

AUSTRALIA CLUB DINNER

LONDON, ON MONDAY, MARCH 20, 1961

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Sir, My Lords and Gentlemen,

I think I ought to begin by saying how grateful I am to His Royal Highness the Duke (of Gloucester) for having once more presided over one of these dinners. He and I were recalling earlier this evening an occasion in this very hotel, in one of those less civilized days when one wore a stiff shirt and white tie; and I arrived with a temperature of 103<sup>o</sup>, which I am told is a high temperature. I got up and read the speech and couldn't see the audience at all - they were like floating clouds - and at the end of it I didn't know what I had said, nor, I imagine, did anybody else. Because of this very high temperature I turned to His Royal Highness, who is a former Governor-General of Australia and a stout-hearted friend of Australia, and if I may say so, Sir, always a kind friend of mine; I turned to him and said, "Sir, I am terribly sorry. Could you understand what I was saying, because I couldn't." And his reply deserves to be immortalized. He said, "I think, on the whole, it is the best speech I have ever heard you make!"

And then, of course, to add to my embarrassment, we have here Lord Slim, another former Governor-General of Australia, a very remarkable man who, since he ceased to be Governor-General has always treated me with the greatest affability. All the time I was supposed to be his chief constitutional advisor - you know, going around saying, "If you don't mind, Sir, I don't think you should have made that speech; let me write the next one." To which he would always reply, "Let it be a little literate for once." All this time I was terrified of him, but since he gave up being Governor-General, we have become very good friends. Therefore, I am permitted to say to you that I think he is a very great man and that Australia had a great honour in having him. I won't dwell on the fact that he knows my mind and knows the feelings of the people of Australia.

But then, Sir, I look to my left and see this calm, benign, non-contentious character, Lord Hailsham. He was involved the other day in a slight fracas in the House of Lords. We don't want to dwell on it in any way, but somebody said to me "What do you think about that?" "Well", I said, "you can't understand that unless you understand Hailsham because when he found himself, willy-nilly, cast into the House of Lords, he protested very violently. I don't go as far as to say that he reflected on his father's choice or anything of that kind, but he certainly did make - do you remember? - a little bit of an uproar: "Why should I go into the House of Lords? I would sooner ring bells elsewhere." But, having been beaten down on that subject, and having resigned himself to being a member of the House of Lords - God bless it - he then decided that he would try and approximate the House of Lords to the House of Commons; or, you might say, to the House of Representatives in Australia. And so he chose to debate accordingly. You all know what I mean, or if you don't, you are not good Australians.

And then there is this wretched creature, the Master of the Rolls. Until tonight, I have always admired him enormously. I have even put myself to the trouble of reading some of his judgments. I have even persuaded myself occasionally as a former lawyer, that they were right - which I think argues a high degree of Christian charity, on my part. This creature: What does he do? He brings in cricket. It is, of course, an

admirable thing to bring in; we could have done with a bit of it in the last week. But having brought it in, he makes a glancing reference to Old Trafford.

Now if somebody wants to he is at perfect liberty to talk about Old Trafford because, so far as I can remember, there never has been a test match played at Old Trafford for donkey's years. Everybody got worked up and everybody got excited - the newspaper critics, you know, these geniuses, these rather underbred geniuses who write about all these things - they had it all worked out for Old Trafford. But for three consecutive tours, not a ball was bowled at Old Trafford because it turns out that at Old Trafford they specialise in rain. Anyhow, he drags in Old Trafford as if he was a sort of - what is the word? - an archaeologist, even an anthropologist, I would think. He drags that in, and then he says this - I think I wrote down the ipsissima verba, "Winnie ille Pu" - you must attend to your pronunciation: "And then we went to a wool sale!"

