

OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND
SECTION OF THE COMMONWEALTH PACIFIC
CABLE AT SYDNEY, 9TH JULY, 1962

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

Sir, Parliamentary colleagues, Your Excellencies and Gentlemen:

You may have been tempted to wonder that my colleague, being a politician, sat down on the tick of the clock. This is not a common disease among us. The explanation is that in front of me, as in front of him, as in front of somebody else here, there's a flashing light that begins to operate when you have fifteen seconds to go, and so if I finish up in the middle of a sentence, you won't put it down to mental decrepitude (Laughter) with advancing years, you'll just understand that the clock has struck and that's all you can do about it.

Sir, every time I hear the Postmaster-General talk about something being Phase 2 and that Phase 3 is coming along, I've learnt from long experience that Phase 4 is just around the corner and Phase 5 The Treasury, particularly, is always interested in these later developments. But I am bound to say that when I attended this Conference in 1959 - it doesn't seem as long ago as that - I little thought that the practical work of getting on with this job would have proceeded with such speed and such obvious skill, because this is a very remarkable occurrence.

There's a good deal of rhetoric spoken about Australia and New Zealand getting closer together. I've heard one or two people say that we ought to take New Zealand over. I heard the Prime Minister of New Zealand say very wittily that if the takeover business was in the air, he was quite prepared to make an offer. (Laughter) But, here we have something which, in actual physical terms, joins Australia to New Zealand - this submarine cable. There's some dramatic significance about it. And, of course, its great significance is in the field of communications.

Like some of you here today, I was born in the nineteenth century. Some of my political opponents, one of whom is here today, think that I was born in the seventeenth century (Laughter). Anyhow, it was the nineteenth century, and the nineteenth century was a century in which communications were slow and difficult. People wrote letters, a great art which has perhaps now passed into decay. They travelled by stagecoaches for a great part of the century. Steam began and the first steam vessels began to emerge to take people from one country to another. But if you were to look back on the nineteenth and make a sort of comprehensive, sweeping statement, you would say that it was the century of slow communications.

And if you look at our century, the twentieth, I'm sure you will agree with me that the great revolution in this century has been in the speed and variety of communication. Voice to voice around the world. Because of jet aircraft and the like - person to person around the world. Because of the miracle of cable and other services - writing to writing around the world. This is a tremendous revolution.

If you leave Sydney in a jet aircraft, as I have repeatedly discovered, you arrive in Honolulu before you leave Sydney. You get to San Francisco an hour or two later. There's something about the International Date Line which explains this miracle, but I don't understand the International

Date Line and therefore I insist on saying that you arrive before you leave. And if the jolly things get any faster, you'll arrive anywhere in the world travelling in that direction before you leave. But it is the most remarkable thing that, actually in physical contact, this century should have put us in a position where we are no more than a few hours away from many of the people we would like to discuss things with.

And, of course, the miracle of the international telephone, radio telephone, cable telephone, has I think, been simply incredible. Now, this is a wonderful thing. It is a wonderful thing if we take advantage of it. I've never been one of those who believed that if we all spoke the same language right round the world we would be better friends. I don't think it follows, because it's very difficult to quarrel with a man in a language you don't understand. But it's very easy to quarrel with him in a language that you do. And, therefore, that's not the complete answer. But I believe, myself, that underneath it all, this speed of communications, this growing knowledge that people have of the other man's country and of other people, the growing means they have of direct conversation - all these things - properly used, as I hope they will be, are going to revolutionise the face of the world and, I think, have a profound effect on international politics.

It was one thing, some few years back, to say, "Well, I'd like to find out what the Prime Minister of New Zealand is thinking about this matter." Or the External Affairs Minister might say, "I'd like to know what the External Affairs Minister (who is the same person) is thinking about it in New Zealand." But with this, today, I think we've reached the absolute ultimate with no interruption. If I want to talk to the Prime Minister of New Zealand, as I expect to in a few minutes' time, you pick up the telephone, you rely on the Post Office or whoever it may be, to give you a quick "through" and there you are. You have a discussion about things which, if they had to be put into other terms, and sent in despatches and what not, would mean a delay of quite a long time.

