

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.  
R.G. MENZIES, AT 75TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NEWCASTLE, ON MONDAY,  
11TH SEPTEMBER, 1961

Sir, parliamentary colleagues, Lord Mayor, and gentlemen:

The toastmaster has told you that I am to propose the toast of Commerce and the 75th Anniversary of the Chamber of Commerce.....Now, Sir to propose the toast of Commerce is rather to invite oneself to make one of those long speeches and I don't want to do that. But to propose the toast of Newcastle on the 75th Anniversary of the Chamber, now that is something that really, I think, attracts the mind.

When I arrived here this afternoon out at Williamstown, I met the Lord Mayor, Alderman Purdue, which, as you know is a corruption of "par Dieu" - really it is only that the name has been changed that gets him rid of a few rather blasphemous observations, (Laughter) in the street. Well of course the moment they said, "Do you know the Lord Mayor?" I said, "Of course I do. I've never known anybody else in that position". So honour was satisfied. And after a few exchanges we came in. Then one of them, I would have you believe, said to me "We have been looking through the records and we find that you are the first Prime Minister to visit Newcastle" - I think he said "officially", whatever that means - "since" - was it Mr. Lyons? I've forgotten. Well I wouldn't have that. Because God knows, Purdue knows, that I have been here time after time and I have fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, with some of my friends here whipping them on from the back of the hall, time after time. "Oh", he said "officially". Then another gentleman I met subsequently said, with an absolute excess, I thought, of virtue, "the first Prime Minister to visit Newcastle in 77 years". Now I warn you gentlemen, this is a perfect example of how extravagance can grow on you - because there has only been a Prime Minister for 60 years! (Laughter) And for my sins I have been it for about a quarter of the time. (Laughter) But this man, in order to put me at a disadvantage - that's what I don't like (Laughter) - went back to 1884 and imagined Prime Ministers. Well anyhow I've remembered it; but I will now forget it. And, of course, I forgive it. Because I think all this shows that he wanted to establish something about Newcastle.

Now I will tell you something about Newcastle if I may. I think that Newcastle and the country of which - this is not a contentious remark - of which it is the natural capital (Laughter, applause) - this is not to be treated as a preliminary judgment on any new State movement - I never anticipate troubles: they come fast enough - is a very remarkable place and a very remarkable area.

Now I should have known, but I didn't, that Newcastle as a port, if you just start there, vies with Sydney and Melbourne in the tonnages that it handles. I don't think that that is at all well understood around Australia. I have been coming to Newcastle - unofficially - for I think 35 years, though I seem to have made singularly little impression (Laughter) on any of my hosts, but until I read the brochure that had been sent to me on this occasion, I didn't really clearly understand how tremendous a port Newcastle is. I think that ought to be very much better known in Australia.

Then, apart from that - and perhaps, of course, entirely related to it, here we have the home, in the modern sense, of the iron and steel industry of Australia. A tremendous iron and steel industry - an iron and steel industry so remarkable, and the people who work in it so remarkable, that there is no more efficient in the world. (Applause)

And all round the world, into the United States of America, into Great Britain from time to time, will go the products of this industry, through this port, into those great countries. When one thinks of Newcastle one thinks of those things.

Then, not long ago, my wife came up here and launched a magnificent vessel, the Princess of Tasmania, of which she still regards herself as the part-owner; the product of a great ship-building yard which still has many fine things to do in the ship-building world.

And then there is the whole coal country behind us. Coal has never been without its problems - it still has them. But I am hoping and believing that with the development of proper coal export facilities a new world is opening for the production of coal and the export of coal from Australia. I know there are other coal fields, but in the old days when I used to be a bit mixed up with these problems, to think of coal was to think of Newcastle - not because you wanted to take coal to Newcastle, but because you had behind it, places like Cessnock and Kurri Kurri, of which I have happy, but exciting memories. Here you are in a port, a great port, with a great major industry, with all sorts of other industries that I won't take time to mention because you are all so familiar with them, and behind this some of the greatest coal measures in the world. This alone would make this a remarkable place.

