

"PLEASANT SUNDAY AFTERNOON"

Melbourne, 3rd September, 1961

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

Sir,

Thankyou very much, indeed, for your kind introduction. I would like to thank, through you, Dr. Benson, for the very courteous references that he made to me; and I would like to thank my fellow-Presbyterian who has just spoken about me.

He said that I must have a record score for "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons" in this place. I am quite sure that is right. The first time I was beguiled into coming here by the late Mr. Cain must have been at least 30 years ago. And the only thing that is evidence to me that time marches on is that, although now I must have come the better part of 30 times, the audience has a tendency to get a little smaller each time. And I don't blame them.

In all those years I have never undertaken the improper task of talking about Australian politics because this is not the place for that. I have in various ways over the years tried to say something to you about the problems of the world and our relation to those problems; and our duty, as individuals, in relation to them. This afternoon I thought I might, following along that line, say something about the current state of the world, because it is a cliché today that we are living in a very critical period in the world's history.

You may well say that we have been living in critical periods of the world history for most of our lives. It is quite true. We have, perhaps, become so accustomed to headlines, to riots, to outbreak, to little wars, to rebellions, that we have almost become accustomed to them; and perhaps a little bit disposed to say, "Well that's happening somewhere else and I mustn't concern myself about it too much". But while all that is going on, we ourselves are presented, almost every day, with false statements about false issues, with propaganda of various kinds, and with a good deal of so-called sentiment, which is rather bogus. And I thought that I might help you, and help myself, if I put a few questions this afternoon and endeavoured to answer them. As I once rather mischievously said to a political opponent in the Federal Parliament who had prepared a series of questions and answers, "There is one great advantage about answering questions if you prepare the questions yourself, as well as the answers". Therefore whatever I say on this you must discount to that extent.

But you know what we are hearing time after time: we read and we think about what is called the "cold war". We don't perhaps go down into that matter deeply enough to find out: Is there a cold war? Who is causing it? What can we do about it? Therefore, perhaps, one ought to begin by saying something about what a "cold war" is.

We now talk about war - it is a very strange development - in the broad, as meaning a great global war, a war in which great powers are hurled at each other. And anything that stops short of that, anything which is local, which is hot propaganda, but not actual fighting, any actual fighting, such as the fighting now going on in Laos, in South-East Asia, we call these things the "cold war" because we do that to distinguish them from the great war which we all pray may never come. But that is not to say that we ought to have an affection for the cold war.

There are great conflicts in this world and they are not just conflicts of power. Don't let us succumb to the idea that the great conflict in the world is a conflict between the power of the United States, for example, and the power of the Soviet Union. This is a false picture. The conflict in the world is a conflict between basic principles, profoundly important ideals, differences of outlook on the spirit of man, and the significance of man; a conflict, as we would wish to believe, between what, from our point of view, is the Christian conception of the freedom of the human mind and of the human spirit, and the dictated, dominated, unfree human spirit that exists under totalitarian Government in the Communist regime. And this is a tension which will never be quite removed, and never can be quite removed, until other people have the same outlook on the human spirit as we have ourselves.

We must remember all the time that while physical slavery is a terrible thing, spiritual slavery is much worse. We must be free or die who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke. This is it: freedom of the mind, freedom of the spirit. The great Communist leaders, men of immense power, of immense authority, take advantage of the fact that our very freedom tends to divide us. We argue with each other. Believe it or not there are 49½% of the people of Australia who would love to get rid of me! (Laughter) I'm not sure that some times I don't agree with them! But this is part of our freedom: to approve, to disapprove, to have ideas of our own in the political field, and to defend them with vigour, and sometimes a little roughly. This is part of our inheritance. It will be an ill day for Australia when that sort of thing comes to an end.

On the other side you have leaders who need consult no Parliament, who need respect no public opinion; but who, with the sheer voice and power of authority can decide what they are going to do. And this is an unequal contest. I will illustrate this by reference to Berlin, this great problem that is going on today - Berlin. What is it all about? Just let me put it to you in a few sentences.

When the last war was being fought to its successful conclusion the powers, the victorious powers - the United States, France and Great Britain, and the Soviet Union - achieved rights in Berlin; a series of sectors in which they were to establish themselves pending the execution of a Treaty of Peace with Germany as a whole. And in the meantime the Soviet forces had come in and had occupied East Germany in which Berlin itself is a mere island - you can't reach it except through or over East German territory. And of course West Germany was there, and has become a free, independent, self-governing and tremendously prosperous country.

