

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES AT THE OPENING OF THE RUSSELL OFFICES, CANBERRA, ON THURSDAY, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1960.

Sir, Your Excellencies, Parliamentary colleagues and ladies and gentlemen:

I have many reasons for being very pleased to be invited to do this task. One of them is that it is one of the rare occasions on which I can see the Diplomatic Corps sitting quietly, respectably, respectfully and with no grievances to ventilate. That makes it a very notable occasion.

But there are other better reasons than that, speaking with very great respect.

First of all, this, or these buildings, this first one in particular, as the first of the four, represent a very remarkable phase of development in the national capital.

The transfer of departments, so that we may have in Canberra almost literally, side by side, the great departments of State; so that no longer will it be necessary for chiefs of staff and those who toil with them to make long journeys to Canberra, to be consulted, or insulted, according to the mood of the moment.

Here we are! We will all be together - my own Department, the Department of External Affairs, the Departments of Defence, the Treasury - the great Departments of State being brought in to this one capital city. This represents a movement in national feeling, and in national efficiency which, perhaps, some people in Australia don't yet recognise. We, for ourselves, are determined to make the capital of Australia one of the fine capitals of the world. Because we believe that if Australia is to take her place, more and more, as a nation in the world - not a large nation, not unduly significant you may tell me, but still with a future - then we must, so far as we can, express our national instinct in concrete visible terms that appeal to the imagination.

The creation of a national capital in this lovely spot is one of the great things to be done in the performance of that task.

I must confess I have very little patience with people who appear to grudge everything that is spent on buildings of this kind - not that they are elaborate - but buildings of this kind.

The moaning that goes on about the imminent creation of a lake which will give to this city character, and make it a city around a lake, as nothing else could make it, a coherent whole! I don't have any sympathy with those ideas at all.

I believe that the future of this country, just like the future of any other democratic country, is largely associated with creating the national capital as a focus of interest, as a focus of pride, as a place which will attract the best possible men and women, not only for Parliament, for the Public Service, but for all the activities that are associated with Government on the grand scale.

So I believe that all the investments that we are making in Canberra are dividend-paying investments in the best sense of the word.

There is another reason why I am very glad to be here. Something pretty good happened in Canberra not so long ago. We had enough wit to establish a Commission; and we had enough wit to make Mr. Overall its Chairman.

Now, this man Overall occasionally frightens me. He looks to you to be a mild and disarming character. He has associated with him Commissioners of great talent who are equally mild and disarming. But I'll tell you the great secret of this man: when he learns on the telephone that the Cabinet has approved of something, some scheme, some project, that concerns him, he has the bulldozers in on the site next morning.

He knows of politicians, even by instinct - certainly not by experience (Laughter) - but by instinct he knows them. He has given us imagination, and drive in the development of Canberra for which I, for one, as the Prime Minister, will be eternally grateful to him. And I say that for him, and for his Commission.

This conception, now beginning to take shape - the offices here, the bridge, the other bridge that will go in, the lake, the whole city grouping itself with, I hope, more fine buildings in the future - this is something that appeals to the imagination.

I am only sorry that I have reached such advanced years now that I won't be able to come back in 50 years' time and see the fruit of all these labours, a marvel, and a pride, and a joy to Australians.

But over here, we are doing something, we are here at a very remarkable step. I'm delighted with it. I'm sure you are delighted with it. I am proud of everybody who has been connected with achieving it. I am delighted to think that my colleague, Mr. Freeth, is able to be here on this matter - he's had much to do with it - and I'm very grateful to think that my colleagues in Cabinet, and the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, have, in the most practical way, supported these developments.

So here we are a growing city; a greater, and more scientific aggregation of the people who work for us; a vision of the future; and a remarkable achievement in the present. All these are great matters. They give me great personal joy and satisfaction, and they will explain to you why I am delighted to declare this building open. (Applause)

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