

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES, AT THE OPENING OF THE OVERSEAS TELE-
COMMUNICATIONS CONFERENCE, 12 SPRING STREET,
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Sir, I am very grateful to you for your very kind words, but you struck a chill into my heart when you referred to what I am about to say as an "inaugural address", because I don't mind telling you that I said cheerfully to one of your Masters here today "How long do I go, about 12 minutes?" and I distinctly got the impression that that would be acceptable unless I could improve on it - and make it eight. And to have this signified by you, Postmaster-General, as an "inaugural address" is really rather terrifying.

Still it is a family conference. I hope you will allow me to talk to you in a family way. I have been attending family conferences, meaning by that, conferences in which have been represented Great Britain and Canada, and Australia and New Zealand for more years than the locust has eaten. In fact you wouldn't think, to look at me, with my boyish outlines - (laughter) - that the first one I attended was just on a quarter of a century ago at No. 10 Downing Street, and I have been, by some accident or other, at many of them since and I enjoy the family conference. And particularly is it a good thing when you don't just meet to exchange a few ideas and produce one of those famous communiques with which I have been associated in the past, from which all meaning is religiously excluded. After all, this is in a very true sense a business discussion. You are going to deal with a great enterprise, which I am sure we will all approach in a most co-operative way. It is a great enterprise that will bring us even closer together and more securely together in the field of communications.

When I knew that I was to do this - and I knew because Charles Davidson ordered me to do it, and he's a Colonel, and I therefore treat him with a certain amount of meretricious respect, - I allowed my mind to play on the subject of communications.

Well, it is, I think, one of the remarkable things of this century to look back - I look back over my own lifetime - and to ask oneself: "In what field of human activity is it that the greatest developments have been made in my lifetime?". I put on one side the subtle mysteries of the bio-chemists and the people who have wrought their own miracles, but in ordinary human relations the most remarkable miracle that has been wrought has been in the field of communications.

One has only to look back on it. I am old enough to remember the first time a telephone appeared in our village at any rate and it filled me with such horror that I've never quite got over it. My staff tell me that I'm the rudest man on the telephone they've ever known. Well that's only because, when you pick that thing up and you're asked a question you say "Yes" and hang up, or "No". Then the other fellow hangs up. But they tell me I am not very good at it, that it is all rather abrupt, and perhaps the reason for that is that in my later youth, which some of you will remember very well, it was a great thing to get on to the telephone in the evening and talk to some young woman with whom you were passionately in love, or thought you were. Those conversations used to last about three quarters of an hour. They were not conversations - they were interrupted by long silences while each partner to this curious transaction tried to think of something amusing to say, and failed hopelessly.

But the telephone well, look at it, you find yourself on one side of the world and you say "I'd like to speak to somebody in Australia", or "I'd like to speak to somebody in the

United States" or "the United Kingdom" and quite frequently you get through. That, I think, is fascinating, and not infrequently, when you have got through, you hear what the other man has to say! They tell me it's very good, and of course it is a miracle. The other day I had occasion to answer the telephone in the morning. They put a call through to me and it was my wife and she was travelling to Tasmania aboard the new ferry "The Princess of Tasmania". She launched it and they gave her a free journey the first time. And I said to her "Hello! Did you have a nice voyage?", you see - one of those fatuous remarks - and she said "We are at sea". Well that is a state that I have been in so frequently that it took me nearly a minute to realise that they were still on the water, using a radio telephone, and really, it was as if you were in the same room carrying on a conversation.

The telephone, the telegraph, wireless, broadcasting, television, these are all matters of communication, these are all matters that bring us nearer to each other, and now they have discovered a new way of communicating with the moon, by hitting it. Well that is again an essay in the field of communication, because it is perhaps occasionally overlooked that all these satellites are sending their own messages just as pilotless aircrafts send their own messages. We have the whole of this simply phenomenal development of communications. You experts take it for granted because you understand about it and you can see the next step arising, but I assure you that when I sat down and said to myself "Well there's the telegraph, there's telephone, wireless, there's broadcasting, there's television and there are satellites - isn't this the most remarkable revolution that's occurred, humanly speaking, in the last quarter of a century?". And I am sure that it is. I was talking to a very distinguished business man the other day from another country and we agreed that if understanding between countries, and business contacts between countries could advance in the next 10 or 20 years as phenomenally as communications between countries and individuals have advanced, the world had a fair chance of improving itself before this century is out. And that, of course, is so true.

You have made the world smaller. It isn't your fault, nor, I hope, is it mine in particular, but it certainly isn't your fault, that in the very period in which you have enabled people almost literally to stretch out their hands and touch each other, and speak with each other, as if they were face to face, in that very period ~~the world has been very busy~~ building up divisions of other kinds. We have had one of the greatest waves of acute nationalism since the War that the World has ever seen. Prejudices have been exacerbated, hostilities, sometimes very bitter ones, have been played on, some of the most barbarous things in modern history have occurred, and all this, in spite of the fact that you have put into the hands and minds of men and women these priceless means of talking with each other, communicating with each other, getting to understand each other. And therefore I hope that we are going to have a second revolution coming on top of yours - indeed the World needs it very much.

