

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES AT THE OPENING OF FEDERAL COUNCIL OF
LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE AT THE ALBERT HALL,
CANBERRA, 16TH NOVEMBER, 1959

Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is, of course, not the first time that I have had the pleasure of opening the Annual Meeting of the Council. In fact as I walked in this morning I was reminded of a few facts that I had almost forgotten. But it is always a great pleasure to come here because this is always a most important meeting.

Naturally as we approach the end of ten years we look back and we look around us. I was called on the other day by a very well-known American Journalist who had been on his travels around the world and he said something to me which other people have said also, and therefore it's worth recording. He said: "You know, there are very many interesting countries in the world, but Australia, today, is a most exciting country". Now lots of people have said that to me; not because they wanted to please me because most of them had nothing to gain from my opinion. But they are right: this is a most exciting country. It isn't exciting because we are exciting - nobody ever accused us of that - it isn't exciting because we have revolutions or counter-revolutions, or change our Government every few months. All that kind of excitement is absent from Australia. It is exciting because no country of even comparable size in the world or population in the world is doing so much, is so busy building its future, so busy creating the great nation that it will some day be. This is what strikes the intelligent onlooker: "Ten million people", he says to himself "that's not many; what goes on here?" and when he looks around and finds out what goes on here his first impression is that it's an amazing thing that ten million people should be achieving it. And of course, particularly, because he is so frequently told before he comes to Australia that we are easy-going, that we are not very fond of work, that we are devoted to sport and that, really, we are not very seriously-minded people. That's what he is told before he comes here and when he comes here he finds an almost turbulent process of development going on and he finds Australia attracting the attention of the rest of the world and attracting the resources of the rest of the world as nobody ten years ago would have imagined to be possible.

Now, that I think is all completely true and the paradox of it is that this dynamic process that is going on in Australia should be to some material extent the consequence of steady, stable and sober Government policies. That may sound paradoxical, but of course, it's a profoundly true thing. A lot of racketing, and excitement and speculation and speculative ideas in the top bracket of Government and you'll find a good deal of dullness further down, and a good deal of anxiety, a loss of confidence; but if you can create all those things - a feeling of confidence, a feeling that there is stability, that there is soundness, that steady and intelligent courses are being pursued - if you can find that in Government, whether it's Federal or State, then you have the pre-condition for this enormous development.

There are many things that are set out in that very good little pamphlet "The First Ten Years" which I hope that quite a number of people will have read before long, but which many people have not yet read. Perhaps there is one aspect of this matter that ought to be mentioned; I just want to say a few words about, in fact about four aspects of the last ten years.

And the first is on the financial side. Ten years ago

when we came back into office we had been told quite blankly by our predecessors, that it was quite impossible to get hold of dollars; that dollars could neither be begged, borrowed or stolen; that in point of fact we must accommodate ourselves to the idea that the world of trade was being divided into two parts and that we must live on hard commons in relation to dollars. Within six months of our return, in spite of that gloomy advice, we had secured in Washington from the World Bank 100 million dollars for vitally needed developmental machinery in Australia - six months after we came into office. And since then the process has gone on. Ten years ago the amount of investment in this country on private account from overseas was very small, relatively small at any rate. But the last three years, or four years, whenever we have a look at the Budget, we have found ourselves saying this: "Well, there was an inflow of capital last year of £90m. per private investment, or £100m. It would be unreasonable to suppose that so high a figure could be maintained; we'd better be a little cautious on this, and perhaps discount it a bit for next year". But it goes on growing; it goes on growing in an almost fantastic way. Some of its effects, of course, need watching; others are splendid.