This, of course, fascinated me enormously because tonight I'm wasting my time on you and tomorrow I'm going to Leeds where I am to open, I'm told - though how I haven't been told - a wool research institute. And I'm going to be given one of my many unearned degrees. I think Lord Slim has one! They thought it rather odd that he should alone have an unearned degree so they joined me in, you see - glad to have a second - and then I make a speech to the Lord Mayor. It is much harder to make a speech to a Lord Mayor than to have a speech made by a Lord Mayor to you. But that is going to happen. And so this wretched character Evershed, he said, "And so we went to a wool sale." If I had made a remark so fatuous to him as counsel, he would have looked at me and said, "Well, Mr. Menzies" - or "Mr. Minges" to people who are well trained - "what do you mean by a wool sale?" It was just like the occasion in my own humble jurisdiction in Victoria, which Sir Edmund Herring will remember very well, when I ventured to say to a celebrated equity judge - and he is one - anyway I think so - none of the common lawyer - we won't go into that - but I ventured to say to the celebrated equity judge, "Well, Sir, the difference you are putting to me is merely the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee." Well like all politicians I thought this not highly original but singularly brilliant - the difference between tweedle-dum and dweedle-dec. And the old boy put the tips of his fingers together and said, "Mr. Menzies, I hope you don't think you are solving the problem!" I say this, Master, only to indicate that although we have overcome all social distinctions, these distinctions between equity and the law are still prevalent. And, as a common lawyer, I think this is not without merit. I say no more than that.

But the Master of the Rolls, towards the end of his speech, made some reference to the Commonwealth. I think it might be regarded as a little odd if I did not say something myself about the events of the last week or ten days. Because there is one odd thing about conferences nowadays: Every morning you open your ten newspapers and you read ten different versions, each particularly authoritative, about what went on before. I have never known what happened at this conference until I have read the newspapers; and I have read some of the most astonishing things. But what I want to say to you tonight I say as a man who won't be accused of not being a Commonwealth man. I have, through the whole of my public life, been a devoted servant of the Crown. That doesn't go for everybody in the Commonwealth - the old Commonwealth and the new Commonwealth. I think therefore one should say a little about some of the events of the last ten days and some of the dangers, as I see them of the results of the last ten days. Because I believe

that last week we had some of the most dramatic events in Commonwealth history, and if we don't think they are dramatic, then we have lost all interest in the Commonwealth and what happens to it. Because after all what happened last week was that a foundation member of the British Commonwealth, to wit South Africa, was in effect told to leave. I use those words. I will justify them in due course. And that country, South Africa, has left. Now this is not something to be tossed off lightly as a mere incident; this is a foundation member of the Commonwealth, a country which became a member of the Commonwealth after bitter wars, after bitter disputes, and after a superb act of statesmanship by the United Kingdom which created the Union.

Now Sir, we have had in the newspapers, speculation, propaganda, and if you will allow me to say so, not a little falsehood, about the events of the last ten days. Therefore, I want to say something about the events as I saw them and as, in an extremely obscure capacity, I have had some part in it. Sir, all this argument has arisen about something which is called "apartheid", which means, as I understand it, separate development. Separate development, has been rightly or wrongly the policy of the Government of South Africa. And indeed I would like to remind you it has been the policy of South Africa since it was first erected by J.C. Smuts. I can't complain about Field Marshal Smuts because he was the most distinguished of all members of the British Commonwealth outside this country. I delivered the first Smuts lecture last year at Cambridge and in the course of preparing myself for it I even read Smuts' book on Holism which very few of you have tried to do. He was a philosopher, a statesman, a scholar, and he found himself confronted by the choice which every Power finds itself confronted by - the choice between having a policy of integration when you have people of different races, or a policy of separate development. Now that, I would have thought, in my innocence, a problem of statesmanship. In the old colonial days it was putting on one side the Africans - apartheid. You had the European colonising Power doing this and that; running the country and building people up, all very properly; a process which has led to the creation of nation after nation in this world; or you have some other view. And so South Africa decided it would have this policy of separate development. Now for reasons I am going to give to you I don't agree with this policy. But the great problem that we have to confront is whether, because you disagree with the policy of a country - a member of the Commonwealth - you push it out of the Commonwealth. And those are two questions that ought to be kept completely distinct one from the other. The whole problem is not one of moralizing, or being superior, or passionate; the whole problem is one of statesmanship.

Now I have said to you that I don't myself agree with this. I am talking to you tonight - and I say this particularly to my Australian fellow-countrymen - I am the only Prime Minister who, until this conference, has never publicly offered an opinion on South African policy. And I stand by that. I think that was right, because I am a believer in the Commonwealth, I am a believer in the members of the Commonwealth meeting together, not arguing with each other, not lecturing each other, not sitting in judgment on each other, but seeking to discover between themselves what points of agreement they have, how far they may assemble their moral force in the world. And, therefore, in my Parliament, and I daresay not much to my advantage, I said "No. South Africa runs its own affairs; we run our own affairs; Canada runs its own affairs. Who are we to be sitting here in judgment one on the other? I don't have any observations to make on what the other man does." But all this is 'old hat' now because everybody has a go at it.

