

OFFICIAL OPENING OF 1961 SCIENCE SHEEP SHOW, SYDNEY

2nd June, 1961

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

Mr. Falkiner, ladies and gentlemen:

In case I forget it, I declare the Show Open. (Laughter) (Applause) And I gather from your applause that that's really all I need to do about it. (Laughter)

But I had a very plaintive letter from George Falkiner inviting me to come down here. He reminded me that it was 10 years since I came here last to do this job. I wasn't likely to forget it! Because with all the optimism that characterises a man who had only been Prime Minister, at that time, for two years - all that optimism has long since deserted me - I came down just with a hat, flew down from Canberra and was to fly back at the end of the afternoon. There I was, just a hat and, of course, a certain number of garmets on me. I was very well received, people were immensely courteous - they were not so angry with me in 1951 as they have been occasionally since - and we got on very well. I left here and caught the plane at about a quarter past five, and we got overhead at Canberra. There was a thunderstorm and the lightning flashed and the clouds were sweeping around and every now and then I could see the lights, as I imagined them, of my own house and a clear mental picture of my poor wife saying "Where is my wandering boy tonight?" Finally the pilot came down and said "I'm sorry, we have to go back to Sydney". If any of you have ever tried to sleep in a Sydney hotel, having nothing to wear except the kind of thing I'm now wearing, you will understand exactly how well I remember that occasion.

There's one other thing I would like to say. I remember it from the time before and it is quite fascinating. There is a very studied form of insult delivered to a politician by you "sheep fellers". Just as the politician begins to think "Now that wasn't a bad sentence", an interjector says "baaaa, haaa, baaaa". You can hear it all round the place. Whereas this regrettable looking old ram opposite me, ever since I arrived and sat down has been wrinkling his nostrils at me. (Laughter) A very subtle form of insult that, and one which I must set about introducing into the House of Representatives (Laughter) You couldn't call a man to order, could you, for wrinkling his nose. You can't rise to a point of order and say "The honourable member for" - let's take a name at random - "East Sydney" (Laughter, applause) "is wrinkling his nose at me".

Anyhow, Sir, whatever my sins, or long since forgotten merits may be, you don't need to apologise to me for asking me to come to this Show, because as you have rightly said this is the great industry in Australia. There can be no question about that at all. (Applause) I've had it very much in my mind of recent times because, as I may tell you rather confidentially, we've taken a few rather unpopular steps in the last six months - I wouldn't want to have it mentioned outside - but I don't mind admitting that that is so. (Laughter)

But I just want to take the opportunity of saying to you that every step that is taken to suppress inflation in Australia is bound to be unpopular with somebody; but it can't be unpopular with you. Because if there is one great industry in Australia it is the wool industry, and if there is one industry that can't afford domestic inflation it's yours. You meet the world, you meet the world's demand, you are paid what the world will pay you; but you can't pass your added costs on to the man next door. People

occasionally forget that even so amazing an industry as the wool industry can really be priced out of profitable existence because of the rise in costs internally.

Therefore I say for myself that it doesn't worry me if somebody doesn't like some carefully conceived anti-inflationary measure, because I happen to have enough wit to know that the solvency of Australia, the growth of Australia, the capacity of Australia to receive migrants year by year, the prospects of Australia having 20 million people in the lifetime of many of the men here present today, all those things depend, not only upon a world market for wool, but upon a successful world market for wool. And it can't be a successful market if galloping inflation is allowed to take charge on the home-front. (Applause)

Therefore, Sir, quite unblushingly I invite you to think, to understand, that as nobody has yet got rid of an inflationary boom without hurting somebody, without treading on somebody's corns, it is the duty of a practical statesman to select the corns, not to be afraid of treading on a few corns, but to say "What is the great object to be achieved? And if I can achieve that for millions of people I must be content to annoy thousands of people". That's it. This is, in the old phrase, the problem of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Now I believe, as you believe, that these passing incidents are only passing incidents. We have had them before today - and we've come through them. George Falkiner was good enough to refer to what has happened in Australia in the last 10 years. It is really fabulous. We forget so easily. 'Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot' - you know, Shakespeare, as usual, was right: we do forget these things. But if any one of us here today had sat down in 1949, or '50, and had put in front of him or her a statement of what the position in Australia would be in 1960 he would have disbelieved it, she would have disbelieved it, it would have been regarded as perfectly foolish. Who had any reason to suppose that 90 million sheep should become 150 million, to take your own great industry. Who would have supposed that we could have seen, with our handful of people the tremendous development of this country, a development so remarkable, if you will allow me to say so, that the people overseas who are shrewd judges of our country, who are not interested in our country in order to lose money in it, are so interested in this country, and its future prospects, its potentialities, that contrary to all the pessimists' prophecies, we are having in the current year an even greater inflow of private capital investment into Australia than we had last year, when it was an all time record. (Applause)

Sir, all this means something to you; it means something to this great industry. It means that more and more and more we are developing a large population ourselves and the strength of a nation to sustain, and be sustained by, our major industries.