But those of you who cast your despairing eye on the Stock Exchange reports occasionally will not have failed to notice the terrific flurry on the market, the immense buying demand, very largely brought about by an inflow of money seeking investment in Australia. And they are not seeking investment, whether it is in factories or in scrip, they are not seeking investment in Australia just for the purpose of making a quick profit and going away with it: the great beauty of the overwhelming bulk of this investment in Australia is that it has gone into great enterprises, giving a massive employment to Australia, using the subsidiary industries to the fullest possible extent, and, to a very large extent, ploughing their profits back into further Australian development. I tell you that all this change in the financial complexion of Australia means quite clearly that in the lifetime of most of us in this room, we will see substantial exports of manufactured goods to an extent that we hadn't dreamed of a few years ago. The whole face of this country is being changed. Now, we would, of course be fools if we claimed that we did it, because we didn't. Perhaps the wisest way to put it is this: that we had enough brains not to prevent it from being done; we had enough intelligence to create the political climate in which it could be done, and I may say that all of these people, from wherever they come, with their money, with their skill, with their material, to invest in the development of Australia, will say that the first thing they like about Australia is that it has stability of Government and appears to have got rid of Socialist ideas. Ten years ago, as you know, the State Governments were, overwhelmingly, in the terms of numbers, Labour. Today we look around and we find that that position is completely reversed. People overseas don't fail to notice this thing; people overseas have not failed to notice that after 9 years of continuous office we were given a record majority. They read into this, and very properly, a determination on the part of the people of Australia to maintain sensible policies, encouraging private enterprise, and not discouraging it, with all the stability that they require and all the confidence in the future for which they had hoped. Now, Sir, those recommendations and facts are, I think, tremendously important; they are much more important than any catch-penny policy that our opponents may be able to put forward.

In the second place in the overall economy of Australia we see the position: we've had our shifts and changes of fortune, but we have not had shifts and changes of policy; we've had some ups and downs but, by and large, over the last ten years the economic growth of Australia has been immense. Nobody

looking around it could deny it. It is always interesting to me to encounter, for example the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association representatives who were here the other day; people from 60 countries and being politicians, most experienced in the art of criticism; not disposed to say that something is very good without some thought. And I think that every one of the representatives who came here from 50 or 60 different Parliaments and who looked around Australia on a splendid journey which was made and on which they saw many things, not one of them failed to be impressed by the remarkable growth of the country, and the opening up of an even more remarkable future. When I say something about "a remarkable future" I think that it is worth recalling that very largely because of the vast increase in expenditure on research my own Government has increased the amount going to C.S.I. R.O. quite spectacularly over this period of time.

The increasing interest in research on the part of private enterprise, the encouragement to research by some of the great primary industries who have levied themselves for this purpose and the work of people like the Bureau of Mineral Resources, the Commonwealth body which has done almost fabulous work, as a result of all these things, and a dozen others, our old conception of Australia is disappearing. You know, when I was a young man some wise man sitting in a University study somewhere, came to the conclusion, and proved it by irrefutable logic that the population of Australia could never be more than 20 millions because there was no hope for the dead heart of Australia, no hope of bringing into cultivation land which did not have adequate rainfall and so on, and even more recently, as I've told you before, just before the War - this last War - we were told by most reputable experts that the optimum population that would be reached in Australia was 7½ million and we wouldn't reach that until 1975. That was the climate of mind. Does anybody believe such nonsense today? When we see soil being brought under fruitful cultivation which was regarded as hopeless once; when we find mineral resources being opened that nobody ever dreamed of, with a broad hint in all the circumstances that we are almost just at the beginning of mineral development, does anybody believe these gloomy prophecies when he sees the work done by the use of trace elements and the like to bring into proper and rich pastoral production land on which stock would once fade away. This all appears to the imagination; this is something of which we must be proud, as Australians, and which should give us the greatest feeling of assurance that we will maintain the interests of other people. I hope we will; that we won't push them back, because I believe that Australia is roughly at the same period in her history with a population of 10 million as the United States of America was in its time, and every prominent American, every highly responsible American entrepreneur in whatever field, and I know that some of my State colleagues can confirm this, everyone of them who has a look at Australia is bound to say before he finishes: "You know this is just like the period in American history when our expansion was beginning and the whole world seemed open to us".