I would not be saying anything about it tonight, if it were not for the fact that in this conference Dr. Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of South Africa, himself acceded to the idea that we ought to have a chance between us all to thrash this matter out. So I pause here, and say this about Dr. Verwoerd: he has been accused, sometimes by people who speak, I understand, in the name of Christianity - I am a simple Presbyterian myself - he has been accused of something that almost approximates to the bitterness of murder. I want to tell you that I, in fact, formed the impression - never having met him before - that he was a man of immense integrity and of great courtesy. He came out of this conference, personally, whatever you might think of his policy, with the very high respect of the people who sat with him. And I say that at the very beginning because I don't want to have it thought that I am one of those people who want to lecture him as if he were a wicked man with no moral sense. I believe he is a man of utter integrity. I don't agree with his policy. But I am not bound to your policy. If I disagree with your policy I don't mean to tell you, you are a man of no character. And I hope you won't be called upon to tell me that I am a man of no character because you don't agree with my policy.

The whole genius of the British Commonwealth - and by Jove, I believe in the British Commonwealth with a faith in my guts - the whole genius of it has been that we are tolerant, we agree to disagree, we seek to understand, we look for points of agreement, but we don't stand up and lecture each other in the face of the world; and never until this year, have we sat in judgment on each other. These are things worth remembering. Here is a problem of statesmanship. Now I, never having before offered a public word about South African policy, am now called on to do so, and not by my wish. I am old-fashioned enough to believe in tolerance, and in living and letting live, and in the virtues of Christian faith, hope and charity. I believe in these things, but if this is out of date and I am to be misunderstood about these matters, then I simply say this to you: here is a time of passion and rhetoric; of broad, sweeping statements, the kind of things you expect to have in the United Nations Assembly but not in the British Commonwealth. These are the times, and therefore I say to myself: "Must I say something?" I believe I must, and I say it. I don't moralize about South African policy because I think moralizing is a pretty cheap thing. All I say is that I don't think it will work.

You see this is the pragmatic British approach and I am happy to say that I am completely British. I don't want to be offensive to the Master of the Rolls, but I believe I am in the tradition of the British common law, and this involves pragmatic judgments - will it work? And it won't work. Nothing was more impressive to all of us at this conference than the way in which Dr. Verwoerd, with obvious honesty, with great courtesy, with great lucidity, explained his policy. He told us what his Government was doing for the Bantu: for the Bantu in their territories, for the Bantu in the ordinary provinces. He told us of the amount of money they were spending on education and health - which I may say is quite an example to all the other countries in Africa. And he believes that all this will work out very nicely. Well, and I speak with great reluctance, I don't think it will, because I believe in this day and generation that the more his policy succeeds, the more he brings the Bantu up in terms of health and living standards and education, the more intolerable will they find it to be second class citizens. Now this is purely, I say purely, a pragmatic approach. It is not sentimental, it is practical. And I said to him time after time in private "I know you believe this is right, but I believe that the more it succeeds in the first

instance, the more it will fail in the long run. Because the more you succeed in building up the Bantus, the more you succeed in giving them proper standards - educational standards and universities - the more you will develop that proper pride in people which will make them say, 'I am not to be pushed to one side'. And if it goes on that way then you may find that the ultimate conflict will be bloody and devastating." Now that simply is my own view, and I offer it for what it is worth, and he is familiar with my views on this matter. But if he goes back to his own country and says "I am unmoved by that; this is our policy", then I want to tell you I stand for the right of any Commonwealth country to run its affairs in its own way.

May I remind you, Sir - I don't want to be too long - but may I remind you that in May of last year, which is less than a year ago, we had a Prime Ministers' conference on this matter; well not on this matter, but on a number of matters, but this was the first matter to come up. And after we had had a discussion we issued a communique. In this great organisation of ours we do not produce a communique unless it is unanimous. And this communique said: "The Commonwealth is an association of independent, sovereign States, each responsible for its own policy." Now these are, I venture to say Sir, fine words and true words. And I emphasise that because, without any boasting, if somebody in a Prime Ministers' conference wants to tell me what the policies of Australia ought to be, I would tell them to go and jump in the Serpentine. I know mine is an unfashionable idea, but there is much to be learned from the history of the past.

