

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. R.G. MENZIES  
AT MEETING OF STATE EXECUTIVE OF LIBERAL PARTY  
OF VICTORIA ON WEDNESDAY, 2ND MARCH, 1960.

Fellow Members of Parliament and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to make a small correction before I say anything else. The President referred to me as being "sun-tanned"; I'm not: I'm hard-boiled. I thought when I was in Indonesia recently and Malaya that it was impossible for anybody to be hotter than I was, but I've felt hotter still in the last couple of days in Melbourne. (Laughter)

Now I'm not going to be here very long because I'm in the middle of a lot of work in my Office and we have a Cabinet this afternoon, but I do want to say one or two things to you.

First of all, of course, I reply to your welcome with the very greatest of pleasure. It's one of the sorrows of my life that being in Canberra, necessarily, for the great bulk of the time, and going to other States from time to time, I find myself very seldom in my own town and among my own people, and you've no idea what a pleasure I get out of coming here and seeing old friends and feeling that I'm in my own place. If that could happen more frequently, perhaps, Mr. President even the low growls might disappear. (Laughter)

I think, perhaps, I ought to say a word or two to you first of all about matters outside Australia. I was very struck on this recent journey to Malaya and to Indonesia, by one very significant fact. In Indonesia, Independence was secured as a result of armed conflict and there were, and are, great racial hatreds. It's a very astonishing thing to be in Indonesia and to realise how almost completely the Dutch influence has been expelled, not always to the advantage of Indonesia; though it's their own country and they'll govern it in their own way. But one sees there all the survivals of acute racial cleavage and, as I say, to a degree, hatred. Whereas up in Malaya Independence was achieved as a result of peaceful arrangement between the British and the Malaysians. The whole atmosphere is different: Europeans are going around about their affairs; large and famous business houses in Kuala Lumpur and Penang are conducting their operations. You go up through the country and if you see some big engineering piece of work it's 'a guinea to a gooseberry' that the Chief Engineer is called "Campbell" (Laughter). I didn't find any of this atmosphere of fear of the outside influence or detestation of the Europeans. And the result is that in Malaya the Government, under a most enlightening and sensible man in their Prime Minister, the Tunku Abdul Rahman, is going forward; they know that it's their responsibility to conduct their country and, if I may say so, they seem to be doing it with great efficiency and with high civilization.

Now I think there is something to be learned from all this. The British history and tradition of converting Colonies into independent States is, of course, well known and it deserves to be better recognised all round the world. It's a most honourable history. It is, in effect, a unique history. But there are still some people who prefer to be late rather than early with the creation of self-government. I think I used to belong to the school of thought myself which felt that you must be very, very, very cautious about reaching the right time. Today, I'm not so sure. Today I'm more and more satisfied that the important thing is that people should be able to rule themselves and that if you help them to reach that stage, if you don't hold them back, if you give them every conceivable kind of help and training and encouragement, then when they do achieve their independence, they will do it on the basis of friendship. And we need that because we're not a very big country. We need it.

That, to my mind was the great genius of Harold Macmillan's

visit to Africa - a magnificent journey. It always sounds quite simple - these journeys always do, until you take them yourself - but they're not as easy as all that. And his, of course, was far more difficult than mine because he is the Prime Minister of one of the great powers of the world and, indeed, and I think in the long run, the most influential country in the world. (Applause)

And he goes down on a journey, starting with Ghana and ending with South Africa, going through half a dozen different countries each of them with utterly different problems from its neighbour, each of them in a different stage of development; some of them with forceful and even hostile leaders and some of them with friendly leaders and, of course, ultimately, in South Africa, the classic example of a country in which the racial problem has attracted the interest of the whole world, though not necessarily the intelligent interest of the whole world, because it is a tremendously complex matter. And he's gone down there; he's made speeches; he's met people; he's discussed their problems with them and I will undertake to say he has, in this one journey, profoundly influenced the future history of the whole of the African Continent.

