia, to a lesser degree perhaps Yugoslavia, countries right up through the middle band of Europe, countries which were, you know, historically, the homes of freedom, and today they are satellites of the most powerful dictatorship in the world, not by their own choice, but by force and conquest. At that time before the war the people of China were not, perhaps, the people of a Nation, because it is a great error to think that because a country is a vast area, geographically on the map, it is in consequence a Nation. No, China, continental China, was a group of communities with individual War Lords occasionally warring with each other. It wasn't a concentrated nation with a concerted national mind and national feeling as ours is. But at any rate it preserved the ancient culture. It had a faith. It lived, so to speak, its own life. And today, it, with all its hundreds of millions of people, is governed by a dictatorship.

You see what I mean, that we are not to suppose that the world has not changed since the war, or that all the changes have been for the better. The fact is that there are hundreds of millions of people who once felt that they were free, who now know that they are not. And if we shut our eyes to that fact we do badly, if we are to have a balanced view of the world.

There is a second aspect to this that I would like to say a little about : Nationalism. You know really, a lot of us thought - didn't we - in the course of the war, that when it was over there would be a new, international organization and that we would become all rather less national, and a little more international, a little less insistent upon our own rights and a little more concerned with the rights of the community of men and women around the world. Yet since the war we have found, haven't we, in various parts of the world, a new, insurgent nationalism which has secured independence, which has, not infrequently produced dictatorships, which has, in itself, the spirit of aggression. With all the work done by the United Nations I would very greatly doubt whether there has been any period of ten years in my lifetime in which there has been a more insistent demand for independent, separate nationalism on the part of the people of a score of countries in the world. There it is; that's one of the facts of life and we must face it.

Well, how do we go about facing these things? One of the ideas, most prevalent, has been that you must follow all these movements; wherever there is a movement for independent nationalism you present the people of that country with independence, and we've done it. Nobody can doubt that whatever may be said about colonialism in this world, the history of British colonialism in this century has been one of glory and intelligence, because the whole process has been to say to people: "Very well, you have your freedom; you govern yourselves". But there again, we can easily go wrong. We are not to assume either that people are all equally competent to govern themselves or that our system of Government is the right one for them.

Now I will say nothing about the first because it is self-evident. But I want to talk to you a little, this afternoon, about whether we ought to be so smugly satisfied that our system of Government is the right one for Indonesia, or Malaya, or Singapore, or India, or Pakistan, or Ceylon, or Ghana, or Nigeria, or the West Indies. Are we so right? Are we wise to push down the throats of other people our ideas of how a country ought to govern itself, just because they are our ideas? I don't think we are. I think nothing could be more foolish. I think we ought to pay a little more regard to other peoples' history and background and religion and culture and leave it to them to work out a system of Government which suits them, because it suits them and not just because it suits us.

Do you ever think about our system of Government? I know that I've been in the middle of our system of Government now, believe it or not, man and boy, for 30 years, and I know all the noises that our system of Government makes and I know that there are people who take a broad view of Government and a broad view of national policy, and there are others who take a smaller view and say: "What will it cost me?" and one becomes accustomed to all this.

But at the base of it I beg of you all to remember that I am a Prime Minister of Australia and there is a national parliament in Australia, and there is a parliament in each State capital, and a Premier and Ministers, because hundreds of years ago our forefathers in Great Britain sat under the village oak tree and learned how to manage their own affairs, their own public affairs, their own local government. Step by step, over centuries, the position was achieved in which there was a Parliament elected freely by all the adult people in the country without regard to wealth or privilege. That didn't happen over night. It was only in the nineteenth century, that the Parliament at Westminster, which had fought and won its battle with despotic monarchy over 200 years before, found itself by successive reform acts, voted for by a wider and wider constituency until adult men all had a vote by the end of the century. It was only in the lifetime of a great number of relatively young people that women had a vote in Great Britain.

