

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES AT "PLEASANT SUNDAY AFTERNOON", IN
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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a sort of conjunction of the planets that goes on here. First of all, I used to be ordered along because I was told that it was to be the nearest Sunday to the outbreak of the Second World War, with which Dr. Benson has always had some impression I had some connection. And then it turned out it was "Father's Day". Then, of course, it turned out that for one reason or another it was the day of the year on which Dr. Irving Benson - a man who, but for the wisdom of the Almighty, would have been the Commissioner of Taxation - (Laughter) - performs his annual extraction. And so it is a happy conjunction of the planets.

He said something about "Father's Day". I don't want to occupy any of your time, or mine, unnecessarily but I have always thought that the great story about father and son was the one that was told by Mark Twain - many of you will remember it - who said, "You know, when I was a boy of sixteen I used to discuss things with my father. He was very, very ill-informed. He appeared to have everything all wrong. I had to put him right continuously. But by the time I was twentyone, do you know, I found it remarkable to discover how much the old man had learned in five years". (Laughter) That is my favourite story on that topic. And if you remind me, over the next 26 years Dr. Benson, I will remember not to tell it.

In a rash moment I said to my old friend, Dr. Benson, that I would talk on not the future of civilization - that is beyond me - but the Test of Civilization. And as the right way to test evidence is to put questions to witnesses, and get them answered, then put them together as best one can, I am going to make my little talk to you this afternoon by putting questions to myself, and answering them myself, which is a remarkable advantage, believe me, for any man putting questions.

Just a few questions that might help us to test whether this is the great golden century of civilization; or whether it isn't. And in order to put questions, and answer them, it is necessary, I think, to get rid of a few illusions.

It is quite true that we know an enormous number of things that our grandfathers had never heard of. It is quite true that instead of having the horse and buggy brought out and clip-clopping along a country road, you may now be hurtled along in a motor car. It is quite true that instead of going by a train from one city in Australia to another, you may now get into an aircraft and be hurtled through the sky. It is quite true that instead of being compelled to listen to another man's voice only when you are with him, you may now be compelled to listen to him at a distance of ten thousand miles over a loudspeaker from a wireless set. It is quite true that there are some people whose faces you don't like, but if you have a television in your house you will see them whether you like them or not. And these are all signs, I am told, of civilization. Well, of course they are nothing of the kind. I think we ought to get clear in our minds as to what civilization is.

First of all: Is knowledge increasing? Now the answer to that must be "Yes, knowledge is increasing". Even the least informed among us today, has a greater stock of actual knowledge in his head than the most highly trained man perhaps, of three hundred years ago. Knowledge is increasing.

Is scientific skill growing? Of course it is. The scientists appear to be able to take almost any physical problem and solve it and produce marvels out of the sky, or out of the earth. Scientific knowledge in this century, scientific skill in this century, has been at one and the same time the pride and terror of the world. Never, in the history of the physical sciences has any century seen what this one has seen. And therefore, yes, knowledge has increased, scientific skill has increased.

Is material prosperity rising? Of course it is. We may argue about the distribution of wealth, the distribution of prosperity, but taking it in the broad, nobody denies that the twentieth century, and this part of it, for countries like our own, has demonstrated a high advance in material living standards. And if that is civilization, then that is the third great step.

Is there a growing acceptance of responsibility, of social responsibility, by organised Government? And the answer to that is: "Of course there is". It is very hard to remember - indeed very few of us would be able to, even by a singular effort - a time when nobody in Australia had thought fit to instruct any Government in Australia to have a system of pensions at all. I first became Prime Minister, which to some of the older among you is a date that you may remember, back in April of 1939. Later on I was put out to grass, as you may remember, very sensibly, for a number of years. But I remember at that time, April, 1939, I was not only Prime Minister but I was Treasurer. Now that, I understand, is a very bad thing to be: you know, you mustn't hold two jobs. (Laughter) And I don't: I always like holding three. But I remember on that occasion introducing a Budget - a very small Budget compared to the enormous figures that we talk about today. But I was remembering the other day that in that year after a number of years in which the social responsibility of Governments had grown in acceptance, the Social Services component in the Budget was £17 million! And the total Budget was about £100 million. Today, such is the growth - and this is not a matter of Party politics at all - of the acceptance of social responsibility by organised Government, that this year in the Budget the Social Services component is not £17 million but £330 million! (Applause) And therefore so far as Governments are concerned you may say that there is an acceptance of neighbourly responsibility, an acceptance on behalf of the rest of the people of Australia which is remarkable.