Well, Berlin presents a spectacle that we in Australia would never hope to see ourselves. Can you imagine Melbourne divided down the middle? No connection between one half and the other except by permission, except by authority? And at this moment, of course, lined with temporary walls actually to prevent people in one part of the city from going to their work in another part of the city. Here is the division of a great historic city: it is almost symbolic of the division in Europe, and the division in the world.

Are the Western powers to say to the 2½ million people who live in freedom in West Berlin that they are no longer interested in them, that they propose to withdraw? Because if they do, then this island in East Germany will be absorbed as certainly as anything could happen, absorbed by the surrounding Communist authority. And here is the terrible thing about it: one portion of Germany not free, controlled with a puppet

Government, but controlled by the Soviet Union with the aid of Soviet troops; and on the Western side of Germany, as I have said, freedom, hope, happiness, prosperity. It is little wonder that over recent years hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people from East Germany have fled across the frontier - not to escape into slavery, but to escape from it. And in Berlin itself, there have been many, many thousands of people crossing from one side to the other, in order to get out into a state of freedom. West Berlin, rebuilt, prosperous; East Berlin still with its ruins and rubble on view, and people living in a state of poverty. This is a tremendous point of conflict, and a tremendous point of crisis for the world.

Well, what does the dictator have to say about it, Mr. Khrushchev? He doesn't need to consult a parliament - he hasn't one to consult; he needn't worry about electors because that is a species that you don't find in the Soviet Union. So he can engage in the great tactics of the cold war. He can threaten. He can say, "Unless you get out of Berlin, unless you agree to my proposals in relation to Berlin, I will sign a separate Treaty of Peace with East Germany; I will perpetuate the division of Germany; I will make it impossible for you to conduct your affairs in Berlin. Because once I have signed a Peace Treaty with East Germany, which surrounds Berlin, then, whether you can go into Berlin or come out of it will depend upon the Government of East Germany, which will be a Communist Government". Now he can do that.

What are the Western leaders to say? This is a great problem. They can, as they have already made clear, indicate to him that they are always prepared to sit down and have a sensible discussion about the position of Berlin, but that they will not respond to threats or to violence. That is a hard thing for democratic leaders to do. Never forget that. It is very hard for a President of the United States, or a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to say, "If certain things happen then we will do so and so" because he must carry with him public opinion; he must carry with him his Parliament or his Congress; he must be sure that he is speaking with authority. And his authority is derived from a wide area. But the authority of Khrushchev is his own authority: he may bluff; he may threaten; he may advance; he may withdraw at his own free will.

Now this is a great crisis in the world. I don't need to tell you that you can't dismiss the Berlin problem by saying, "Well is it worthwhile to have all this argument over one city?" We have an interest in it here in Australia, strange as it may seem to some. If Berlin goes, if Berlin goes into the Communist maw, if they have this enormous triumph in the cold war, the same kind of triumph as that which has subdued Hungary, an older country than ours, a country of a great ancient civilization, if those tactics succeed in Europe, then you will have an encouragement all over the world to people who don't believe in the freedom of the spirit, who don't believe in the divine right of man. Because they don't believe in a God anyhow. And we will find in South-East Asia the pressure growing, more triumphs in the cold war. Time after time we will be told, "Well is Laos worth worrying about? Is South Viet Nam worth worrying about? Is Thailand worth worrying about?" When will we start to worry about it? When we have to say "Is Darwin worth worrying about?"

You see this is a matter of immense significance. We are not only looking after our own interests; I believe that we are, all over the free world, trustees of matters of imperishable significance. We are not to allow the enemies of freedom, the enemies of a free religious faith, to trample over more and more people, more and more ground, in order to achieve their ambition of dominating the whole world.

Now I am not saying this because I want to rattle the sword. This is too grim a matter. I don't believe, myself, that the Soviet leaders want a great world war. The very power of destruction that exists today in these dreadful weapons, the nuclear and thermo-nuclear bombs, to say nothing of the inter-continental ballistic missiles that are now being practised, the very power to destroy is mutual. It is quite true. If a great war broke out a country like Great Britain could be practically eliminated in a few minutes. But so could all the great centres of Russia. Action, re-action, both sides equally powerful, both sides equally alert.