So that I believe that we are, today, witnessing or taking part in a quite historic event and, of course, when the other phases are complete, when it's not only to New Zealand, but to Honolulu, to Vancouver, across Canada to Great Britain, you'll have a ring through British Commonwealth countries and, in particular, through those Commonwealth countries which are within the direct allegiance to the throne - Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia You know, together, we're not insignificant in this world. There are new fashions, there are new organizations, there are new ideas, but in the long run, it is on the cohesion of countries like those I've mentioned, that a good deal of the sanity of the world will depend. And this will bring us closer together.

I frequently say that it is one of the oddities of life - it is, too, that if one of my Ministers wants to go to Perth, well, he goes to Perth. He goes aboard a plane and goes there. It's not my business, it's his. But if he wants to go a much shorter distance, to Auckland, that is an overseas journey. That is written down in the book. (Laughter) It is the subject of questions in the House. Now, of course, this is all too silly. New Zealand is just as close to the great centres of population in Australia as is the West Coast of Australia itself. And this significant fact, this fact which ought to have made us much closer than we are, is being underlined by what happens today. Because this cable brings us, through this medium, closer and clearer to the Dominion of New Zealand.

And that is why a Prime Minister of Australia and a Prime Minister of New Zealand can feel tremendously pleased at the event that is being celebrated.

I said, Sir, that there were many ways and means that had been evolved in the twentieth century for improving communications. I'd just like to repeat before I conclude that these are the mechanics of international relations. They still leave the substance of international relations as a matter of profound, human responsibility. The scientists, the technologists, have given us to our hands and to our ears, all the mechanical aids that we need and, of course, others are still undreamed of. All the mechanical aids that we need today to be in touch with people, to hear what they have to say, to tell them what we have to say. And I believe that as the scientists and the technologists have done this so it will be the task of statesmanship around the world to see that these things are applied in the highest possible fashion to produce the greatest possible areas of understanding and of peace.

Now, Sir, in a couple of minutes' time - I've been given my instructions - something happens and I pick up the telephone and I have a conversation with Mr. Holyoake. You will all listen in to it. I remember when I was at Canberra, helping to open the coaxial cable, the Lord Mayor of Sydney had a talk with the Lord Mayor of Melbourne and I thought he beat him right off the track (Laughter) and before we came down here, I said to my colleagues up above, "You know, it's just a gamble as to who gets in first, Mr. Holyoake or myself; because whoever gets in first is likely to drive the other man off the course (Laughter). So, if you find that I have too little to say, you will please credit that fact partly to the superiority and attainments of my opposite number in New Zealand and partly to my innate and well-known modesty. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, that hasn't rung for me yet. They said to me "Pick up the 'phone with your right hand" and I said, "How do you know that I'm not a bit deaf in the right ear" (Laughter). That's what they take for granted. I have misread the clock.

(Phone rings)

Voice: Mr. Menzies, Mr. Holyoake is on the line.

Mr. Holyoake : Hello, Bob.

Mr. Menzies: Hello, Keith, how are you?

Mr. Holyoake : I'm just one hundred percent.

Mr. Menzies : Where are you? In the Auckland Town Hall?

Mr. Holyoake : I'm in the Auckland Town Hall and obviously you're here too, Bob, by the sound of your voice.

Mr. Menzies : It's pretty good service, isn't it?

Mr. Holyoake : Yes, it's terrific

Mr. Menzies : We must advertise it (Laughter)

Mr. Holyoake : It's getting a pretty good kickoff today.