This process of self-government, of parliamentary self-government of ours, has grown slowly and sometimes painfully over a period of centuries. We all have it in our blood. It is part of our history. It is something we learned about from our father or our mother and that they in their turn learned about from those who went before them - something that we've read, something that we've come to understand, something that we've felt. That is why I always maintain that in Australia we understand just as much about democratic, parliamentary self-government as any other country in the world. We are in the forefront of that historic development. But it has taken centuries.

Do you suppose that you can take a community of many millions of people, not bred in our tradition, not with that fusion that has gone on for so many centuries with us, between

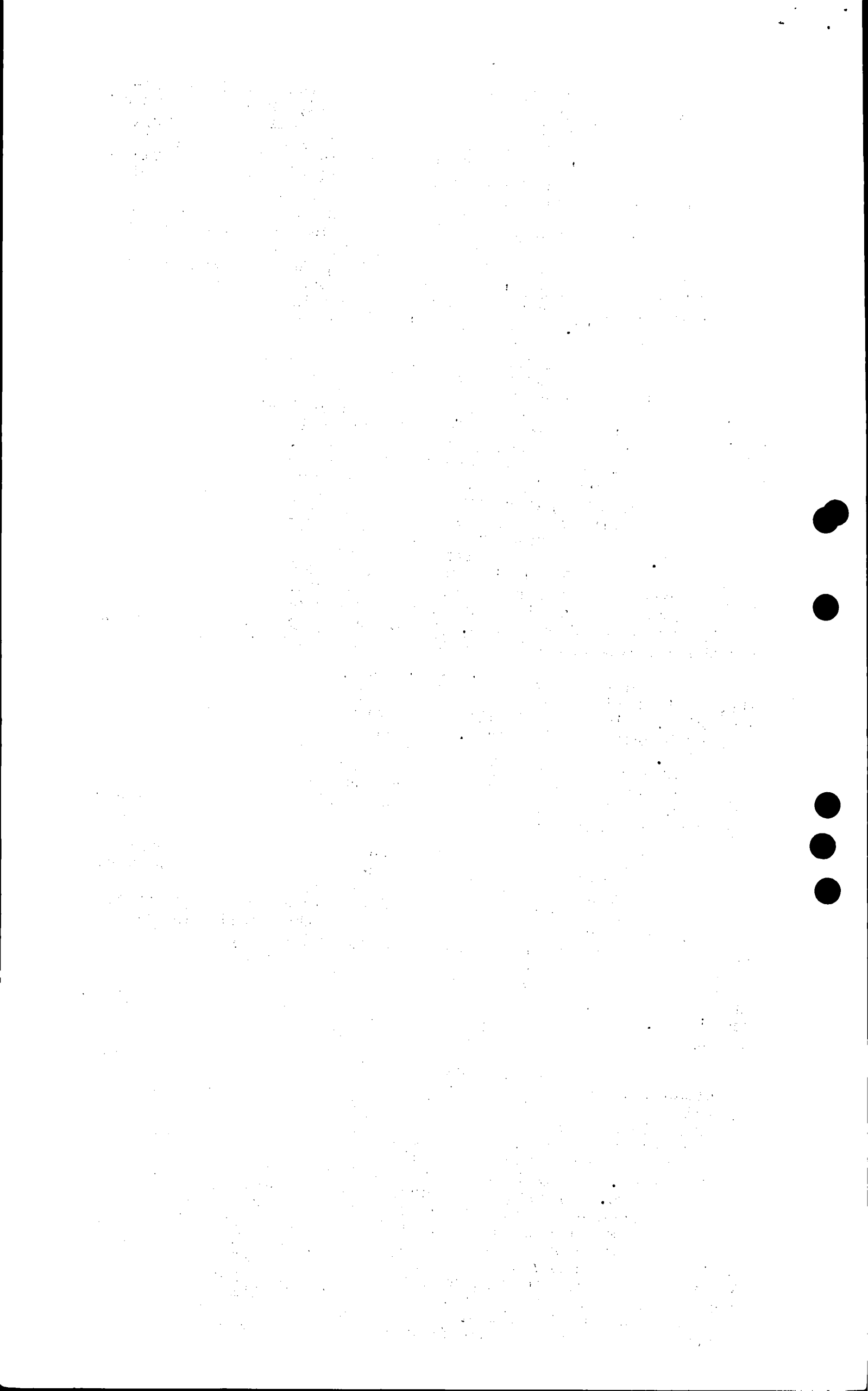
the principles of Christianity and the principles of representative Government, bred in some strange creed, from our point of view, with notable cultures going back into their own history, but incapable of being understood by us, or by many of us, at any rate. You can't take a fully grown plant, like our parliamentary democracy, and put it down in an alien soil and expect it to flourish and grow and bear its fruit as if it had been there all its life. It is a very great mistake for well-meaning people to insist that our system of governing ourselves must be right because it suits us - it is right for us - and then say: "Well all we have to do is to present this, fully grown, to some other community and say, 'Well, there you are boys, you all have a vote, you will all have a Parliament, now just go ahead and govern yourselves'". Life doesn't happen that way.