Now the third thing, looking back, is our industrial position. We have, by and large, over this period of 10 years had substantially full employment. We have sometimes had overfull employment; we've sometimes had a little spatter of unemployment but we've never had anything that in any way resembles the pre-war circumstances in the industrial field. And one would have expected that with plenty of jobs to be got we might have expected a good deal of industrial trouble because it is easier to go on strike - to put it bluntly - if there are other jobs around the corner, than it is to go on strike when jobs are short. And so the cynics, particularly the cynics on the other side said: "Ah! you see; This Government is going to encour-

ter trouble. The only people who can handle, who can understand, who can be understood by the Trades Unionists, is the Labour Party". What nonsense it's turned out to be. I venture to say that the relations between Government and Trade Union movements have never been better than in the last ten years. That, indeed, is why so many Trade Unionists vote for us: our relations have never been better. And as for the relations between the great body of Trade Unionists and the community, so far as that is concerned mark the fact that the loss of work by industrial trouble is fantastically small. Year by year, year by year, we've gone on recording fresh records in the small number of days lost. In point of fact, our present and recent experience has been such that less time and work have been lost by industrial trouble than would be occasioned by the granting of a half-day's holiday in Australia. Of course lots of people from overseas, years ago, used to say: "Well, Australia, it's got very tough trade unions; it's always having strikes. We read about them in the cables - strikes and industrial disputes of all kinds. They even have a special provision in their Constitution about Industrial disputes. What a land of disputation it must be." They have only to come here; they have only to become interested in this country, to get hold of the facts and they discover that the very reverse is true and in that field I venture to say that we may claim some credit for the state of affairs which I have referred to.

And then, finally, looking outside our own country, at International affairs. You know, this notion one hears, sometimes in one's own party, or in one's own party organization, that we have been pretty lucky, that we are rather, on the whole, inert, and that we suffer from that blessed word "complacency" in large doses, I get so tired of hearing that kind of thing because people who say it must have had their eyes closed to what has been going on, not years ago, but continuously going on at the present time.

I've said something about some aspects of it but look at the International picture. Where were we ten years ago before this inert Government came into power in the Commonwealth? Where were we internationally? We had succeeded in quarrelling with the United States of America; we had been making such loud noises of self-assertion that people occasionally wondered what side we were on, on the great issues of the world, and today, after a continuous process I venture to say that our status, not only in the British Commonwealth, but in the whole world was never as high; that we have achieved a reputation for responsibility and good sense and co-operation. Certainly our standing with the United States on the one side and Great Britain on the other was never more intimate. I have the great privilege as the Prime Minister to be in frequent communication of a personal kind with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and in less frequent communication of a personal kind with the President of the United States of America. We can communicate with each other as friends. We are of unquestioned standing in the free world and in respect of our own problems in the South east of Asia, in the south-west Pacific, which are problems which, under Communist pressure, might become more and more acute, without us being able to restrain them, in relation to this area, we have taken an active and successful part in promoting two great International Agreements - one the ANZUS Agreement with the United States of America and New Zealand and ourselves, a negotiation in which we played a most leading part and the South-East Asian Treaty Organization in which, again, the United States is involved, and, of course, Great Britain and ourselves and New Zealand and two or three of the South East Asian countries.

That Agreement itself was a notable achievement in diplomacy and just to show that all this isn't past history and that we have given up the ghost and have no more ideas to pro-

-duce I hope you have all noticed that in these discussions in Washington in relation to Antarctica, the chief promotion of ideas and of an Agreement between the Nations has come from Australia through my colleague, Mr. Casey. And in the result we are going to see an International set of affairs in Antarctica which will achieve much good results - two things in particular; one, I wont say the demilitarization of Antarctica because it hasn't been militarised, but an Agreement that it shall not be used for military purposes. That would have seemed silly, wouldn't it, once, until they began to develop rockets and guided missiles and sputniks and the like; very important today. And in the second place, the combination of the resources of nations for the exploitation of scientific knowledge or, indeed, of scientific matter of any kind in the Antarctic area - and that again is of tremendous importance to us. Even meteorologically, it would be a wonderful thing if we could have access to all the scientific meteorological knowledge gathered by other nations to have a foot-hold in the Antarctic so that we might pool the results, it would improve our own poor knowledge of our weather in Australia out of all recognition.

So, Sir, things go on, but as we are getting towards the end of our tenth year I thought that it might be an opportunity for saying something to all our friends here today - those who are the labourers in the field in the Liberal cause - something of the pride that I know you feel and that I know I feel in what has been going on and something of the complete confidence that we have that so long as we maintain the steady course, the strong-minded ideas that we have had in the past, then nothing can prevent Australia from flourishing and becoming great.

Sir, I declare the Conference open.