But if you go further still you come, as I have been taking great pleasure in reminding my friend Vercoe from South Australia - where they are a little bigoted about their wine, you understand - that if you go up the Hunter you will come to some of the finest wine country in Australia. (Applause) And the one thing that I complain about in the expensive brochure that was sent to me was that I couldn't read anything in it about Mount Pleasant wine, or about Tulloch's.

But let us remember it. This is a remarkable state of affairs: a port, a great iron and steel industry, coal, wine.

When, recently, I said to some people who are associated with me that I would like to make a speech on the Common Market problem to a country audience - because country people have a lively and particular interest in it - and they said to me "What about Maitland?" I said "Oh, come, one, I've spoken, or been spoken to, at Maitland a fair number of times". And they said "That's all right". And I found myself talking to a thousand people, most of whom were farmers, and woke up, as even a Prime Minister will ultimately, if you give him a chance - after all I'm only a beginner - woke up to the fact that here was an immense farming area, with dairy farmers, and wheat growers and, of course, behind all that, wool growers, an immense wool market here in Newcastle.

Look I could stretch all these things out to the crack of doom. The point that I want to make to you is that you must never think of Newcastle as just a heavy-industry city, or just as a port. This city, and the area that it serves, the area for which it is a port, the area of which it is, in the sense that I have described it, a natural sort of sub-capital, this is a microcosm of Australia itself. If you wanted to find an area in which you said, "Well now let us consider the state of Australia, what we ought to be doing, how we are balanced on two feet in our economy, our hopes, our future", then I would recommend to anybody that he should come here and study, not only this town but the country that lies behind it: a perfect example of inter-dependence.

I think, Sir, that that is one great reason why for once in my life since I arrived here I haven't had my ear bashed about tariffs, or import licensing, or subsidies, or whatever goes on, you know. The truth is that you here - and I can see it when I realise who are represented here tonight - represent the broad sweep of Australian interest. Therefore you are all conscious of the common interest much more than you are of your particular interest within the common interest. And this is, I think, vastly important.

One doesn't need to talk party politics on an occasion like this - it would be ridiculous and quite improper having regard to your association - but as I get older, not only in years, but in the service of this country, I like to feel more and more that we are all Australians and that the greatest interests that we have are interests in common.

Therefore, Sir, it is a very refreshing thing to come to an area in which all these things are demonstrated; in which all these things are brought together.

I can remember when I was a small boy living in the bush, in the north-west of Victoria, when people became passionate about protection or free trade - this is going back a few years, you understand - my father was a violent protectionist, in the middle of a wheat growing community. It took a bit of something, you know, to be that. But he brought me up to understand that if ever I ceased to be a protectionist he would rise from his grave and deal with me. And I think he would, because he was a man of considerable vigour; (Laughter) and men of considerable vigour like that are not easily kept down. But there it was: protection and free trade. And I went through a period in my early manhood when it seemed to be taken for granted that if you were for manufacturing industry in Australia, you must be against the farmer; and if you wanted to be for the farmer, you must be against manufacturing industry.

This has now been understood by the people of Australia to be the most sorry nonsense. Because we live on each other, with each other. And if anybody wanted to be taught the rudiments of this broad understanding of the Australian economy I will recommend that he be sent up here and made to understand what is going on here, and what is going on 50 miles west, and up the valley of the Hunter, so that at the end of the time he may realise that the whole business of commerce in Australia is a business of inter-dependence, and not of quarrelling about what we suppose to be individual interests.

When I look at the list of your membership - as I did - and I see its broad sweep I can very well understand, Mr. Chairman, that your Chamber, in its 75 years, has been able to emphasise this mutuality of interests, this mutuality of patriotism, which I think must characterise a great Chamber of Commerce in a great commercial, industrial, farming and pastoral centre.

And so, Sir, I am delighted to be here, and I am delighted to have the opportunity of proposing the health of the Chamber on its 75th Anniversary. But before I do so actually, perhaps I might say this to you.

I went out to Maitland on this occasion expecting to see 120 people, not a bad crowd that would have been, and finding 1,000. Why? Because they loved me? On the contrary! Probably 49.5%, or you might say 50.5% hated the sight of me. But they came. Why? Because they had realised that these events in Europe about the Common Market are not only the business of the

United Kingdom but the business of Australia, the business of Canada, the business of New Zealand, with tremendous force, the business of other countries.

