

STATE BANQUET AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA,  
IN HONOUR OF THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND  
QUEEN OF THAILAND

28TH AUGUST, 1962

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

Your Majesties, Your Excellencies, Your Serene Highnesses and Ladies and Gentlemen (I call you all that, whether you come from the Senate or the House of Representatives) :

We have now come to that pleasant period of the Dinner when I am, and following me, Mr. Whitlam, your humble instruments to offer some words of welcome to the King and Queen of Thailand. (Applause)

I must say, Your Majesties, that this seems to be an entirely unnecessary and almost irrelevant performance because you have not had your experience in various parts of the world without realising that here, in the capital of Australia, you have received a welcome in the minds and hearts of all our people. (Applause) And as a sense of welcome is far more a matter of feeling than words, I don't need to elaborate. I am sure that I have some idea as to how you feel.

I think I would like to say, on behalf of some of my colleagues at least, the travelling members of the Government, that we are infinitely grateful to you for having advanced your visit to Australia by a week so that, in the last few days and tomorrow, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Treasurer might have the opportunity of seeing you both, of welcoming you, because otherwise, the three of us, to say nothing of anybody else, were bent on a journey to London to discuss the somewhat theological problem called the Common Market. (Laughter). But I would like to tell all my Parliamentary colleagues that Their Majesties couldn't have been more kind or more understanding and they advanced their time by a week and the result is that those to whom I have referred, including myself, will at any rate be able to bid farewell to them tomorrow in decent order and form and then as they travel to the less privileged parts of Australia (Laughter), some of us will travel to what might or might not be the less privileged part of the Commonwealth. Anyhow it has worked out very happily.

And I don't say that Your Majesties just because it has turned out to be convenient from our point of view. I, myself, and I am sure my colleagues will agree with me, will always be delighted to think that our departure for London for this vastly important conference occurred at a time when we had had the great pleasure, the great opportunity for two or three days in Canberra of having some of your own charm brushed off on us so that we might take it with us as a happy memory. (Applause).

It's very interesting to look back on recent history. I know that there are people in this Parliament, Your Majesty, well, I presented a number of them to you and said these were my opponents and I know that some of them think that really I've been here long enough (Laughter) and this Your Majesty is a feeling I entirely share, but even an old doddering fellow like myself, looking back over the last ten years, can realise what revolutionary changes have come in the world.

There was a time not so long ago when your country was known to the ignorant outsiders as Siam, when we looked at it and said, "Oh, yes, that's somewhere in Asia - you know - and it's a long way away." I've come to realise very vividly that for me or for any other politician in Australia to travel from here to Perth, all inside Australia, is only two or three hours less than travelling to Bangkok. We have in the modern world in point of time become close neighbours and I am happy to believe, Your Majesties, that we have become close friends. (Hear, hear) (Applause).

We are, of course, friends by treaty, because we both subscribe to the South East Asia Treaty and it's a good thing to be a friend by treaty, but it's a better thing to be friends in the heart, in the spirit and in the mind. (Hear, hear) (Applause).

I was saying to myself last night, I think it was last night, you never know in Canberra (Laughter) that we have all sorts of great things in common - your ancient country - our modern, new country - we have wonderful things in common, and the first of them, perhaps, is that we are both monarchies, (Hear, hear) and, Sir, speaking to you, His Majesty the King and to you, Her Majesty the Queen, in this country I can say with no reservations whatever that just as in Australia we are all the Queen's men and women (Applause) so, in our country we are all delighted to see a King and a Queen presiding over a country which has literally centuries of history behind it. And so, Sir, we have that and we have a love of peace, a profound love of peace in our hearts; we have, I believe I may say, a deep sense in both countries, though we occasionally affect to conceal it, a profound sense of spiritual values. Neither you, nor your country nor this country has a prosaic dull belief that the only values in the world are material values. We share this with you.

We share with you, though we haven't so many marvellous examples of it to our hand as you have, a love of beauty - a nice kind of love to have, in a world that is so frequently ugly. (Applause) And, Sir, as I suggested, we both have a sense of history; your history going back in your own country for, what, seven hundred years; our history going back in our own country for one hundred and fifty, near enough. But going back beyond that, to a country whose roots are in the very soil of history, far removed as they were from you in point of space and, at that time, in point of time. But when you come to Australia, derived as we are from that old civilisation, the old faiths and the old loyalties, you are coming to a country which, of all countries in this part of the world, is destined to understand yours, to be friendly with yours and to look back, as we all will, on this Visit of yours as an occasion on which we met with great respect and profound affection two great people who were also our friends. (Hear, hear) (Applause).

Your Majesties, this is one of those precious occasions in Parliamentary history when there is unanimity on both sides of Parliament and I am going to ask my friend, the Acting Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Whitlam, to support me. (Applause).

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