

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SIR GORDON ROLPH MEMORIAL
PAVILION, GRAMMAR SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 1961

Sir, and ladies and gentlemen, and boys:

I have had a tempting series of invitations, haven't I, laid out before me: the Judge has been doing his best to persuade me to tell you the story of my life. This, I think, I would prefer not to do. But if the boys of the school are interested in how a man can begin in a small way as a speech-maker, and end up by doing about six speeches a week I will tell them.

When I was 12 years old, at school in Ballarat I was thought, for some reason or other, to have what they call "the gift of the gab". A master was leaving the School, or he was being married, or some disaster was about to overtake him and it was decided to give him a small present and have it accompanied by speeches. The first boy to speak, who subsequently became a General, was selected; and I was selected as his supporter. He made a very good speech - he took the precaution of writing it out and reading it. I, in my youthful vanity, decided that that wasn't for me so I stood up, at the ripe age of 12, opened my mouth - and nothing came out. My mouth got drier and drier, not a solitary syllable could I utter, and I returned to my form completely discredited. Of course my enemies would say I have made up for it since. But I thought that might encourage some of the boys who are called upon some day to utter and who find that for the time being they can't.

Now I admit with shame that this is the first time I have been here. My first impression, of course, on a lovely day, is this: that this must be one of the most beautiful, and beautifully situated, schools in Australia. It is really quite a moving thing to look around and to be told that in its present position this School is a young school; though, of course as we all know, in actual years of life it is a very old school, the senior school of the lot. But what has been done here just amazes me. I found it very hard to believe that Bruce laid the foundation stone over there when he was Prime Minister. And that doesn't seem long ago. I congratulate you. I think this is a marvellous place, beautifully situated; buildings growing more and more mature as time goes on, and now this splendid oval completed by this splendid pavilion behind me.

I had the great pleasure of knowing Gordon Rolph very well indeed, and of spending many holidays down on the river with him. A lot of people thought that we must have a busy time talking politics - we didn't ever mention them. Even then we talked about two subjects - where the fish might be biting, and grandchildren, grandchildren. I knew all about his grandchildren, or those of them who were then available, by hearsay, even before I met them in the flesh. And I used to say to him occasionally, "You know I think you spoil this boy, or that". And he would say "No doubt; you wait, you wait and see what you do". And I've waited; and I know how right he is, or how right he was. But they were great days, wonderful days we could have together - a wonderful family. If I spoke about Lady Rolph too much I would embarrass her, because she has always been to me, and to my wife, one of the great women of Australia - a marvellous person. She tolerated me, she tolerated us, she tolerated the grandchildren, she tolerated the fishing; and between ourselves she could cook rock cod so that it tasted like the finest fish in the world. So I go back over a few years of this.

Now Sir Gordon Rolph was, of course, as you have been reminded, a great citizen of this city and of this state, a man whose friendship I valued enormously, a man whose friendship contained no element of selfishness, or self-seeking in it. He liked people because he liked people; and people liked him because they liked him. And of course, as you know he had a considerable belief in his family. His daughters were beyond compare to him; and indeed almost to me - with one exception - the finest daughters in the world. It gave him great satisfaction to think of his grandsons coming here, growing up in the tradition of their own fathers. And Lady Rolph couldn't have done anything more significant, or more moving, than to commemorate his name here in the School of his grandchildren, and no doubt their children, and so almost ad infinitum. This is a very happy thought and one that we all appreciate.

Now all I want to say to you about a school of this kind, about this school in particular, is that I am no believer in uniformity carried too far. There is almost a passion for uniformity in Australia. What happens in one State must happen in all States; schools that exist in one State must exist in all States. All the rules of the game, whatever they may be, must apply, from Cooktown in the far north to Cape Leeuwin in the South West. There is a sort of strange passion for uniformity. And uniformity has very little to be said for it, in my opinion. We are all different - we have an element or two in common - but we are all different. The business of a community is to encourage the individuality of every human being so that we won't be a driven crowd of 11 million, but will be 11 million individual people. If you are going to produce that result, you can't carry uniformity too far.

Now as you have been reminded I have had a varied scholastic experience, if that is the right word to use, having begun in a small country state school in the north-west of Victoria where there were about 25 boys and girls, then having gone to a bigger state school in Ballarat, then having gone to a secondary school which, I regret to tell you, closed up the year after I left. Then I went to a big public school in Melbourne and then to the University of Melbourne. So that I have seen this problem from a number of different angles. I don't criticise our State system of education; I think it is magnificent. I never go anywhere in Australia without being tremendously impressed by what is being done in the building of schools, and high schools, and the provision of facilities. But I have a particular spot in my heart and mind for the Church schools like this, because I think they produce that variety in education which, in my opinion, is literally the spice of life. They are different. It is a good thing to have some schools that are different. They develop a particular point of view. It used to be said many years ago that what we call Public Schools in Victoria, great Public Schools, were the homes of snobbery; of privileged people.

You know really, ladies and gentlemen, there is an awful lot of misuse of language in this country of ours. The privileged classes! When I look back on the fellows who were at a Great Public School with me, there was only one fellow whose father had a decent income - and he was bitterly unpopular because he could spend more money at the tuckshop than anybody else. We hated the sight of him; and we were quite right. As for the rest of us we didn't have two shillings to jingle, one against the other. Privileged! You know there is an awful lot of nonsense talked about these things.

But we had the great good fortune to find ourselves, by one way or another, by some efforts on our own part, and by a proper spirit of devotion on the part of our parents, and a good deal of self-sacrifice, to find ourselves in a school in which the whole operation was conducted against the background of religious belief, against the background of a high moral ethical standard. This, I think, is of tremendous importance. I believe, in other words, that if you were to abolish every school like this in the sacred name of uniformity, and send everybody through exactly the same hierarchy of schools, willy-nilly, something would go out of the life of Australia that we wouldn't very readily replace.

The best proof, I think, of this is that as time has gone on more and more people are sending their boys to schools like this, sending their girls to sister schools of schools like this, with an eagerness to secure the advantage of this particular educational training. Nobody can tell me that that is just keeping up with the Joneses, or being snooty, or superior: this is a growing recognition of the fact that when your son, or your daughter, comes out of school, goes to a University, or goes out into the world of affairs, or goes into some technical training, you want him, or her, to be an individual, with some personality developed, with an individual mark, not just the mark of a mould.

To do that I believe that we have to draw out of all those who are at school the best that they have. It may be the best that they have at cricket, or at football; it may be the best that they have in Latin, if one may speak with respect of what I understand is now almost literally a dead language. We must try to get the best out of their minds, their personalities, so that at the end of it people will say: "That fellow went to a good school" and won't say "I wonder whether that chap ever went to school".

It is the individual who matters. There is too much nonsense talked about in this century about mass movements. Half the troubles in the world today are caused by roaring politicians like our friend from the Soviet Union, who are appealing all the time to a mass hysteria, to mass fear. The moment the people of Australia become disposed to yield in the face of mass persuasion, mass hysteria, mass fright, mass whatever it is, then liberty will begin to disappear in Australia. The guarantee of liberty and the guarantee of character is to have true individual citizens who think for themselves, who have had their minds developed, who have put themselves in the way of learning more and more right through their lives; and who are, therefore, able to speak their minds and resist any petty aspiring dictator, in whatever field, who may come along.

Now, Sir, that is a pretty large survey from a small beginning. But I believe that it is true. It is because I believe in those things that I have felt it a very great privilege to come here to this school, for the first time, in order to say something to you and perform this small office of a very deep and abiding friendship. (Applause)