Anybody who is concerned with politics, anybody who attends, as I do myself, International Conferences in which we discuss the grave issues of peace and war and of International understanding, can't help being struck, time after time, that while we have had put into our possession the whole mechanics of International understanding, we have, so far, not yet acquired the spirit. Our hands have been, to that extent, more adroit than our hearts, or than our minds.

But, Sir, I believe that when we have broken down some of the barriers, when Leaders of Great Nations have come to

regard their meetings as a commonplace and not as some phenomenon which requires massive headlines, when they have got into the habit of saying "Well I'm so close to this man, my means of communication are so easy that I'll have a talk with him tonight, I'll ask him to come over tomorrow.." - don't forget that the Jet Aircraft is one of the great means of communication, and not merely a means of destruction - "I think we ought to have a chat next week-end". This kind of thing which is commonplace in your own country will, I hope, become a commonplace internationally. And when it does I think great changes will come to the world.

You know, if you can stand right off and be at arms' length it is terribly easy to nurse your prejudices and to nurse your hatreds and to say "That man's no good". I have met a lot of fellows in the world in my lifetime that I thought were terrible fellows. I became quite fond of them after I met them. I even can remember - this is very confidential - having a deputation come to me once from a few sturdy characters and at the end of it, one of them stayed back and said: "I think I'd just like to tell you that you're not half such a big so-and-so as they told me you were". There you are, that was the benefit of direct face to face communication.

But, really Gentlemen, it is, I think, a great and constructive piece of work to be able to sit down to discuss this Cable, to discuss this great enterprise which will bring our family closer together, and it is a jolly good thing to start with the family, because not one of us is contemplating fighting the other and we all know that on all the great occasions of trial, we are the one people and we stand together. We know that, and therefore something that brings us closer together is a great thing, but it doesn't only bring us closer together, it is another step in this remarkable development which has put into the hands of the people of the world one of the greatest instruments for peace that the world has ever had. I would like you to think of it in that way. These are great instruments for peace, because they are great instruments for mutual understanding, and if we are such fools in the world as not to use these implements as we should, well then, that's a reflection on us, but, I venture to say, not a reflection on you.

As far as we are concerned in Australia, we have an undiminished belief in the significance of the British Commonwealth in this world, and if I may say so, we have the oldest associations in the world, with the countries that are here represented, indissoluble associations. We can have an argument, occasionally, but the argument is never fatal, it is an enjoyable argument - we are all argumentative people, except New Zealanders, and of course they take it for granted that you will agree with them anyhow.

But to get together in this fashion - in this new exhibition of co-operation in the communications field - will, I believe, be a very powerful contribution to the sanity and civilization of the year. To tell you the truth, and this of course is very secret information, I'm much more interested in what you are going to produce out of this conference and the results which I hope will flow from it, than I am in the question of "Who next hits the moon with a rocket?". I don't like this monkeying about with the Moon myself. The moon has been quite useful to you and me in its day and of course it has other trifling advantages in the world's geography and oceanography.

But these are the straight, simple means of bringing people closer together. Many things that have been happening since in the International world, though they would be great instruments of bringing us together, are thought of, and written about, as if they were instruments to divide us, to make us

jealous of somebody else and to stir up hatred in our bosoms. Indeed, to me, it is one of the reflections on our time, that whereas even I can remember the time when, if some scientist produced some new wonder, the whole world applauded it, the whole world wanted to take advantage of it. They didn't say: "What side of an Iron Curtain was he on?" or "What country was he in?". The people who pioneered the great anti-biotic drugs, these fellows, the marvels, the Flenings and all those people of the world, they were International property, everybody was proud of them, everybody was delighted with what they did, and I think that one of the things I hold most against certain people in the world is that they have now set out to teach us to believe that a great piece of technology, a splendid piece of Applied Science, in whatever field it may be, is to be regarded solely in terms of rivalry, so that we get our tails down if the other man wins the first heat, or the third heat. What a lot of nonsense it is. I have no sense of shame about what people of our kind, not me, I'm the least scientific of mortals, but the record of people of our kind in the world, in all those discoveries of science which have brought untold benefits to humanity, will take a good deal of knocking about by somebody who in some particular or specialised field manages to do something, and do it extraordinarily well, that nobody else has yet done.

And so, Sir, I commend your task - it is perhaps pedestrian from the point of view of those engaged in rocketry, but it is vastly important and I believe that as a result of all these discussions, and what goes on, we will find ourselves able between ourselves, to make this new development and to forge another link in the chain of communications that will bring us closer together, and, in due course, bring the people of the world closer together.

And so, Charles, I have the very greatest honour indeed, not in delivering an address, but in declaring the Conference open, and I think, Sir, that you won't be entirely irregular, which you frequently are - I ought to propose, quite impertinently to this meeting - that when I have sat down you might perhaps instal the Postmaster-General in the Chair, so that the business hereafter may be regular.
