

CITIZENS' LUNCHEON, ASHFIELD TOWN HALL

15TH MAY, 1961

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

Sir and gentlemen:

I have been suffering this morning from a sort of - I think I am right when I describe it as a sort of undulant fever. Is that right? When the temperature goes up; and then goes down? Because my good friend and colleague, Fred Osborne, originally inveigled me into this matter, and that depressed me. Then he said to me, "Of course you understand that they are not all political fans of yours who will be there". I said, "Oh, no, I know that". So he said, "Make a non-political speech". And I said, "Do you mean by that, Fred, a non-Party speech?" He said, "That's right". So that depressed me still further.

But then, by a singular stroke of genius on the part of somebody, just as I was to come in here, I saw Tommy Andrews. Look at him! Tommy Andrews! And as I am the greatest living hopelessly incompetent cricket lover in this country, I greeted him like a man and a brother. And that cheered me up. Tommy, I must say that if I manage to say something worth listening to today, you may take the credit.

I thought perhaps I might say something to you, in a genuinely non-Party way, about the business of Government, because you are, for the most part, business men. I am perfectly certain that in your more inaccurate moments you criticise the Government, and criticise politicians, and say it's a great pity more businessmen are not in politics - and of course I agree with that. The trouble is they won't come. And you say there ought to be more business in Government, and, I think that highly original phrase goes on, less Government in business. Well I am familiar with all those things. Man and boy now I've been in Parliament of one kind or another for 33 years. The Mayor and I are contemporaries, I think he said. Thirtythree years! He's a bit inclined to complain because he's been an Alderman, treated rather badly, and he thinks that I am a silver-tail because I've been for 14 years or so, in total, a Prime Minister. But 33 years, man and boy, we've been engaged in it. I know most of the noises people make about us, and about the business of Government.

I just want to say this to you: The business of Government is not only the greatest business in the country, but it is, I think, the most difficult business in the country. It is extraordinarily difficult. I am able to make a comparison, because, believe it or not, it is now 21 years since I was first sworn in as a Prime Minister. In those days I well remember the kind of problem that fell on to the table. The number of problems has quadrupled in that time. I well remember the amount of paper one had to read, the number of actual decisions that had to be taken. Today all those things have quadrupled. We have, all around the world, diplomatic posts. We have to instruct them and be instructed by them. I suppose it is pretty safe to say that I would read 100 to 150 cables in the course of one day - and a great number of them pretty long-winded because, thanks to the person who invented stenography, people dictate cables now. If they had to write them by hand they would be much shorter and much more readable. You have masses of things coming up from the various departments; you have ministers to interview; you have to give a nudge at the appropriate time in the direction of a particular decision on a

particular matter. And above all things you must keep yourself informed, because it is a changing world, and it is a world that can't be coped with even from here in Australia without immense study and concentration. I would have hopelessly collapsed under this job if I hadn't earlier in my life acquired the habit of concentrated work, and close study of particular problems. Therefore I assure you that this is a very difficult business.

It is frequently a very technical business. There are all sorts of things that one has to consider. You can't deal with the economic policy of a country without having acquired laboriously over years, a knowledge of economic matters, a knowledge of financial matters. There is a mass of technique that underlies the easy and platitudinous observations that you expect politicians to make to you.

Of course all this demonstrates that it is a business that can't be learned over night. Now I wish I could persuade everybody that that was true. The older I get, the more experience I have, the more I know, because I must know by this time a great deal about these things, the less dogmatic do I become, the less certain am I that my voice is the last voice of authority. But you produce to me some fellow who is in the way of airing his mind on these matters and who knows nothing about it at all, he knows all the answers. You can read him frequently, day by day. The less you know, the more certain you are that you are right.

Now there is another aspect of the matter that I want to say something to you about. I wonder to how many of us the business of politics is an emotional business. There are a lot of people who write and speak, who convert everything into terms of emotion. If I am discussing somewhere in Parliament the question of the level of social services, for example, there is bound to be some hearty emotionalist who will say, "How would you like to live on £5. a week?" And of course I wouldn't. That seems to me to have nothing whatever to do with the case. This is an emotional argument. It is easy to whip up emotions. I tell you that on any great problem that arises, whether it is the position of South Africa or whether it is the position of some social service, or whether it is something else entirely unrelated to both, the easiest thing in the world, and the quickest thing, is to be emotional. I don't think that I am a stranger to emotion because I have a great number. But it is a very great mistake to think that because a man has a cool head he's cold-blooded. The two things are entirely different. I hate cold-blooded people. But I like to have people around me who have cool heads. Because cool heads and good judgment are needed in the management of your public affairs, more than perhaps anything else. So I say to you, distrust the easy, rather cheap, emotional reaction. We all have it. It isn't to be supposed that we are not human beings. Of course we all have it. But when you have responsibility you must exercise a cool, balanced judgment, because that is, after all, what you owe to the people of your country.

Now, Sir, may I turn from that to say something about our attitudes to Government? These are perhaps a few cautionary observations which a Prime Minister of any political party could make to you, if he had had a lot of experience in these things.