Don't ask me to say what is going to happen. But I do know this: that this is an issue which rises above all party considerations. I don't believe for one moment that there is a man in the Federal Parliament who doesn't want to see that everything that can be done is done to protect the proper interests of our country in the markets of Great Britain, and of Europe, and of the world.

But it is not going to be easy. There are powerful considerations that affect the old country. There are tremendous political considerations - and they don't grow smaller, day by day, as the manufactured crisis over Berlin becomes more difficult. These are tremendous problems. And in the solving of them we all know that we need a powerful Europe; and we all know that a powerful Europe needs a powerful Great Britain. Never let us abandon our recollection of the fact that the great nation in the saving of the world, twice in this century, has been Great Britain itself. (Applause) And as we remember that we will remember that we must be astute, not to do something that will hurt her, or diminish her significance in the world. But at the same time we are Australians, we have a profound duty to our own country, and we don't want something to happen that will hurt us. And we believe that with good sense, and good judgment, and some understanding on the part of European countries, and of the United States of America, we might hope to arrive at a conclusion on matters which will lend strength to all of us, and to Europe itself.

I am not going into details on this matter - though we have been doing it in other fields - but I just want to say to you that I don't think these are problems that are going to be solved by rhetoric, by aggression, by aggressive remarks, by aggressive arguments. These require firmness of character and level-headed judgment and resolution. And isn't it interesting that those three things are still needed on everything that matters: level heads, clear minds, firmness of resolution.

I mentioned just now the Berlin crisis. You know, it is so easy to dismiss Berlin. "Is it worthwhile? It's only a particular city. Is this worth a war?" Well you don't avoid wars that way. After all Czechoslovakia wasn't worth a war, it was said; Poland wasn't worth a war as it was said; Belgium wasn't worth a war. You can go around the whole gamut of these things and you come back to the proposition which ought to be established crystal clear by now that there is a 'point of no-surrender' otherwise the free world retreats and retreats and retreats into surrender. And here we have Berlin.

I am happy to say that I think the attitude taken on this matter by the great Western powers has been admirable - firm but not provocative. Mr. Kennedy's statements I think have been splendid - firm, but not provocative. And at the moment they are being met by blustering and threats and bullying. Well, gentlemen, blustering and threats and bullying may go down well with some people, but they have never cut much ice with us, have they? Never cut much ice with you; never cut much ice with me.

And yet we don't want to be behaving as if we were hungry for battle. Because the next great battle in the world will leave none of these countries to be discussed in future. And they all know it. And when Khrushchev knows that, as he does, then I have a firm belief that the first time he sits across a table and sees a man with a clear eye who represents true authority, and a great massive body, not only of public opinion, of free strength, but of power, and he is told that this

is where it ends, that is where it will end. This is going to be the most tremendous, the most tremendous event in recent years. (Applause)

Well we all hope, we all believe, that we won't come to this dreadful pass. I don't think there is any reason in human nature - and there is a good deal of human nature on both sides of the iron curtain - to suppose that it will come to this pass.

But in the meantime we have one prime duty: to get on with the development of our own country; to get on with the production of our own country; to establish that here in this remote corner of the world, not by one means only, but by a hundred different means, we can become not only great producers for ourselves, but great producers for export markets around the world, and particularly around our quarter of the world. This is a great task. I feel infinitely indebted, myself, to those who take time off from their own business undertakings to think about these things.

We have just had a magnificent conference in Canberra about exports, a widely representative conference. We all mean business on this matter. And all I want to say to you is that it is a good thing to talk about at a non-party gathering because this, with great respect to everybody, is a non-party matter. This is an Australian problem. When we have solved that one we can take time off to have a crack at each other - we will anyhow because that is all part of the game - and I enjoy it - but anyhow we can take time off to do that, and we will. But here in Newcastle, in this place, in this area, with your immense variety of activities, you, I believe, represent, in summary, the whole thing that Australia is aiming at.

So, Sir, I say to you that as this Chamber has been going on since nine years before I was born, so I hope that it will go on for 90 years, 900 years, after I am dead. And then, I trust, an industrious secretary, looking through the records of the past, will produce as a piece of ancient history that a fellow called "Menzies" once came here and spoke. (Applause)

---