And I am saying that to you because very now and then you will read in the newspapers of some head of a new Government, whether it's in Africa or in Asia, who has done something which, from our point of view, is quite dictatorial. And we say, "But that's a terrible thing to do; this is a dictator's action". Don't become too excited about that. There are quite a few so-called dictatorships in these new countries which will, in the course of years, mellow down until they develop their own form of popular Government, and when they do it will be their own form and they will understand it. Don't be too severe in judgment about what goes on in Ghana, or what goes on in Karachi, or what goes on somewhere else. Don't be too severe about it. You don't expect other people to be able to adopt systems of Government which we understand instantly so that everybody knows them and everybody responds to them just as readily as those whose great, great, great, grand, grand-parents saw the developments of these things in British countries.

And therefore don't let's force our views, and, above all, don't let's be intolerant about what goes on in these countries. I'm not defending dictatorship. Dictatorship has brought horrors to the world. We will never have one in Australia. But there may be countries which, in their early stages of development in independent Government may need to give much more power to their central rulers than we would dream of doing, so that order may be established and gradually administrative procedures can be worked out and put into operation.

Now the only other thing that I want to say a word to you about is this: we think, and I think we are right, that we understand our system of Government, though there are some people who think that it is a system of Government by pressure groups, or by threats, or by something of that kind, but we know better than that. We know that by and large, over the years, we have been able to throw out Governments which have honestly tried to serve the interests of the community. And we understand that. But we are a little bit inclined to assume, aren't we, that our system of Government is just the same as the system of Government in other democratic countries.

It has been my task and, of course, from time to time my pleasure, to attend dinners in the United States, in Great Britain and in Australia in which glory has been attributed to the relations between the United States and ourselves, the United States and Great Britain, and in that genial mood, men at least get into after a good dinner, people eliminate all the difficulties. They talk about us being the same people, the same language. Almost, they persuade themselves that we are of the same blood - we are just completely identified people - and then they wake up next day and find there is a frightful brawl going on between Washington and Whitehall, and they say: "I don't understand how that happened; how could it happen?". Silly enough thing to say, anyhow, because my experience, when I was a lawyer was that the most bitter of all litigation was between members of families. But anyhow let that pass. They assume that we are the same in our system of Government.



Some day I hope somebody, if I haven't got the time myself, will write something about the basic differences between American self-government and our own, and if it is written, then we will not quarrel with the United States from time to time. We will understand what these differences are, they will understand what the differences are, and with an understanding of our differences we have a much firmer foundation than we have by talking rather vapidly about our unities and forgetting about our differences. I give you one example.

In London, in Canberra, if we want to work out what our policy is in some great international matter, we don't, contrary to what you may have thought, ask other people to talk about it. We go into the Cabinet Room and we talk about it ourselves, and we do a lot of reading and thinking about it, and finally we say: "Well that is what our policy is to be in relation to this matter", whether it's to be in relation to some near territory like New Guinea or South East Asia or the United States. Whatever it may be, when it emerges and is stated it is our policy. And there it is. And people in the rest of the world, reading it, being so advised by our Ambassadors and our Ministers, are able to say: "Well we know where Australia stands on this matter" which is very useful.

