

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
R.G. MENZIES AT DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE
DELEGATES TO THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY
ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, CANBERRA, 2ND
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Sir, we have all this rather neatly worked out; I begin by saying Mr Chairman, Your Grace, My Lords, Your Excellencies, and Ladies and Gentlemen - a form of address which I find rather tedious because it always reminds me of the fact that in London when this happens the announcement is made by a gentleman in a red coat, and one gentleman in a red coat, a very highly priced one because he was always employed, came across to me one night when I had made an almost intolerable number of speeches under these rather melancholy circumstances, and at the last moment before dinner, saying "My Lords," right down to "Justices of the Peace" - you know what I mean. He said to me, in a fine Scots voice, which had not been obvious up to that time, "Excuse me, Sir, but will I announce yer as 'Menzies', or by your proper name?". In consequence, I was introduced as "Mingies" which, mark you, is quite right - and I don't care who denies it.

Sir, this is my third innings. I had the opportunity of a very brief and not adequately alcoholic contact with Learie Constantine before dinner; he is a great cricketer and I am a great fan - is that the word? But in that game you don't get a third innings - except in the newspapers, and I am not going to assert myself - peace to our American friends for getting into the baseball game; and therefore here I am, third time up. What I find very hard about this matter is - that it is very difficult. What can one say?

The first thing I want to say to you, of course, is - in spite of evidence to the contrary - that we are all the same; that, I think, is the most interesting thing about us. We are all the same. We are all men and women of Parliament and, if I may forget the stronger sex for the moment, we are all Parliament men here tonight. This is a great bond of unity and yet, of course, Sir, at the same time we are all different. That, I think, is something that we have to learn to live with - we are different. We are all different races, we are all of different religions, we all have different histories and different backgrounds and - yes, if you wanted to dwell on differences you could find a whole universe of difference between us who sit down here together as friends tonight. In point of fact, every one of us here tonight is different. I find that there are not too many people who have come to understand that every man lives in a different world. That is rather an interesting reflection, I think.

I was born in the bush, not long before a drought year, and I never hear rain falling on the roof - particularly on a tin roof - without feeling a surge of joy through me that no man born in a city could ever understand. Somebody else born a week later in another place is born into another world. This is so profoundly true that it ought to restrain us from being dogmatic. Every one of us is born into a different world, has different early memories and has a different setting in the community. I find that a wonderful and an exhilarating thing.

So here we are tonight, all the same as people of Parliament, all different, every one of us, by reason of our birth and our upbringing and our early experiences and all the things that have impacted on us in the course of our life. And that after all, Sir, is the great thing about this magnificent Association. Here we are, what - 200 of us? - all different; not one of us can put himself or herself inside the experience of another - all different people, all with our own memories and our own hopes, our own despairs, our own vanities, our own

follies and our own frailties; all different - and yet we meet here as one group of people united by a common bond because we are all people of Parliament, and Parliament - though the word has a sort of dubious Norman-French derivation - is one of the great words in modern history.

Sir, there is another thing that I would like to say: many years ago - so many that I read the book as a student - Lord Bryce wrote a book on the American Commonwealth - many of you will recall it - and he said a profoundly true thing about all systems of federation. We have a federal system in Australia; there are others in the world. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association does not call itself a federation, but those are in common with it, and Bryce, writing about the American Federation, about one of the great things that must always be remembered, said that in every federal system there are two forces of opposite kinds always operating - one, centrifugal, one centripetal - and therefore in a federation power will tend to aggregate itself at the centre or it will tend to disperse itself to the perimeter.

This is a great problem, and I think that anybody who observes federation in the modern world would agree with me that the centrifugal force has been the greater, that more and more - and more as time has gone on - there has been an aggregation of power at the centre. And the same kind of conflict, the same kind of issue exists in the international world, and it is in the international world that we are tonight most vitally concerned. It is a remarkable thing that, internationally, two things have been going on - one centrifugal, one centripetal - and perhaps we have not observed them as much as we might have done. Let me say, as I understand it, what they are.

Since this last war in particular there has been a tremendous resurgence of national feeling - the struggle for independence, the assertion; the very proper assertion of national prestige and right and self-government. That has gone on and somebody looking at it may very well say how odd it is that after a war which was, in a sense, fought to produce some kind of international and co-ordinated order, we have had country after country after country asserting and claiming - and achieving - its national independence. There are scores of people here tonight who represent such countries and are proud to represent such countries; think of them! You have only to go back for ten years to see country after country after country asserting and obtaining its independence, and some onlooker may very well say "Well, that is a dispersing effort"; this is something that is centrifugal. We are going to have a world in which there are scores of countries each one with no connection with the country next door, each one living its own life, living separately its own existence; and yet at the same time - and this is the glory of it - the other forces have been at work and the glorious paradox of the last ten years is that the more countries who were once members of the British Empire who are today independent, powerful, self-respecting countries conducting their own affairs - the more of those we have had the more they have come together for common purposes. This, Sir, is at one and the same time the expansion, the separatism, the fragmentation if you like of an old world and the re-grouping of an old world with honour and self-respect for common purposes - a great paradox, if you like, and a glorious paradox as I believe.

Every now and then some clever young man will sit down and write a book - that happens, I am told. And every clever young man who sits down to write a book discovers that silly old fools like me were always wrong. That is all right, because the great comfort is that twenty years afterwards another clever

young man will sit down to write a book to prove that the first was wrong and that I was rather a great fellow. Therefore it works itself out. Every time I am tempted in my own heart or in my own mind to engage in theories about - the Commonwealth, I was going to say - our Commonwealth, I find that theories don't matter, that the fact is that we may argue till Kingdom come. We may disagree about all sorts of things but we all come within the same tradition whether the tradition is in one country or another - the same tradition of honest self-government, of Parliament, of the rule of law, and all these things that mean so much to every one of us, and because we do come out of that background then I am quite prepared - and you are all quite prepared - to sit down one with the other and remember that underneath all this extraordinary diversity - what the outsider may regard as separate-ism - we are in reality one people because we think just the same way about all the matters that come in the world of free men and of free women. And therefore I pronounce the paradox - it is a paradox. I rejoice in the paradox, and because I know that you rejoice in it, I have the greatest pleasure in the world in proposing the health for such of my Australian customers as are here tonight, in asking them to stand up with me, which they will with great goodwill - after I have called on Dr. Evatt, of course - to drink the health of our distinguished visitors.

Now, having said that, I am going to sit down. Dr. Evatt is having a very, very bad weekend; this will be the second time this weekend that he has had to agree with me - but if I may anticipate what he is going to say, I think he will agree with me now, as then, in the most warm-hearted and whole-hearted fashion.