First of all Australia has now, as a result of great efforts by Australians in two wars, and as a result of a growing enlightenment in our own country about the rest of the world, become internationally significant. I suppose that it's very seldom that a few weeks may go by without I myself being in

communication in a direct sense with the Government of the United States or the Government of New Zealand, or the Government of the United Kingdom. Fortunately I know all these men now extremely well and we exchange our ideas with considerable point and with complete frankness. I like to believe, and I think I am right in believing that Australia has a significance in the world of affairs rather more than the population of our country would warrant. We are regarded, increasingly, as a notable country, as a happy country, as a country with an immense future, and as a country made up of people who have good common sense and courage. These are good things to have thought about our country around the world.

The result of all this is that from time to time an Australian Government through its Prime Minister, or through somebody, will offer an opinion on what goes on in the world. It may be necessary to offer a public opinion on some problem in some other country. I have done it myself a few times. And the moment a Prime Minister does it he will be told "You mustn't say that - there's some other country that won't agree with you. Now you mustn't do that - you'll be misunderstood, here or here or here". Gentlemen, this is an absurdity. Never offer an opinion unless it is well considered; never offer an opinion gratuitously, as if you wanted to blow your bags out and tell the world how clever you are. But when you find yourself called upon to offer a view on behalf of Australia, don't fall into a state of terror because somebody, or some other country, disagrees with it. If you didn't believe in your own view it would be idle to state it. If you do believe in it, it's pathetic to run away from it because somebody else, somewhere else, doesn't accept it. That's the thing, that's one of the elements of maturity in our country which I believe we have to hang on to.

You know there are a lot of people around the world who talk about the 'colonial powers' and the 'colonial attitude' of mind. There may be a few people left in Australia who still think that the great problems of the world can be safely left to other people. It's not true. Of course we must have great friends; and occasionally we must subordinate our views to the views of our great friends if we are to ensure the security of our own country. But these things are well understood by statesmen. The real point is that we are an adult country, far more adult, far wiser in judgment, though I say it myself, than some countries with many times our population. And we must have in relation to these matters, a decent pride for this is a remarkably great country.

I am not one of those people who believes that we ought to go on as if we had a hundred million people, as if we were a second United States of America, but I do want to emphasise to you that we are so addicted, still, to the habit of knocking our own country and our own people that we occasionally forget that this is, man for man, a great country, with a great place in the world, and a great future.

Now, Sir, having said that may I refer to another aspect of our relations to Government? Every now and then somebody comes to see me under the simple illusion that in my official capacity of course, control unlimited supplies of money - something fascinating about money, particularly if you haven't got it. And people come along, "Well now this is a thing, all we need is £50,000, all we need is half a million, all we need is £50m." - I've had all the variants of this even in the last few weeks. And they say, "Now the Commonwealth can provide all this money. What about it?" If you show some reluctance, if you are a little coy about ante-ing up £Xn, the assumption is

that you are an insensitive character, you are a cold-blooded fellow, you don't understand the real needs of the case, because if you did, of course, you would just find the money, it would come out of some magnificent cornucopia, just flowing out.

Therefore I want to remind you, if you need to be reminded, gentlemen, that Governments are not proprietors of money. All the money I have wouldn't solve the problem of the smallest municipality in the bush. Governments are not the proprietors of money; they are the trustees for the money that ordinary citizens earn and pay to them. That's their position. Easy enough for a Government to say, handsomely, "Right £50m; that's no trouble". But the people will find the £50m. This is the basic element of Government - that Governments don't have any money of their own. They borrow money from the people, or they tax money from the people; and whatever money they get in these various ways they are able to spend according to their judgment. We must never forget that. All the money that a Government has to deal with is money that has been worked for and earned by private citizens and transferred by them to the Government in order to give effect to the Government's policy.

Therefore, if, as private citizens - and we all are - we want more from Governments than we get today then there must be more of us at work, we must perhaps work a little more successfully, we must certainly produce considerably more. The greatest illusion in the world is to think that the standard of living is a monetary standard whereas in fact the standard of living is what a man has by way of a house, by way of shelter, by way of food, by way of the amenities of life. These are all material things - I'm now talking about the material standards - of life. And they all have to be produced by somebody.

I say to you, therefore, that in addition to having some pride in our own country, we must not place upon Governments demands which jointly we are not prepared to place on ourselves. Because you are the Government. If you add up all the people in Australia who work and produce and pay, they are the Government, they are the creators of the available resources of the nation. I don't need to tell you that if a Government pretends to pay us as individuals, more, and carries out the pretence of inflating the currency it's just giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

And yet, Sir, the odd thing about political life - and I say this quite dogmatically - is that though inflation is unpopular with many people, not by any means with all people for there are some who have a vested interest in inflation; measures against inflation are always even more unpopular. Because you can't restrain inflation, you can't push down inflation without imposing some immediate disability on John Brown, or Tom Smith - I hope neither of them is here - which he will resent and say "Why deal with me, why am I the fellow to be affected?" You can't have any policy, no Government can have any policy, which is designed to produce some stability in the currency, a firm foundation for future expansion, unless from time to time it takes measures calculated to produce that result.