Cynical onlookers who think politicians like myself are all words, and take jaunts - what does it matter what they think about me - but I say this about Mr. Macmillan: I think this journey of his has made such a profound impact on the future history of Africa that it will be regarded as an "epoch-making" visit. And the outstanding thing about it is that wherever he's gone he's made it clear when he's talked to Africans, to the indigenous inhabitants of these countries: "We are not your jailers; we are your friends; we look forward to the time when you are going to rule yourselves and we're not going to be too petty about how you come to rule yourself. We want you to know and we want you to feel that you are to come to your Independence with feelings of friendship."

It seems simple doesn't it? I bet a lot of the things he had to say weren't very popular with some Europeans in Africa because whether we like it or not there are always conflicts between the young turbulent native element, getting education and getting a feeling of freedom and a great ambition for their own country, and the older European inhabitants who feel that things haven't gone too badly and they might, with advantage, be left alone. And Macmillan's visit has gone like a breath of fresh air on all these matters. He has spoken in South Africa with great frankness but on my advices, without leaving one ounce of rancour behind him. This is a marvellous combination of firmness and tact and good sense and imagination for the future. And it's important that he should have done it in Africa because though we talk about one hot spot in the world after another - and they seem to change every year - very few people doubt that the developments in the African Continent in the next ten years are going to occupy an increasingly important place in the thoughts of all of us. And of course, will have increasing significance for us. Don't forget that from our point of view it's a very grave matter that hundreds of millions of people in China should have come under communism; it would be a double tragedy if the Communists, who have their eyes on Africa, should succeed in establishing themselves by capitalising the interests, the enthusiasm, the emotions of the native inhabitants and pointing out that their white colonial powers are being unfair to them and failing to see their point of view. This was a master stroke by Harold Macmillan.

Now I might, perhaps, turn from there to our position at home. I'm not going to make an orthodox, political speech - I'll probably have to make one or two before I'm very much older. I'll be out on a stump in Latrobe where I've already been preceded by my friend, Mr. Calwell, who has my warmest good wishes for this election to Leadership. (Laughter)

But the thing I want to talk to you about very briefly has nothing to do with what he is talking about. It has to do with what the President said this morning in an indirect way.

Half of our problems as an organisation arise from the fact that we live under a Federal Constitution. I'm a great believer in a Federal Constitution - nobody need suppose that I have any ambition to see all power concentrated at Canberra. But it's true that a lot of our problems arise from the fact that we do have a division of power. So does the Federal Government that has limited power over this and that, the State Government that has limited power over that and this and there will always be, in a sense, conflicts which don't need to be - conflicts of hostility - but there will always be questions of jurisdiction; there will always be in the feeling of a State Parliament or a State Government a sense that it is too dependent upon the Commonwealth in the financial field; there will always be a feeling in Canberra that while we have the major responsibility in financial matters, we don't have - and you will agree - the major authority to deal with them.

All these things produce differences of opinion and arguments and they will always go on as arguments. But the thing that we have to remember is that we are all one people. I feel strange in some places in Australia - Melbourne's not one of them I hasten to say - to discover that I'm an outsider. I've nothing to do with that State, I'm something to do with Canberra. And I always have to tap them on the shoulder and say: "I'd like to remind you that every man in this place is a constituent of mine because I happen to be Prime Minister and I am elected by exactly the same people only more". And that's to be remembered. It's the underlying element of unity which must be preserved and if you have that - a sense of common destiny and of common responsibility - then whatever discussions we may have about the details, one arising from some conflict of power, another, perhaps arising from a conflict of ideas, they don't matter. They're very healthy. I agree with the President. I like to have this low grumble, this low murmur. It's a very good thing; it shows that we're not dead. But I do beg of you to remember that over and above all that we are one people and just under that, but remarkably important, we are one Party. We were once, in 1943, fourteen parties. We became one, and let's never forget it. We have presented to the people and to ourselves a spectacle of unity which the other side of politics envies in secret because it has been torn asunder for years.

All I say to you is: "Don't let us ignore what we see in front of us. Let's always come back to the fact that we are one party". You take the Commonwealth body. We have a Federal Secretariat. And it's a very intelligent and very useful affair to have. But we don't forget at Canberra that the whole of the field organisation in Australia is attended to by the State Divisions. Without that we would be helpless. We could go to the newspapers; we could make speeches; we could go over the air but we would have no organisation on the ground; none of this thing which is so vital to political success.