Is there an increasing sense of international responsibility? And I think again the answer is "Yes." I don't remember, do you, twenty years ago hearing anything in particular about granting aid to other countries. Nobody had ever heard of the Colombo Plan. Nobody had ever heard of Marshall Aid. Nobody had ever heard of this enormous programme of grants in aid conducted by the United States of America. On the whole we allowed countries to look after themselves, or, as the Scots would say, 'to dree their own weerd'. And they went along: if they were poor - well, they were poor, and they could do but little. And if they were rich - well, they were rich and they could do a great deal. But they weren't our business: 'charity begins at home'. All these frightful proverbs were prevalent. But today there is an acceptance, internationally, of responsibility for other countries which I think is one of the great, great good things of this century.

Now therefore, all these questions I've put to myself - and perhaps to you, since you've been listening in - they are all questions, the answer to which marks some advance in civilization in our century.

But there are other questions that we sometimes conveniently put on one side and until the day comes when we can answer these in the same happy sense, we mustn't be too dogmatic about the advance of civilization.

Do we understand human beings and humanity better than our grandparents did? Do we? I know, Sir, it is the age of psychologists and people like to talk about the psychological aspects of this or that - you know. But do we understand human beings and understand humanity better than our grandparents did? It is a question worth thinking about. We can't say that we understand human beings better merely because we find so much more money to help them. That is not a matter of understanding; that may be a matter of accepting, willingly or unwillingly, an obligation. But do we understand them as people? Because if we do understand them as people we will be a lot more tolerant than we are about other people; we will be a lot more tolerant than we are about other nations. Do we consciously try to find out what is going on in the other person's mind: what exists in his history, in his tradition, in his feeling? Or are we a little too tempted to say, "Look at the marvellous things that we have done; why can't these people do them? All they have to do is to follow our example. Let them be like me" - like that song in the show, 'Why can't a woman be like a man' (Laughter) 'Why can't she be like me?' Do you remember? Yes. Is it permissible to refer to the theatre? Yes. (Laughter)

In the next place: Do we love our neighbour? This is perhaps the great question, the great test of civilization. Quite true this country of ours spends millions of pounds every year, literally millions of pounds, in giving help to under-developed countries under the Colombo Plan and under the SEATO Treaty - under whatever it may be. And we do it. And the United States of America does this thing on a fabulous scale. But do we do it because we love our neighbour? Or do we do it for other reasons? I'll just come back to that in a minute or two, because that is a tremendously important thing.

Again, Sir: Are the Nations and the peoples of them less cruel than they were a hundred years ago? This again is a great test of civilization. You would have to go back far, far more years than 100 years to discover parallels for the cruelties imposed by nations and peoples upon each other in our own life time. Never were the wars more dreadful, more cruel; never were there practices in war so terrible to contemplate for humanity as in the lifetime of most of us in this room. The savage is never too far from the surface. Could we honestly say that the nations and the peoples of the world are less cruel than they were a hundred years ago?

There is something to be thought about in all these matters. Civilization is balance: we must balance the good with the ill; we must identify the ill; we must work strenuously to cast out the ill - before we can say that civilization is on the march to a state of almost perfection.

Now I said something to you just now about international aid. It is astonishing you know: I go around the world and I see people of great eminence in their own countries who will say, "I can't understand it: we have provided enormous sums of money for other nations, but we don't appear to get any thanks for it". And I've always said to them, "Well that is the last thing you must expect". A man who does good because he expects thanks is committing a cardinal error. He must do good because he genuinely believes that it is a good thing to do. It is very agreeable if somebody says "Thank you", but it doesn't always happen.

There is a good deal of resentment in the world, and among individuals, about being under an obligation: "Why should he be able to have that money when I don't?". You know it is the most simple thing in the world. International aid can be given - this great phenomenon of our time - as a condescending charity. I am sure it is never designed in that sense, but if anybody gets the idea that it is a condescending charity, then it fails. It may be designed to buy goodwill: 'Well if we help country A or country B or country C that country will think well of us and be friendly to us.' That, I think, is a false standard. You can't buy goodwill. You can buy a sense of obligation - momentarily - but you can't buy goodwill. Goodwill is something that comes from the heart and is not purchased through the pocket.