It is not a matter of waiting for months you know, to find out what happens, but a matter of minutes, in attack and counter-attack. This means that a nuclear war will, beyond question, - it is not a mere matter of metaphor - destroy both sides in the conflict and leave the outskirts of the world to some extent untouched; but the great centres of the world eliminated. And this is something that can't seriously be contemplated by any man, whether he is Russian, British or American. Because there is a good deal of human nature in all of us. Therefore I feel, myself, that Khrushchev has the great advantage of knowing that he doesn't want to have a nuclear war, knowing that we don't want to have a nuclear war, and feeling all the time, if he can divide our councils, that he can press forward a little, pressing forward, not taking the final risk of a great war, knowing that we don't want one, feeling that we will be prepared to abandon a few positions in order to avoid having one. This is an immense game of bluff in that sense. And people can be easily bluffed in this world if they have confusion in their minds, if they are not clear about what goes on. Just let me give you one illustration of that because I can't hope to cover all this ground in one short speech. But let me give you one example of it.

Every now and then quite worthy people in Australia associate themselves with ideas of having a petition, or a deputation, for example, to me, about banning the bomb, about peace - as if I didn't want peace, as if I had any atomic bombs around the corner, because I haven't, and I don't want them. What is the use of coming to me? Where does the threat come from? Who started the cold war? Who is going to initiate a great war of destruction? The old country? How stupid! The United States of America? Ridiculous! France, bled by two or three wars? Of course not! Well who is going to start it? And yet people will come to democratic leaders like myself in the free world and speak earnestly about the atomic bombs when I would very much prefer that they went to the Soviet Union and talked about them to the Kremlin. Let us go to where the real danger exists.

All this idea of making armaments unpopular in the free world is exactly what the Soviet Union wants. Because armaments will always be popular in the Soviet Union until it has got all it wants in this world. So don't confuse this matter, don't let us think that we are going to solve all these problems in the world by weakening our own position, or by appearing to accuse ourselves of being responsible for world positions for which other people are responsible.

Now my one illustration of that is the question of the further testing of atomic weapons. Back early this year we had a Prime Ministers' Conference in London and we passed a very significant resolution, unanimously - and it is very seldom we pass a resolution - a resolution on disarmament in which we endeavoured to get down to the reality of the matter. We decided that the first step in the direction of disarmament, the first

proof of good faith, the first ray of hope for mankind would arise if the powers concerned agreed that they would suspend all further testing of nuclear weapons.

Now that was simple enough. Great Britain has a few; America has a great many; the Soviet Union has a great many; France has two or three perhaps. But there is a limited number. There are four nations that have these terrible things. All right, let them all agree that they will stop testing any more. That would be a wonderful step, wouldn't it? This would, to that degree, remove a feeling of threat from the decent people of the world. What difficulties are there about it? Only difficulties of good faith.

The Western people went to the Conference at Geneva. They said, "Yes, we are prepared to suspend the testing of atomic weapons; Of course, if you are", because it has to operate both ways. "Of course we will need to arrange to have this agreement supervised; we will need to be sure that not one of us is doing it secretly behind the other fellow's back, so to speak. Therefore let us have a system of inspection, and a Committee to conduct the inspection and scientific people from both the Soviet Union and the free world side, to conduct their examinations to see that this agreement is being honoured". What is wrong with that? All that is perfectly fair. And for months they have been sitting there getting nowhere, with the Soviet representatives refusing to agree to this or that, playing for time.

And now, at the very moment, I repeat, when there are good people in England and in Australia who want to talk to us about suspending atomic tests, they are now reading the last news that Khrushchev has said "We will resume tests". And to illustrate the utter insincerity of the whole thing, within 48 hours of him indicating that they are going to resume tests, they have one. Now I am no scientist but I don't think you can get ready the testing of a new weapon in 48 hours. Experience indicates that the preparation for this must have been going on all the time these talks were being engaged in at Geneva.

You see the hypocrisy of it. Play for time: If you can get the West to halt while you go on, quietly, and then say, "We won't have an agreement" and then be in a position, at once, to test your new developments, you may ultimately get ahead of the West; and you may ultimately be able to threaten more destruction than you can receive. And on that day you will be master of the world. This is the way; this is the approach. You and I can't understand this; we haven't been nourished in such a creed. This is not part of the conduct that we understand, that we aim at, not at all. But this is it. This is the kind of thing that you are up against.

So, while I am a great believer in persuasion, and am always willing to receive complaints, criticisms, or advice, I hope that on these matters we will clear our minds and know really who are the people who are responsible; and that while we will talk, anywhere, at any time - because I am sure the Democratic leaders will - in order to resolve these difficulties like sensible people, we are not going to let down our own defences and accept a risk which, if it materialised would make us guilty of abandoning some of the most vital things in the world.

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