The Charter of the United Nations - and that is a body with which I don't invariably agree - the Charter of the United Nations concedes the point. It says: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State". And Sir - if I may add to that - last year, after this conference in which these matters had been informally discussed, I went off, dreadfully daring, to Cambridge to give the first Smuts Memorial Lecture. It was a piece of irony you know, as I look back on it, because it was Smuts who devised the policy of apartheid. He wouldn't have done it in the same way - no, of course not. But he was a great man, a great figure in the history of the Commonwealth. Would you mind if I quoted from this Smuts lecture? You could of course buy it for a few shillings from the Cambridge University Press, but I know how impoverished you are, and I won't dwell on that. But I really think this is something I ought to put to you:

"During the recent tragic episodes in South Africa - because remember that this declaration I have just been quoting to you was made after Sharpeville, after Langa, after those events which are now celebrated by gentlemen with sashes across their chests -

"During the recent tragic episodes in South Africa there were not wanting suggestions that South Africa should be expelled - presumably by majority vote - from the Commonwealth. Any such suggestion, in my opinion, misconceived the nature of our association. We do not deal with the domestic political policies of any one of us, for we know that political policies come or go with governments and that we are not concerned with governments and their policies so much as we are with nations and their peoples. If we ever thought of expelling a member nation of the Commonwealth it would, I hope, be because we believed that in the general interests of the Commonwealth that nation a nation was not fit to be our associate.

"The Prime Ministers' Conference would break up in disorder and the new Commonwealth would disintegrate if we affected to discuss and decide what we thought to be the proper measure of democracy in our various countries; whether particular groups should or should not have the vote; whether oppositions should be respected; whether a Parliament should control the Executive. On all such matters 'autonomous' or 'independent' nations must have the right to manage their own affairs in their own way.

"We are not a court. We are brothers in a special international family."

Now let me emphasise this, every Government, every member of the Commonwealth, has achieved self-government, a right of complete independence. Do I want to go around and to say to any one of them, "This is how you ought to govern yourself?" Of course not. That is too stupid for words. You will have a high degree of authoritarian government in one country. You will have an advanced stage of parliamentary government in another. But when you look back on these things and you remember from first to last, from the Balfour Declaration onwards, we emphasise that we are autonomous governments, masters of our own fate, masters of our own problems. Don't you think it is a monstrous thing for us to be sitting in judgment on one another? I wouldn't have said a word about South African policy, which I think is doomed to disaster, except that I am the only man yet among the Prime Ministers who hasn't said something about it. And it has all been exposed to the public eye and therefore no one can be misrepresented. But really, basically, I am a great believer in autonomy meaning autonomy, and self-government meaning self-government. And if we are to reach a state of affairs in which, instead of meeting to discover points of agreement that we might have - struggling to understand each other's problems, every now and then finding out there is some matter on which we can jointly achieve some results, forward some good cause - we are not to do that but are to adopt the new rule that when we meet, somebody is on trial and we analyse their differences, then, next time it may be Australia.

How do I know? We have things in our policy which are our policy and our business but with which somebody may disagree. I wouldn't tolerate having these things discussed by other people. I wouldn't tolerate being lectured by other people on what we ought to do. But alas, when emotional judgment comes in and there are all sorts of banners being borne in the sky, people can be misled into misunderstanding what it is all about. Today it is the fashion to talk about racialism. It is still the fashion to talk about colonialism - so long as you don't talk about Communist colonialism, which is the greatest and the most aggressive colonialism in the world. But who talks about the rule of Parliament? Who talks about the rule of law? Who talks about an uncontrolled press? Who talks about no imprisonment without trial? I could very simply, if I am allowed to stay in office long enough, have a word or two to say about these things. If the drill is that in the Commonwealth, which was a communion of friends who didn't order each other about but met to discuss and, as far as they could, agree; if this is to be changed so that we are sitting in judgment, so that we are a species of courts, so that we have accused, and charges, and verdicts; then I am bound to tell you with all that inherent courtesy which characterises me, I will have something to say about that. By the time I have said it, and by the time the answers have been made, there won't be any Commonwealth because we will all have expelled each other.