Maybe that some international aid is given because it is thought to be good business. Let us face up to it: there are a lot of people in the world who think that it is; and that if some particular commodity is given to another country and it is manufactured by a particular manufacturer, it is good business, it is good advertising.

All of these motives, to the extent to which they exist in international aid are intelligible, but they have no relation whatever to civilization. What has relation to civilization is this: Are these great outpourings of wealth and of help in the world the expressions of a true understanding of what is involved in being your 'brother's keeper'? Are they based on an understanding - to take two examples - an understanding that in the world today - and it is more true now than it ever was before - the great source of irritation, the great basic conflict is between the "haves" and "have nots". If you have the "haves" on the one side and the "have nots" on the other, in a state of conflict, in a state of mutual envy, then you have all the seeds of bitterness. In our own country we have, by the wisdom of generations, reduced this conflict. We have reduced the gap considerably between the "haves" and the "have nots". But in the international world it remains the most tremendous problem.

May I just give you one illustration of that because I think it is of considerable importance. I said something about it only two or three months back at the University of Harvard in America where I was speaking at their Commencement Day.

Divide the world into the advanced industrial countries of which Australia is one, and the unadvanced, under-developed countries in which there are primary industries, primitive forms of production, very little technical skill, no institutions of technology. Well, obviously, the advanced country is richer and better off, and its people are. But as the years go by the tendency is for the advanced country, technologically, to advance at an increasing rate, because technical skill builds on itself and it goes up, and up, and up. I mean a country like Australia given even circumstances will, in another fifteen years' time, have standards that we don't think of today, because immense technical skill produces a rapidly increasing rate of climb in productivity and in the production of wealth. But if another country has hardly any technique, if it still has oxen in the fields, if it still has simple home industries, its rate of improvement is very much slower. And you see what that means my friends? It means that every year the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" in the world is increasing, not narrowing: the rich nations becoming richer and more productive and the poor ones slowly advancing, but at so much less a rate that

the gap between them grows all the time. This is the vital problem of the world. I don't know that many people direct much attention to it and I've hardly seen a word written about it. But this is the key problem of the world. And whether we are to regard ourselves as a civilized world will depend upon whether we can solve it. And of course we can't solve it unless we wake up to the fact that for the advanced nations of the world to look at the unadvanced ones and to say, "You may have our spare change" is not good enough: that will never do it. What we will need to do will be to make provision to a point of sacrifice for the under-developed countries in the world, because if we don't we shall find an enormous state of disorder and more and more hatred.

You can't establish peace in the world just by passing resolutions, or even by making disarmament agreements. You can establish peace only when you persuade the countries and peoples of the world that they live in a state of justice, that they have, each of them, a fair deal.

Now, Sir, my time is practically out. But before I finish may I put one other matter to you?

When we read our papers, when we listen in, we hear and discover a great deal about the newly emerging nations of the world - Africa is full of them. We've had Ghana; we're just having Nigeria; we can look right across the Central African Federation - in a state of some disagreement - we can look at Kenya and Tanganyika and all this kind of thing. You may run right around the world of Africa and Asia and there are new nations coming to birth. "Political independence" is the cry. And it is easy to talk about political independence: self-government is a nice mouth-filling phrase and if some people use it enough it is a great substitute for thought. Whereas the truth is that to give a country political independence when it is in a state of economic turmoil and incapable of sustaining its own life, is to present it with a cup of poison. (Applause)

The great thing that the statesmen of the world have to work on is that as they bring every nation to a point of political independence, so, side by side with that, must they build up its capacity for self-government, its economic strength, its reserves of administrative capacity. This is what we, and I am proud of it, are doing in New Guinea and Papua. This is what was not done in the Belgian Congo. This is what was done in British Malaya. It is essential that in addition to fine words we should do a little bit of fine thinking; that we shouldn't satisfy ourselves that we are great civilized democrats because we believe in political independence and self-government. It is a much harder task to help to make all countries fit to enjoy it. We will never be able to say that we live in the golden age of civilization until we have not only made up our minds that we will help our neighbour, but have gone to some pains to discover, in truth, what it is that our neighbour needs. (Applause)
