

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
AT NATURALISATION CEREMONY, PERTH, ON 24TH JULY, 1961.

Sir, Parliamentary colleagues, and ladies and gentlemen:

I want to say a few words to those who are, tonight, taking a step which in the life of any human being is a very, very important one. Those of us who have had the good fortune to be born in a country, to live in it, to enjoy its life, to take our citizenship for granted, can't know very much about what is involved in pulling up the roots of the family and moving into another country, moving right across the world and entering into a new life, and a new citizenship. This is a very remarkable event.

Whenever I think about it I say to myself "What does persuade people to move from one country to another?" I might ask you ladies and gentlemen tonight, "What was it that persuaded you to leave your ancient home, and to come here?" There have been times in the world's history when people left their own country because they were, in effect, driven out of it - we have seen something of that in the modern world; we have seen something of that in the last thirty years of human history - people being compelled to leave home, so to speak, because home was no longer home, no longer the kind of home they wanted to live in. These are the tragic events of modern history. And when that event happens to anybody there must be one passion in the heart, and that is to go to the country where those things can't happen to you, to come out of a country whose freedom has been snatched away from it, and to come to a country where freedom will be defended by everybody, whatever political party he may belong to, whatever religion he may profess, where everybody is agreed that we are free people, free, as Mr. Cash says, to pray as we want to pray, to speak as we want to speak, to assemble as we want to assemble.

Well, of course, there have been other movements in the world's recent history - or modern history - in which people left and came to another country because they saw in that new country an opportunity which they didn't see at home: not driven out, but drawn out by the prospect of a new life.

In case any of you who are being naturalised tonight think that we political fellows here on the platform are treating you as if you were something apart, let me say this to you: there is not a man on this platform, and not a woman on this platform, who didn't have a grandfather, or a great-grandfather, who came to Australia - he might not have been called at that time a "migrant", or a "new Australian" (Laughter, applause) - so you know we are all the same, aren't we?

Don't let yourself feel that you are a sort of something apart, something odd in the Australian community, because you are not. Let me tell you - I'll speak only for myself: on my father's side, my grandfather and my grandmother came to Australia from Scotland. Now any Scot here tonight would say "What a mistake". (Laughter) "To leave Scotland to come here!" But they came here and looking back on it I've no doubt they said, "A very good country to go to, Australia, because although we will be 'new Australians' when we get there, our grandson will be Prime Minister" (Laughter, applause) You make a note of that. Put little Willy's name down. (Laughter) Stranger things have happened. On my mother's side my grandparents came out because my grandfather on her side thought that there was gold in Australia. Instead of looking for it in Kalgoorlie, which might have been a rather successful thing to do, he looked for it in vain in another part, in the State of Victoria. He was, I suppose, a new Australian. I don't know.

You see the point I am getting at? Your grandchildren will be as much old native-born Australians as I am today. (Applause) And so I want to say to you: don't feel odd. Some of you may face language difficulties, although I am staggered at the skill and speed with which people learn to speak, not only English, but Australian (Laughter) - you know, a slight complication upon standard English. But don't be worried if you think that you speak our language indifferently. I remember I had a colleague, once, a genial character, rather rough and ready, to use our idiom, who had to receive a French football team. They arrived and the leader of the team said to my colleague, "Excuse, please, I don't speak English very well" and my colleague, with a flash of candour said, "Don't worry about that, old boy, neither do I!" (Laughter)

But all those things are passing phases. It is quite true that many of us had grandparents who came here from what we call the "old country", from England, from Scotland, Wales, from Ireland, wherever it might be, and so there were none of these problems of language, although even there there were some - some. And many of you have come from ancient countries in Europe and you have different tongues, different backgrounds, marvellous histories, marvellous literature, marvellous music. You carry with you an enormous store in the mind and in the heart. These are tremendous contributions to Australia. It was said a little while ago that migration has meant something tremendous to Australia in the post-war years and I want to repeat it. It is tremendously true.

I go around Australia a good deal in order to have the pleasure of having one man out of ten say "Good on you" - do you know that idiom? - and the other ten saying "Baaa!" All this, of course, is the very proof of freedom in Australia. Prime Ministers here don't go around with a posse of police around them: they just go around. Sometimes people are friendly; and sometimes they are not. And the Prime Minister hopes for the best, being by nature and experience a good high-spirited fellow, you see.

But when I look around this country, for whose political leadership, rightly or wrongly, I have been responsible for a long, long time, I can't imagine that Australia would be as prosperous, as happy, as forward looking, today, if it hadn't been for this remarkable inflow of good people into Australia. (Applause)

It has been a wonderful thing for us and I want every one of you who will be naturalised tonight to realise that this is not all one way. We are not just being nice to you; we are grateful to you. And you are not just to be grateful to us for having received you: I want you to feel a proper pride in what you find yourselves able to do in Australia. In some of the greatest industries that I know of in Australia the progress would have been a mere fraction of what it is today if it hadn't been for hundreds of thousands of people coming in willing to work, willing to contribute, willing to become good contributing citizens of Australia. Anybody who knows anything about our great industries will realise at once that what we call the great migration programme has been of immeasurable benefit.

So I just want to say to you: don't be nervous, as if you were in a strange land, because, as I explained to you before, your grandsons will be on the same footing as I am tonight. There is no occasion to feel nervous or strange. Don't feel that any man's hand is against you. Because the only really unpopular people in Australia are politicians and football umpires. (Laughter)

It is a great thing, a difficult thing for you, the parents, a difficult thing; a difficult thing for you who, having reached mature years have had to make this great change, I know, a tremendously difficult decision to make. But for your children, for your children, this is the land of opportunity. I am perfectly certain that nobody who looks at it along these lines will ever doubt that it was a great thing to come here. We are a friendly people. We are not stuffy. We are not consumed by snobberies of class, or some of this nonsense that has beset some of the older countries of the world. You are in an essentially democratic country where every man has a chance to stand on his own feet, and every woman, and to be taken at his or her own true value by other people. Nothing could be better than that: to be free, to feel that there is no shadow over you, to feel that there is none of the paraphernalia of dictatorship in this country, that we are, in the truest sense, a friendly community, a brotherhood, and a sisterhood of people.

And so we are, in Australia - where any boy or girl has a vista of opportunity which can be marched along provided there is ability and character and courage and determination - a country of freedom, of equality before the law, a country which governs itself at its own will, through the people it chooses, without compulsion of anybody else, to serve it in Parliament or municipal life. This is, I am proud to say, in my opinion the freest country in the world.

And it is for all those reasons that I don't look down from a great height and say in a sort of patronising way, "Well you all look rather new to me! Not a bit, not a bit. No newer than grandfather was. Make no mistake about that. And I will be surprised if, out of this generation of people who have come to Australia from the old countries of the world we don't find Prime Ministers and Premiers and Judges and Chief Justices, people of great distinction, serving Australia. I find that prospect very attractive. I hope you will find it very attractive. Therefore I say to you "welcome". I am delighted that you have taken this decision. I am sure that it is good for you; and I am positively certain that it is good for Australia. (Applause)