But in the United States, policies are today, to a remarkable extent, thrashed out by Committees of Congress, not one member of which is a Minister, because, as some of you will know, Ministers, as we would call them, in the Cabinet, as we would call it, of the President of the United States, not only don't sit in Congress but they are not allowed to. They are completely separate from Parliament - I'll give up calling it Congress for the sake of clarity and call it Parliament. So there's a Parliament, House of Representatives, Senate, at Washington, not a Minister allowed to sit in it and Ministers are up somewhere else discussing their problems among themselves. On a few occasions the Minister may have had parliamentary experience but on most occasions he has never had any. He has been selected because of his capacity in his particular field, which is of course, to that extent, a great advantage. And the result is that Congress has established a series of committees. They have, for example, a Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate and a Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives and they occasionally sit together.

If the Secretary of State, the late Foster Dulles or today, Mr. Herter, the most important Minister in the United States, is engaged in international negotiations of some kind he can be, and is, called before a committee of Congress, and cross-examined, perhaps all day, about how his mind is working, what he thinks may be the result of his thoughts. Well it is very interesting. It is all done in the presence of the Press and frequently with Television. It is very interesting. But it seems to us to be an odd way of evolving a policy because here is the Minister who hasn't been able to work out what his policy is, to completion, and he is being asked to analyse his own mind in the presence of the public. And therefore, like any other man appearing before a committee, he will think aloud. He will say: "Well, of course, that's one way we might deal with it" and then later on he said: "That's another way we might deal with it" and these little bits and pieces come out to the world and get on to the cables and people in London and people in Melbourne and Canberra say: "What sort of a man is this? He doesn't seem to know his own mind".

This was said about John Foster Dulles, you know. It was wickedly untrue. If ever I knew a man who knew his own mind, it was John Foster Dulles. But before a committee he might express ten minds in the course of ten hours of questioning, all in the process of making up, ultimately, his own mind.

You see - I hope you follow what I'm meaning by this - that means it is easy for us to misjudge what's going on in the United States. It is easy for us to get false ideas about American policy, or about American standards, terribly easy, disastrously easy, unless we understand that their system of Government, and their system of policy-making, is completely unlike ours because we have a Cabinet Government, with Cabinet sitting in the Parliament, and directly responsible to Parliament on the floor of Parliament. These are two utterly different systems. I prefer ours, if I may say so. They prefer theirs. They are a very great country, with a great number of extraordinarily able men and women and they are well entitled to prefer their system. All I am asking is that we shouldn't go blundering along assuming that our system of Government is the same as the system in any other democracy.

So that you see that there are two parts to this little lay sermon of mine: firstly, don't assume, when we talk about the democracies of the world that we all have the same machinery of democracy, because if you do, we will fall into misunderstandings every few months. Secondly, don't let us fall into the error of thinking that we can say to millions and millions of people who have emerged, or are emerging, from an entirely different state of life, that our system of government is necessarily the best for them.

All these things, all these international problems, call for a degree of tolerance, a degree of intelligent understanding, which, so far, we haven't achieved and it is because I know how important understanding and tolerance are in the world, that I am always delighted when I see that the head of some Government has talked to the heads of other Governments.

I know there are people in Australia who are inclined to regard these personal contacts as a jaunt or a desertion of duty. On the contrary, they are the performance of the highest form of duty. It will be a sad day for Australia when the head of the Government of this country cannot go and be a known and recognised friend and intimate of the leaders of the major Governments of the world - a very sad day.

And now that the President has come away from the Whitehouse, and has been travelling in London, in Bonn, in Paris, I am delighted. And perhaps the way to sum it up is to say that I am most of all delighted because I think it is rather sad that in a world of human beings contacts between the most prominent human beings should be regarded as the exception rather than the rule. I would like them to happen every few weeks, without brass bands, or trumpets, or television sets or all the other impedimenta of publicity. I would like them to happen just as a matter of normality, so that we will all know each other better and better, and particularly these great men in the world, know each other better and better and better, because - and here is the great and closing comfort - the more the ordinary people and the extraordinary people of the world know each other and are friendly with each other, the less dense will be the cloud of possible war, the greater will be the chances of an enduring peace.

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