

THIRTY-SECOND ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF COMMERCIAL  
BROADCASTING STATIONS HELD AT CANBERRA,  
ON 8TH OCTOBER, 1962.

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

Mr. President, Mr. Minister and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I want to make, I think, two preliminary remarks. The first is that there is a certain benevolent quality about this meeting this afternoon - commercial broadcasting stations meeting under the benevolent smile of Sir Charles Moses (Laughter). I think that's very agreeable.

The second preliminary remark is that by some error somewhere, I am at present somewhere else, having had the rare experience of being double-booked today. And, as "somewhere else" involves me talking with three Premiers - and you know what Premiers are like - I have craved leave of the President to enable me to depart when I have said what few things I have to say to you.

I don't profess to be an expert on broadcasting. I speak over the air more than I listen. That, I suppose, you might say was an endemic disease of politicians. I leave all the fine work, the expert work, the neat parry and thrust of wave lengths and things of that kind, to Charles Davidson who, though he doesn't understand them any more than I do, (Laughter) gives a very, very good imitation as a Minister, of knowing what they're about.

All I want to say to you in reality is that I have now lived quite a long time, as any opponent of mine would tell you. I am not unacquainted with change for, after all, in the last Parliament, I had a majority of 32. And so Sir, I know all about change - which is the law of life. But, like very many other people, I can look back to a time when nobody had ever heard of wireless broadcasting, or of television, or of aircraft. And it is one of my minor boasts, that I can go back to a time in my boyhood memory when the first motor vehicle arrived in the district - and it was a motor buggy.

We have lived through the most extraordinary series of miracles, haven't we? And, interestingly enough, most of them haven't been so much miracles of understanding - I doubt whether we understand much better than we did - but miracles of communication. It seems only the other day that anybody who wanted to broadcast, some amateur, was regarded as a harmless crank. I remember when the first stations were set up - commercial stations. I confess to you, I thought that the people who put their money into them were mad - and now I know better (Laughter). The way in which, what began as a sort of bit of fun, has become a tremendously powerful influence in business and in social life - is, I think, one of the miracles of my time.

I shall always feel glad that when these matters began, Governments in Australia were intelligent enough, as I believe, to decide that they would have a dual system; that we would have the Broadcasting Commission, and that we would have commercial stations with advertising, and all the rich variety of programmes that result from a highly competitive system. This, I am sure, has been a wonderful thing. I, for one, would not wish to go back on it. I think it has been a great thing for Australia.

Now I know, Sir, that now that television is descending upon us - one mast on Black Mountain when I went away, almost two masts on Black Mountain when I came back - we have the rich privilege of seeing what the movie stars looked like twenty years ago. (Laughter)

I know Sir, that a lot of people, many of us perhaps, felt that when television came in, broadcasting would go out. Quite frankly, I don't believe it and I believe I am right in saying that there is nothing in your own experience which suggests that.

Broadcasting, and I am now talking in particular about commercial broadcasting, brings to millions of people, the direct voice, the direct statement, the direct song, the direct piece of drama - whatever it may be - and that is a wonderful thing because there is a constant conflict in the modern world between what a man says and what he is reported to have said - these are entirely different matters; and although I witnessed with a certain amount of wry humour the development of Parliamentary broadcasting - I have seen that little instinctive movement that takes a Member a little nearer to the next microphone (Laughter) and I have watched with regret what I believe to be the decline of the intimacy of Parliamentary debate in favour of the set speech - still it must be said that, wherever I go in Australia, I will encounter somebody, perhaps one, perhaps a dozen, perhaps fifty who were able to say, "Well, I was following that debate, such and such a point was made and I didn't find it answered." Now this I think is an advantage for thoughtful people.

But above all things, when somebody like myself sits down in front of a microphone to address this wretched, unresponsive piece of metal backed by a blank wall, he often says to himself, "Oh dear, I wonder if anybody is listening to this. If I stopped suddenly would anybody know?" You all know this feeling that we get - perhaps you get it occasionally, I don't know - but I get it.

At least one has the knowledge that whoever does happen to be listening, and possesses the patience to hear you through, will know what you said and will be able to form a judgment about whatever personality accompanied the words over the air.

I am speaking now purely as a political person, but consider how many people in how many remote places in Australia thirty years ago cut off from their nearest neighbour 100 miles away, thirty years ago, living in remote places thirty years ago, perhaps not all that many miles from a Capital but on a little branch line in the country with one train a week and a batch of newspapers once a week, and then consider what broadcasting has brought into the lives of these people, consider the way it has contracted the geographical area of Australia and integrated the Australian mind and the Australian feeling. All I can say is that I don't think there is any invention that has done more for social development and individual enrichment in our own country.

Now you gentlemen of the commercial broadcasting stations are of course open to the gravest of suspicion - you are deeply suspected of trying to make a profit (Laughter). That, of course, is something which a lot of people don't care for - so long as it is practised by other people. Good luck

to you - may you go on and make profits, because the success of your enterprises will maintain this rich flow of competitive material and competitive services to the people of Australia.

I very well remember when I was a small boy - not such a difficult feat I suppose - living up in the Mallee. A train arrived once a week and everybody went up to see it arrive. Newspapers came in and I used to cut out of them, when they reached me and the family, the pictures of the celebrated cricketers of the day and paste them on the wall. This was the one injection of pabulum, the pabulum of instruction or of entertainment for the week. Wise people emulated the old gentleman that we read about in Somerset Maugham's stories - if not in his autobiography (Laughter) - who, having received seven copies of the newspaper for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, perhaps Sunday - read them one day at a time, so as never to be ahead of the news.

Today all that is gone and it is very largely due to you that it has gone. Therefore, as the temporary occupant of the post of Prime Minister - temporary for the next two and a half years (Laughter) - I welcome the chance of coming down and saying to you just a little about how I feel over the work you are doing, over the service you are rendering.

I express two hopes - one is that your enterprises will go on forever, and the other is that you will never be in the red on the profit and loss accounts.

I declare this Conference open.

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