- Mr. Menzies : Yes. Well, I'm in the head office here, with a couple of hundred tired businessmen locking on and listening in. Have you got the same kind of thing?
- Mr. Holyoake : I think just a little more than a couple of hundred. I must always just top Australia, musn't I?
- Mr. Menzies : That's quite right.
- Mr. Holyoake : Little more than two hundred. A very, very representative gathering.
- Mr. Menzies : Well, it's quality rather than quantity that counts. (Laughter) How's Jack Marshall, is he in good form?
- Mr. Holyoake : Jack's very well, and highly appreciative of your assistance, of course, over in London.
- Mr. Menzies : Are you taking him with you in September?
- Mr. Holyoake : Most likely. I would think almost certainly.
- Mr. Menzies : I think he's frightfully good.
- Mr. Holyoake : John McEwen going with you?
- Mr. Menzies : Yes.
- Mr. Holyoake : We will look forward to for gathering with you.
- Mr. Menzies : That's right. Will you be going just at the last moment, or a few days earlier?
- Mr. Holyoake : It will depend on my House a bit. Will yours be meeting at that time?
- Mr. Menzies : Well, by a brilliant arrangement, heartily concurred in on both sides, my House is not sitting in September, so that whoever is Prime Minister at the end of August, will continue to be Prime Minister until the end of September. (Laughter)
- Mr. Holyoake : I'm just a little more fortunate, Bob. I haven't got quite the anxiety from the House that you have.
- Mr. Menzies : That's quite right. (Laughter) And you even improved your position at a by-election.
- Mr. Holyoake : Well, we didn't win the seat, but it was improved, yes.
- Mr. Menzies : Well, I hope that there's an easterly wind blowing and the habit comes over the Tasman (Laughter)
- Mr. Holyoake : I couldn't wish you more than that, of course.
- Mr. Menzies : We'll do our best anyhow.
- Mr. Holyoake : I say, it's an extraordinary thing being hitched up like this.
- Mr. Menzies : It's wonderful. It's a most historic affair, this. We've just been talking about it here.

- Mr. Holyoake : Another close link.
- Mr. Menzies : You know what this means - instead of sending letters to you in future, I'll ring you up.
- Mr. Holyoake : My goodness. Don't forget New Zealand is ahead of Australia again, Bob.
- Mr. Menzies : I know that. Two hours ahead, in point of time. Oh yes, we've always conceded that.
- Mr. Holyoake : Just another thought. This links us so much more closely together. You remember when I was in Canberra five or six weeks ago, I made our position quite clear, didn't I, on the question of the seventh State of the Commonwealth?
- Mr. Menzies : That's right. I was telling the audience here about it. What you said was, that if there was any takeover talk in the air, you were prepared to make a bid. Does that still stand?
- Mr. Holyoake : Yes, that still stands.
- Mr. Menzies : I'll discuss the details with you when we meet next.
- Mr. Holyoake : When you think, too, not of just Australia but a link up through Canada and Britain. We are going to talk just in this fashion. Perhaps we won't have any more Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences.
- Mr. Menzies : Well, that's well on the cards. How does that strike you?
- Mr. Holyoake : Well, I think that had better go on the Order Paper. (Laughter)
- Mr. Menzies : Yes, I think so.
- Mr. Holyoake : Too many people listening in.
- Mr. Menzies : Look, Keith, I think all the gentlemen who are here today would like me to ask you to convey to your audience in the Auckland Town Hall the warm good wishes that Australia entertains for your country. Would you do that?
- Mr. Holyoake : Thank you very much, Bob. They've all heard it over the loudspeaker system, and can I, on behalf of everybody here, everybody associated with this venture and, indeed, everybody in New Zealand warmly reciprocate your good wishes in that respect.
- Mr. Menzies : Thank you very much.
- Mr. Holyoake : I think, Bob, it's a tremendous experience for us both, for me at least, it's a tremendous experience to share this unique occasion with you.

- Mr. Menzies : Thank you very much and I have exactly the same feeling. As a matter of fact, I don't need to tell you, we and your New Zealanders like to have a chip at each other. You know, it's rather the vogue, but down underneath it all, there are those things between us, aren't there, that can't be destroyed.
- Mr. Holyoake : The closest and the deepest ties.
- Mr. Menzies : That's it. Perhaps, at this stage, I should say the appropriate word, and you'll do yours at your end, will you? I have the great honour of declaring, on behalf of Australia, and at the Australian end, this cable open.
- Mr. Holyoake : And I join with you, and on behalf of all the people of New Zealand at this end, I join warmly in declaring the cable officially open from the New Zealand end.
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