Now, Sir, the next point that I want to mention is this. We talk a good deal about democracy and I'm a great believer in democracy. Democracy is the only system of Government so far in the world that has operated with even a shadow of social justice. People can be very superior about it. They may say how ridiculous that every man's vote should be of

the same value when men are so infinitely varied. True enough, perhaps. But I want to see a better system. The world hasn't yet produced it.

The truth is that the great glory of democracy is that it does pay attention to the individual person. The authoritarian systems that exist in other countries tend to reduce the individual to a mere cipher, to a mere calculating medium in a blue book, or a statistical record. But in democracy it is the man and the woman who count. The business of Government is to promote them, to enlarge their opportunities, to broaden their horizons, to develop their personalities.

But when we have said that, I believe we must remember that the point of democracy is not just that everybody has a vote - that's the mechanics of democracy, that's not the essence of democracy. The essence of democracy is that every individual, and he may express it through the vote from time to time, has his own responsibilities, and because he has his own responsibilities he has his own unalterable rights. This could not be said about any other system of Government in the world.

If, occasionally, I think that I detect in our own democracy a weakness it is simply that I think that occasionally - do you agree? - we think too much of our rights, and too little of our responsibilities. Because if we think of our rights only, of our demands only, of our claims on Government only, then we will transfer the responsibility for meeting those claims to a smaller and smaller body of men; until, ultimately, we'll find that we have brought about a system of oligarchy, or bureaucracy, or even of autocracy, because the responsibility has been piled on to other people while we ourselves assert our rights.

Now, Sir, finally I would like to say this to you. I have just said something about responsibilities. We don't have responsibilities only to ourselves, or to our own country. Here's something quite remarkable that is going on in the world. We are, in a broad sense, aware of it; we have, in a true sense, done something about it, as a nation. But in 1950, which is not long ago, there were 2,500 million people in the world - 2,500 millions. In 1975, in the absence of unprecedented pestilence or ruinous war or some disaster on which we can't predicate any views of ours, in 1975 other things being equal, there will be not 2,500 millions, there will be 3,800 millions - 1,300 million more people at the end of a period of 25 years. And by 2,000, again predicating the same conditions, it is estimated that there will be 6,000 million people in the world. Now here are we, in 1961, half way through that first span so let us assume that we have perhaps a little over 3,000 million people in the world today. Double that in the year 2,000; double that in the lifetime of many, many hundreds of thousands of people now living in Australia.

This is a colossal problem. It is not only a problem for the people who live in the large countries in the world, it is a problem for us. Do we, in Australia, contemplating that by 2000 we might have what? - 20 or 25 million people, I don't know - remain indifferent to the fact that in Continental China alone there will be 1,000 millions at the same time? What are they going to live on? What's going to become of world food production? To feed 3,000 millions more people is a task, a challenge, a challenge to education, to our generosity of outlook, to our technical skill, our willingness to contribute so that land now not fertile will produce food for this coming hungry world. This is a tremendous problem. We do something about it through the Colombo Plan. We have a very creditable

record in technical aid to new countries, under-developed countries in the training of their students in Australia. But we can't afford to sit back on it, we can't afford to say "How kind we are, how clever we are". We, as a highly intelligent and highly qualified community - because we are in world terms - have a responsibility far beyond our numbers on this matter. If the world as a whole doesn't do something increasingly about this tremendous, this overshadowing problem, then I believe that we can look forward, or our sons can, to all the most terrible results of a hungry population pressing upon inadequate resources, with all the threat that it contains of starvation and pestilence and war as the last desperate expedient.

Therefore, Sir, I like to feel that when we bask a little in the satisfaction that we occasionally have in our own system of Government, in our own happiness, in our own relative prosperity, though it may vary a little, a high relative prosperity, we should recognise that as a growing nation we have a significance and a responsibility in the world, and not only to ourselves.

I think that one of the unfortunate things is that all too few people study history - they think it's a rather academic matter. History academic? The world would save itself from an abundance of errors if it knew something about human history. And we ourselves might get a more proper understanding of our opportunities in this world if we recalled a little history. Because don't let it be forgotten that in the spacious days of great Elizabeth, the first Elizabeth, the days of Shakespeare and Marlowe and Beaumont and Fletcher, running on into the time of Francis Bacon, the days of Raleigh and Drake, the great blossoming period in English history, a period which made this little island in the North Sea one of the great factors in the world, and in civilisation, at that time the population of England was probably no more than today's population of New South Wales. We forget these things. It isn't just numbers. It's quality. Give me 10 million people of quality and they will influence the current of human events, and human destiny, more than 50 million people of poor quality.

This is our great opportunity. And we seize it if we just take a little time off, occasionally, as I've tried to take with you today, to consider what our relation is to Government, not in an organised Party sense, but as citizens, what is our relationship to Government in our own country; what is our relationship to each other in our own country; and finally, what is the relationship of all of us to a world which will unquestionably bring its problems to us in due course, unless we can have made our own contributions to the solving of those problems, to the well-being of mankind, 6,000 millions of them, and therefore to the peace of the world.

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