

PARLIAMENTARY DINNER IN HONOUR OF RT. HON. K.J.  
HOLYOAKE, IN CANBERRA, ON 7TH MAY, 1962

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

Your Excellencies, Prime Minister, and gentlemen:

I have a very simple task tonight. I am to propose the toast of somebody who is heavily concealed on the book of the words as "Our Distinguished Guest". But I must bring him out from behind this concealment. The Prime Minister of New Zealand is, of course, always a distinguished guest, but he is also our neighbour and our friend. (Applause)

There have been some amusing incidents of late Prime Minister. One or two, or, for all I know, three members of the Federal Parliament have suggested that you ought to join the Commonwealth of Australia. And I am credibly informed that when you were asked about this at a Press interview you said, I thought quite clearly, "well we've just discharged our trust to West Samoa and they now have their independence. We're quite prepared to consider another takeover". (Laughter) Is that right? The Prime Minister reminds me the lists are open.

It is a very curious thing, you know, about Australia and New Zealand, a terrible thing, that we should have to talk about each other as if we were thousands and thousands of miles away. I have occasionally pointed out to my New Zealand friends that there is something quite irrational about the fact that if an Australian Member of Parliament wants to go to Perth, or wants to go, even into the remote wildernesses of Wyndham, or wants to go up into the north of Queensland, he just goes; and Ministers, who are always reluctant, like myself, to travel can go to these places. But I don't need to be told that it is much further from Sydney or Canberra to Perth than it is from Sydney or Canberra to Auckland. And yet that is an overseas enterprise. This is a very odd thing and, I must say, a very strange thing. The more you think about it the more you realise that although we have a vague idea in Australia that New Zealand is our little brother, and in New Zealand they have a determined idea that we are a miserable lot of - whatever you care to say - in Australia, the fact is that for all the purposes in this world, purposes of existence, or economic survival, or economic growth, we are the same people. And the great problem, Prime Minister, is really to encourage everybody on both sides of this Tasman, this turbulent sea, which lies east of Sydney, or even east of East Sydney (Laughter) to get to know each other better and understand each other better.

I had a talk with the Prime Minister, who is an old friend of mine, this afternoon and we agreed in principle - (you know that is a very good thing, "in principle" - this Sir I may tell you is what I always resist in Cabinets: I say 'I won't have these decisions in principle' because once you have made them you are sunk, you see - but on the Continent they do this thing rather better, they say "en principe" and it's the same thing) - but he and I have agreed, in principle, that it is very important that every year some members of Parliament from Australia should go to New Zealand and get to meet their opposite numbers; and that some members of Parliament from New Zealand should come to Australia and meet their opposite numbers - not based on some Party conception, but a balance of people in Parliament. I think this is of the greatest importance and I am very happy to say that the Prime Minister agrees about this, in principle, because we really ought to know more about each other than we do.

What do we know about New Zealand? Well, we know, every Australian knows, going back to wars, that the New Zealanders and the Australians have stood side by side and have known no difference in the field of courage.

We also know in our boasting fashion that it is not so many years ago that most of the Ministers in the Cabinet in New Zealand came from Australia (Laughter) and, I regret to say, a number of them from .... Anyhow it doesn't matter. (Laughter) There they were, there they were. And in my own lifetime I have often met some distinguished headmaster, some famous professor, some great head of a college, and I have said, incautiously, "This is a very good man" and I have been answered, "Oh, yes, he comes from New Zealand". So it has been a two-way traffic - Australian politicians to New Zealand; scholars and gentlemen to Australia. (Laughter)

I am reminded by my equestrian friend the Minister for Trade, who, as you well know is, of course, a devotee of the race course, that every time we have a Cabinet Sweep, a £1. in - even Paul Hasluck subscribing (Laughter) - all you have to do is to run down the list if you are a scholar on these matters as I am and say "which one has N.Z. after it?" and you are pretty safe. (Laughter) That is what they do to us. That's right. Even Captain Cook, having gone to New Zealand, don't forget, came to Australia post haste - never forget that. (Laughter)

But, Sir, all these are interesting aspects of the fact that we are neighbours, we are friends, we are of the same blood, and our future is inseparable. Our future as survivors in a world conflict between darkness and light, is together. Not one of us can survive without the other. And in the great events that are being negotiated at this time in the world we are together. You may have this at risk rather more than us, and we may have that at risk rather more than you in the negotiations for the European Common Market but that we are together in having things that are involved and, to that extent, are at risk, nobody can doubt.

I think it is rather a dreadful thing that people like myself who have been to New Zealand a number of times should have been there so little; and I was shocked this afternoon when I came back from Melbourne to find that this was the first time that you, a Minister for nine years in New Zealand, and a Prime Minister for 18 months - and there is something to be said for 18 months, you make a note of that (Laughter) - are visiting Canberra for the first time. Well now Sir, that is to our discredit, and to our disadvantage.

But all I want to say to you is this: that you are here among people who represent both sides of Parliament, who represent all the Commonwealth countries, you are here as a friend and as a neighbour. I hope that you will always feel able to speak to us in forthright, plain, homely terms - as we speak to each other - because Australia and New Zealand stand together, or they fall together. This is, of course, a great challenge. But it is a tremendous honour. It produces immense pride in all our minds that when it comes to the point we are together, and we stand, or we fall together. When you stand and succeed it is a very agreeable thing to have company. I used to know something about that. When you don't quite succeed it is still a comfort to know that you have company - isn't it?

I can say quite simply and plainly on behalf of the members of the Government side of this Parliament and for the Opposition members of this Parliament we are at one in looking across the Tasman and thinking of you as our brothers and as our friends. Not on some tenuous political agreement, but because right down in our blood we are the same people. Therefore we are delighted to welcome you. It unfortunately hasn't turned out to be possible for the Leader of the Opposition, or for the Deputy Leader, to be here: they have very compelling engagements. But I am happy to say that a distinguished member of the Opposition Executive, Mr. Alan Fraser, is here and I am sure will support me when I propose the toast of your health. (Applause)