Sir, I think this is really a most unhappy event and

the last thing I want to say to you is this: don't fall into the error, which many people are falling into, of thinking that the Commonwealth - this our most glorious contribution to civilized life in the modern world - is a sub-division of the United Nations; don't begin to think of it as if it consisted of resolutions and amendments and lobbying and votes. I resist this. This has nothing to do with the United Nations. I don't mind if the representatives of ninety-nine nations in New York go on making speeches lasting two and a half hours each, and keep going into committee, and doing all these things to amuse people. Forget about that. This is highly experimental. It may produce some good results. But what hurts me is this: that this great Commonwealth is being dragged into this area of thought which has no relation to it.

In 1935, I, for the first time, attended a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers. It wasn't called the Commonwealth then, it was called the Imperial Conference and the then Prime Minister of Australia, my late friend and leader Mr. Lyons, was ill. He asked me to attend for him. That was twentysix years ago and, man and boy since then, I have had a lot of experience of these things. Nothing will ever persuade me that you can identify the exquisite intimate personal relations of the Commonwealth with the debating society that goes on in New York. God bless the debating society in New York. The Commonwealth is burgeoning out - your Royal Highness - from the old allegiance to the Throne, burgeoning out from the old Crown Commonwealth through these various processes which I don't resist or resent, so that you have republics, so that you have countries all of whom have had old associations with us. I look here at my friend Yousuf from Pakistan. You can't argue about India. They have all had the most wonderful relations with the old British Raj. True, the allegiance to the Throne, both dear to my heart and to the heart of so many of you, is no longer the sole condition. But at any rate we have had a special family relationship with the Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen as our Sovereign Lady. If anybody wants us to do something which converts the Commonwealth - with all its warmth and its intimacy, its capacity for hostility within friendship, which is the great thing about any family relationship - into a forum where we are to sit in judgment on each other, then all I can say is - with great devotion to Her Majesty - it is a sorry day for the Commonwealth.

Why can't we disagree with the South African policy without pushing South Africa out - and believe me it was pushed out. If Verwoerd hadn't gone when he did, I would have been surprised. Harold Macmillan, the most distinguished Prime Minister of this country with his colleagues, and with myself, worked like horses to develop a communique which would expose the criticisms of other members of the Commonwealth and the answer of the Prime Minister of South Africa and, having exposed them, would then make it possible for South Africa to remain within the Commonwealth as a republic as every other republic has. When finally Mr. Macmillan came in and said, "Dr. Verwoerd agrees", I was delighted. I thought, "This is it"; in my innocence I thought "This is it - we will now have the criticism fairly stated, the answer fairly stated... and South Africa remains in". I say this as I have read some awful rubbish in the newspapers - not for the first time - I've read some awful rubbish to the effect that Mr. Macmillan pushed them out. This is monstrous. No man worked harder than he did. No man worked harder than Duncan Sandys with him, to produce what you might call a formula under which the argument this way was stated, and the argument that was stated. But I must tell you - in view of all this propaganda that goes on - that while I was saying to myself in my simple, colonial fashion, "Well, I think this fixes it," one, two, three

four, five people got up and made it completely clear that they wouldn't have this, that they didn't want South Africa in, and that every convenient opportunity, or inconvenient opportunity, would be taken to attack her.

Well I'm not Dr. Verwoerd and I'm not the apostle of apartheid - though I have my own immigration policy - and I'm bound to say that in his place I would have left certainly not later than he did. So don't let us have humbug. There is an awful lot of humbug in the world and, on the whole, I think that humbug is one of the more serious offences in the world. So don't let us have it. The fact is that in all these circumstances South Africa is out. And what I am saying to you - so many of whom are Australians like myself - is, "Don't let us jump on this latest band-waggon. Let us think of this Commonwealth of ours. What does it mean in tolerance, in understanding, in points of contact, and to us who are Australians, in a superb allegiance to the Throne?"

What does it mean? If we think it means nothing then it doesn't matter; let it all go to the United Nations. But if we think it means something, then I beg of all of you to look back on these events, not with hilarity - for I feel no hilarity about them - but to look back on them saying, "Did we go wrong? Has what has happened strengthened the Commonwealth?" And the answers to these questions will depend on whether you think our marvellous association depends upon tolerance, kindness, and understanding and the long view; or upon the popular passion for denunciation. I don't need to tell you that I don't feel good about this. I apologise for having inflicted my views on you. But since my earliest days in politics I have had a great vision of what the Commonwealth should stand for. I hate to think that it is blurred.

---