While the State Divisions on the other hand remember that in the Federal Secretariat we have evolved a very considerable and useful thinking and policy scheme which, in relation to Federal matters, does work that can't be duplicated elsewhere, in relation to Federal problems. And, therefore, here again is the very proof of our unity. They may appear to be different, but we are the same thing operating through various instruments.

Now, I say that to you because that means that I'm saying that in our Party organisation work we should always remember the Federal structure of the Constitution under which we all live. Therefore proposals to alter that Federal structure are the

concern of all of us. People occasionally think that a Constitutional amendment will resolve itself into an argument between one Parliament and another. That's not true. Constitutional amendments concern the whole people; they're not lawyers' tricks or lawyers' problems; they are the problems of ordinary men and women - the lawyers may have to put them into form - but ordinary men and women are affected by these matters.

We have just had a joint Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution at Canberra. It has made a massive report, a tremendous report, which I suppose very few people have had an opportunity of reading as yet. And about 40 or 50 amendments to the Constitution were suggested. Well, I'm bound to say without being too discouraging, but I think that's a pretty optimistic approach to the problem. I've had a bit of experience trying to make one or two amendments to the Constitution (laughter) but I've never tried 57.

As a matter of fact some of you will remember that in one year - I think it was 1937 - we had two amendments to the Constitution. One had to do with marketing - orderly marketing - notwithstanding Section 92. It came out of the Dried Fruits Case and was designed to help, among others, the dried fruit growers in the Murray Valley. And when it came to the polls I couldn't fail to notice that it was most heavily defeated in those areas. You never know. I hadn't a friend left. All my friends in Kooyong who weren't very interested in orderly marketing or dried fruits, or whatever it might be, used to look at me in the street with considerable distrust and I just scraped home at the next election. It's a fact. I know a bit about Constitutional referendums.

But at the same time we put up another proposal, let me remind you, to give the Commonwealth Parliament power over Civil Aviation. Now you'd think, wouldn't you, that a problem of that kind was obviously a matter for Commonwealth treatment since you can get into an aircraft in Melbourne and be in Brisbane in a couple of hours. So what? Enthusiastically you think: We're in the habit of saying "No", we vote "No". If we don't understand it we vote "No" which, no doubt, is a very safe thing to do (Laughter). And therefore I just want to tell you that nobody need anticipate that we're coming out tomorrow with a Bill to make 57 amendments in the Constitution. On the contrary. We're going to examine this great and massive document with loving care. I use the word "loving" in a metaphorical sense. It may be that some amendments will emerge as being worth consideration. I know myself of one or two problems that could, with advantage, be straightened out, particularly the relations between the two Houses on which I think that it's an unsatisfactory state of the law at the present time.

But so that nobody will become involved in heated argument prematurely, let me say that we have not yet discussed in Cabinet this report. A lot of preliminary work is being done on it by my colleague, the Attorney-General, and I've been doing some reading on it myself. But nobody need fear that there is going to be a sudden announcement that this particular mass of amendments will be introduced to Parliament. We must discuss this with our own colleagues in the Party; we must commune between Members of the House of Representatives and Senators; we must exercise our own judgment as to what is practical, as to what people are likely to approve of. Therefore I'm not in the happy position of the Labour Party in Latrobe which I notice has already begun to say, not that what we're doing about inflation is wrong - though they will, of course, in due course say it's wrong - but that what they would do about problems like the problem of inflation. What would they do? They would alter the Constitution in accordance with the terms of the recommendation of this Committee. I think that's rather nice. You might win a by-election with proposals of that kind, but you wouldn't win a referendum. (Laughter)

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, I just take the opportunity of reminding you of these things. We don't always think about them but I am satisfied that the 10 years in which I've been able to be the head of the Commonwealth Government, 10 years of very great advance all over Australia, would not, on the political front have been possible if it hadn't been that I had a united band of people behind me and united people working as you work in the field. It is unity which has been our great strength and if we preserve that, spiritedly, frankly, never afraid to argue with each other - though preferably in private - but not afraid of differences, but always remembering that it's the great underlying unity that carries this movement forward and that carries Australia forward. And I think that somebody else I hope will be standing here in 10 years' time as a Liberal Prime Minister looking back on another 10 years of successful service to the country.

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