Now the only other things that I want to say Sir are, first, that one of the great problems in this industry is research. I don't suppose I would have much difficulty in going down the street somewhere, in Sydney, or even in that benighted centre that I come from, Melbourne, to find somebody who would say, "Oh, yes, I'd love to be a sheep man. Quite easy, quite easy. You just sit on a verandah and smoke a pipe, and watch the wool grow. It's as simple as that".

I like to remember that even in my own lifetime the quality, the yield of wool, the knowledge of pastures, the pride of achievement in the wool-grower, has grown out of all sight. This is a proud industry, as well as being a great industry. And because it is a proud one, it must have research; it must grow and grow. People of pride are not satisfied to decline - they must go on and be strong.

In the pavilion that I went through before lunch, looking hastily and, I'm afraid, not always intelligently, at the exhibits and at what was going on, I once more had reason to be thankful that the wool industry has been aware, increasingly, of the need for research: some of it in the laboratory, some of it in the office; a lot of it on the sheep farm itself, a lot of it conducted by practical sheep men, a lot of it conducted by scientists who, as I was happy to observe today, are in no case "long-haired" scientists - they all looked quite respectable to me. (Laughter) Rather like politicians. But the importance of research, I think, can't be over-estimated because wool, of course, has its battle to fight in the world. I'm an optimist on that matter, if I may say so, because for the last 20 years I've been listening to people who have said "Wool is finished. There's a synthetic fibre that's going to put it out of business". I once was cajoled into a garment made of one of these synthetic fibres. I put it on once, I hated it, and I've never worn it since!

We've always been told that the day of gloom, the day of disaster, is around the corner. I don't believe it. I believe that if wool is constantly reinforced, as the greatest of all natural fibres by the efforts of scientists, and passing out, ultimately, into the efforts of breeders and developers of wool production, it will hold its own against competition. If it is of any importance to any of us I'd like you all to have this in mind because I've had it in my own mind for various purposes a good deal of late: the population of the world was 2,500 millions, so the statisticians said, in 1950. In 1960 this had become about 3,200 millions, a very big increase. By the year 2000, wind and weather permitting, in the absence of some enormous world catastrophe, the estimate is that there will be 6,000 million people in the world, that the population will double in a period of 40 years, or near enough. Does this make you pessimistic? It presents us with problems, it presents the world with colossal problems, because these people must be fed and clothed. But from the point of view of this great industry this is a marvellous opportunity. We are not to suppose that you are just catering for the existing demand for the great fibre. The demand, as the standard of living rises around the world, will grow, will double, will treble, will quadruple - of course it will - provided that the industry itself, with all the aids of theoretical and applied science, is able to meet the market, to meet demand, to meet the calls of fashion, to meet the calls for trousers that don't have to be creased by your wife, all these modern developments that have been of such great importance, and will be more so in the future. Therefore research by you, by the technical experts, by the scientists is tremendously important.

The other thing, Sir, is promotion, because this is a sort of salesman's world. Do you know, if I may betray a guilty secret of politics to you, that I occasionally have the most magnificent and brilliant ideas (Laughter), but the trouble is I have to sell them to people, I have to make them understand that they are magnificent and brilliant. That's reasonable, isn't it? So the art of salesmanship is tremendous, the art of promotion. I am delighted to see that under the virile leadership of my friend Sir William Gunn (Applause) this promotion campaign goes on. The world is not going to beat a path to our door just because we grow great wool. I know that somebody said that that would happen if somebody had a good idea. You must go into a world, no country in which can compare with Australia as a grower of fine wool, and you must constantly have right under their noses, and in their minds the virtue of this great fibre. You can't leave it alone, you can't stay at home and say, "Well, they will come along" because they won't. It's not that kind of world.

Therefore the promotional programme seems to me to be something of the most tremendous importance. I hope nobody is going to say, "Well if the Government thinks that, let the Government do it." Do you know one of the things I like about this greatest of all Australian industries is that it has never yet put its neck into the Government, the political noose. It has been its own master; (Applause) it has had its own pride; it has made its immortal contribution to the life of this country. Sir I hope it will be like that always, long after my time; long after the time of other people here.

Therefore I hope I have conveyed to you that this to me is not just one of those chores that a political man has to do. This to me has been an occasion of opportunity and of very great pride. So, for the second time, I declare the Show open.

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