

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
R.G. MENZIES AT THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMEN-
TARY CONFERENCE, CANBERRA, THURSDAY, 29TH
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Your Grace, my Lords, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: My task is a very pleasant one and, you will be relieved to know, a very short one. My task is to propose the health of our visitors, and in doing so I will be supported by Dr. Evatt, representing the Opposition. That simple statement perhaps explains almost all that has to be explained about the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and about this gathering.

We are speaking now as Australians, completely bi-partisan on this occasion. We have no differences when we deal with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and its delegates. I have looked round the room and I have seen staunch supporters of mine, hardened Tories like myself, sitting cheek by jowl with gentlemen of advanced ideas from the Opposition, giving every possible appearance of being friendly, as indeed they are. That, after all, is the great secret of parliamentary life, and that is perhaps the greatest thing to be learned about parliamentary life, in all countries old or new.

So that is the first comment that I wanted to make - that there is something superbly bi-partisan, if I may use that term - or non-party, to use a better one, perhaps, about our meeting.

The second thing that has been very much in my mind - and I am not going to say all that I have in my mind - is that I have been instructed that this is only the first of three speeches I shall make to precisely the same audience on precisely the same topics. So, naturally, I must keep something in reserve. So the second thing, and the last thing, I want to say on this particular occasion, which is a pipe-opener is just to ask one question. This is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. What is there that makes us an association? What is it that makes us all feel that we have some profoundly great element in common, with all our differences? Some of the old ideas are no longer valid for that purpose. Take the Crown, for example and its relationship to the people of Australia. We are Her Majesty's subjects, externally and internally. There are other big countries represented in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association who recognise Her Majesty as the Head of the Commonwealth but to whom the Queen is not internally the same constant presence. So there is a difference.

There are differences in our law. We all hope and struggle to have the purest of legal administration. But every time I begin to persuade myself, with all the natural arrogance of a common lawyer that the Common Law is the secret, I encounter somebody from South Africa who, I find, is a stranger to the Common Law and all messed up with Roman Law. Therefore, I cannot have that as an element of unity.

Really, the more you think about it, the great thing we have in common is that we are all Parliament men and women. We know about Parliament, we live in a parliamentary system. We are all of us, or practically all of us, members of some parliament or another, all of them, interestingly enough, modelled on the great model of Westminster, all of them with departures and modifications which depend on local history and local characteristics or the inexorable march of events. But underneath it all we are parliament men. This is our great link.

I know of no other body or association in the world in which everybody participating can say: "I am a man - or woman - of Parliament. I believe in Parliament. I am part of Parliament, and Parliament is part of me." This is a unique body,

and that is a unique link.

Therefore, we in Australia who practise our politics, as Winston Churchill once said, with a fine Eighteenth Century vigour, are delighted to meet people, all of them people of Parliament, some of whom practise politics with more vigour than we do, some of whom have achieved that state of Nirvana in which courtesy prevails always, which we can only envy.

Before I propose the toast "Our Guests" I am going to invite my distinguished opponent, the Leader of the Opposition, my bi-partisan friend for this occasion, Dr. Evatt, to support me.
