

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES AT OPENING OF JEWISH WAR MEMORIAL HALL,
WAVERLEY ON SUNDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 1960

Mr. President, Your Excellency, distinguished visitors and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I think that this is a very happy occasion for a very material reason and I also have two quite irrelevant reasons for being here this afternoon.

The first irrelevant reason - though perhaps it isn't irrelevant - is that I have observed with great interest that your President's name is Felix. I was going to say his Christian name but I suppose that wouldn't be right. (Laughter). But his name is Felix which, if I remember my Latin correctly, means "happy" - happy - (Applause). And I should think he ought to be.

The second irrelevant reason that I have in my mind is that the last time I had the honour of making a speech to a Jewish congregation in Melbourne I was a little troubled about having to wear my hat all the time. I look bad enough without a hat on, but when I have a hat on I look terrible (Laughter) and I made a little bargain with the Rabbi who is a most courteous and obliging man and he said: "Well, if you start off with it on, you may then remove it and put it on again before you finish" and that's what I did. And this afternoon Felix - Happy here - said to me just before we came up: "It's all right; from now on it's hats off". Therefore I'm so speaking - cool, calm and collected.

Now, Sir, I'm not going to detain you but I just want to say two or three things about you and about this remarkable and interesting occasion.

There are three things that have always struck me about your community. I hope you won't mind a rank outsider like myself, who is an unblushing Presbyterian - you know what I mean - making a few observations about a community, so many members of which are very close personal friends of mine. But three things have always struck me and I think they're worth mentioning.

The first is your adherence to your faith. You've been persecuted for it in the course of the centuries; you've been attacked for it; you've almost been ordered to abandon it from time to time and you have adhered to it through thick and thin until it has been hammered into true steel. Now that's a wonderful thing, a wonderful thing - your deep, loyal and abiding religious faith. I admire that enormously. Everybody does. It produces in any community an element of sanity and balance and reliability which no community can afford to be without. I don't want you to think that people who are not of your particular religious faith necessarily, or frequently, or at all, object to you on that ground. Of course we don't. On the contrary. Any man, any woman, who has the flame burning and who keeps it alight is a great man and a great woman and the community is proud of him and proud of her.

That's the first thing that I've always liked and admired about the Jewish community. It's an enduring quality.

And the second thing that I've always admired is that I really think that you have a remarkable sense of family. I have met a few people in Australia - not too many, I hope, but some - who are a bit anxious to pass off the responsibility for their families to somebody else. I've never met a Jew who felt like that. I've never known a Jewish family in which the welfare of every member of the family wasn't the constant task of the lot. Now that's a marvellous thing because the family - a

good family, a health family, a proud family, a family generous in itself - this is of the very essence of community life. There can be no great nations without great family feeling and I admire your community immensely because all through my life I have observed this extraordinary, devoted sense of family pride and family responsibility. I hope that will always continue.

Your community is not a separate body in a great nation. It's not a sort of colony. You have no intention that it should be. But your faith and your inherited instincts are a great contribution to the community in which you live.

And the third thing that's always excited my admiration - I've said something about faith, family - well the third is friendliness. I want to say a word to you about friendliness, if I may.

I know that recently there have been strange people putting up strange slogans. If you'll allow me to say so I know a little bit about this kind of thing because "Out with pig-iron Bob" or something (Laughter) (Applause) has been on every railway crossing and every brick wall and of course being a low-down politician I've never objected to it because I've felt that this was unpaid publicity (Laughter). But I think that we just want to have in our minds that there will always be a few people who intend mischief, who desire to defile the community, those who don't believe in that orderly system of government that we believe in, that there will always be a few people who want to make rude noises or put up offensive slogans. And if one could grab one of them that would be the day - never been able to get one myself (Laughter). They have no place in this country. They don't represent any opinion in this country but as usual they've traced around themselves what might be called "the lunatic fringe". Do you know what I mean? They are the silly - well to use a good wholesome Australian expression - the "ratbags" who say: "This is pretty good; this'll do me" and they will go around chalking up or painting up slogans.

I don't want to discuss that problem with you except to say this: that 99.8% of the people of Australia regard these manifestations with contempt. These things don't represent a great movement in this country. Nobody need ever fear in your community that, in the case of some of you, you have come out of great tribulation and persecution into a country in which you might still be persecuted. Forget about it (Applause). You've come into the freest country in the world. (Applause) That's the great charm about Australia; that's why my friend Landa and I can be up here instead of biting each other's heads off (Laughter) and find ourselves on common ground, you know, on common ground admiring this spectacular and devoted piece of work. But it's a free country. It will remain free.

You know I came down here to do this job and I came down yesterday and as I drove in from the Airport the car stopped opposite a Hotel - there was a traffic light against us - and it was in one of those suburbs that vote for Landa and don't vote for Menzies - you know what I mean? - (Applause, laughter) and in the charming al fresco habit that people have in Sydney there were three fellows sitting on the doorstep of the Bar with their feet in the street having a drink and there was another one - a rather ill-conditioned sort of fellow, he didn't look entirely sober - and the first three fellows waved their beer mugs at me and said: "Good on yer, Bob" (Laughter). Well I thought that was rather nice. And the next fellow, sitting all hunched up by himself, he just looked at me and said: "Huh, yer big mug". (Laughter). Now sir, I like that; I approve of that very warmly. You see I'm very proud to be the Prime Minister of a free country, liable to be dismissed by the free citizens one of these days, proud to be serving them

and with no complaints of what their decision might be because we are free people. (Applause)

Everyone of you who was born in Australia knows that; you don't need to be told by me. And those who have come into Australia, particularly since the war, out of the horrors of Europe, in particular, I know that you've breathed more freely since you came here and that you feel that you're in a free land where you have your own opportunity and where, by your great talents and immense industry, you can make great places for yourself. And that being so, while I would willingly stamp my foot on one of the deplorable creatures who do these deplorable things, don't get that out of proportion. That doesn't represent anybody of intelligent, decent Australian opinion and it never will. (Applause)

And so, Sir, I come back to where I began. I'm very proud to have been invited to come here. I think this is a marvellous development. Only people with vision and courage could have imagined this centre, with all its costliness, with all the hard work that had to go into it. Only people with vision and faith and imagination could have done it. And I want to say to you: "God speed". I think this is a great occasion, a great occasion in the history of your own religious community, a great occasion in the history of Sydney. I can well understand the Mayor's pride of this in Waverley and I, speaking on behalf of Australia, if I might, am proud to think that such a work could have come about through faith, a feeling for the family and a friendliness which is, I assure you, reciprocated all round this country.

And so, Sir, I say "Thankyou" for having invited me. I offer to the whole of this immense audience or congregation, my warmest good wishes. I think it's a marvellous occasion. I'm proud to have been associated with it. (Applause)
