

ANNUAL GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE N.S.W.  
DIVISION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY HELD  
AT SYDNEY ON 1ST NOVEMBER, 1962

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

Sir, Parliamentary colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I have learned at least three things since I arrived here tonight, and for an old fellow like me to learn anything is such a novelty that to learn three things is quite exciting. (Laughter).

The first thing is that I have some resemblance to a gentleman whom I don't know - the President of Puerto Rico. Now if I had known that you were going in for these analogies, I would have hired from a theatrical outfitter a very straggling dark beard and would have presented myself to you as the President of Cuba. (Laughter) (Applause)

The second thing I have learned - I warn my colleague, Senator Spooner - is one that I will in future employ in the Cabinet room. I am in the habit of letting every Minister who wants to say something, say something - sometimes briefly and sometimes at considerable length. But I have learned tonight that the right drill is to hear a little argument - not too much - and then say, "Those who agree with me, say 'Aye'" and if a loud noise comes out, I say, "I declare it carried." (Laughter) You have no idea how much time this will save me in future, in Canberra. (Laughter)

The third thing I have learned is that it is not a bad idea when people have speeches to make with which you may not agree, to make them stand in a corridor with so many pillars in it that you can't see them at all. (Laughter) I could see Bill Arthur and hear him - well, I have heard him before today. But two or three speakers here, standing in the middle will go down in my memory as disembodied voices. (Laughter) I think perhaps, Bill, we might do something about that in the Cabinet room and have a broad pillar put between you and me and between Bill McMahon and me (Laughter) and then what will be the result, we don't undertake to say.

But, Sir, I am very glad to have come in here just at the tail end of a discussion about the United States of America because this is one matter that I was going to say something to you about. I don't think we are so badly known in America. I don't think so. I can remember years ago before the war, one could go through the United States of America and find the vaguest possible ideas as to where Australia was. Indeed, once I went into a shop in San Francisco and the fellow identifying my accent as something weird and wonderful, said to me, "Where do you come from?" I said, "I come from Australia," and he said, "Where's that?" "Well, I said, "don't you know?" He said, "I ought to know. I have an idea it's out on the East Coast." (Laughter) But I must say that after the Second War, I have not found anything of that kind. For a great number of young Americans we have become much better known than we were. And on the Government level, I am bound to say that I think, and I say it with great pleasure, that our stocks are high with the Administration of the United States. Indeed in that supposed sink of iniquity, New York, which happens to be the centre of a great deal of private financial enterprise in the United States, our stocks are so high that our credit rating - to use that abominable expression - is higher than perhaps any other country in the world.

But I wanted to refer to the United States of America because quite recently there have been arguments going on as you have all noticed and, indeed, I have seen them continued on the Agenda Paper, about Australian defence. I am not going to enter into a long disquisition about Australian defence. My distinguished colleague, the Minister for Defence recently made, with our full approval, a considered statement on this matter which, in most quarters I think, has been pretty well received. But I think that as Liberals - and that's what we are here tonight - we really ought to clarify our minds by going back to the basic differences between ourselves and our opponents - those basic matters which determine on what side we are. You can have all sorts of arguments of detail and I don't resist them and I don't resent them. They are all very healthy. But if we get so taken up with arguments about particulars that we forget that we have basic differences and that these are the things that create the whole Parliamentary controversy in Australia, then we will fall into a most grievous error.

I wonder if we all remember that the Labor Party, the Australian Labor Party, not so long ago committed itself to the proposition, and it regards this as its pride and joy, that we should seek to establish a nuclear-free zone in the Southern Hemisphere, that no nuclear weapons should either be established in the Southern Hemisphere, or fired from the Southern Hemisphere, or stored in the Southern Hemisphere, or in any way used from the Southern Hemisphere. This has been their categorical statement.

This afternoon when I got back - I blush to tell you - from looking at a very, very good innings by Norman O'Neill, I read the Communist Review and it, of course, seized the Labor doctrine with the warmest possible approval and claims it as a triumph for a long-sustained Communist propaganda. Now just think about it. This is one of those catchpenny ideas, calculated to appeal to us - if we don't think. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a Southern Hemisphere which was immune from all the possible trials and struggles of the Northern Hemisphere. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing. This is what they say, in effect, if in Australia we could live quietly and comfortably while Great Britain and the United States and Western Europe and the Soviet Union tore each other to pieces. Even stated in that way, you know, it doesn't appeal very much, does it? Look at it a little further.

We have, and it's thanks to your present Government that we have it, an ANZUS pact with the United States - the United States, Australia, New Zealand - under which we all come to each other's aid in our mutual defence. If somebody attacks us, if somebody attacks Australia, then we know that the United States of America will come to our aid. Not a bad thing for us, don't you think? Not a bad thing for us to have, metaphorically, alongside of us the greatest power in the modern world. Do we want to dispose of it? If you had secret ballot, would you vote to repeal the ANZUS pact? Would you vote to say that Australia should have no alliance with the United States? If that's the way you feel then you can support the Labor Party's recent policy with complete conviction. Because that's what they are saying to the United States - and I know that the United States understands this because I've been there twice this year and I have discussed this very problem with them. Suppose Australia is attacked, say by Communist China, directly or through devious routes, attacked some day by a country which today has seven hundred million people and which is reaching out into South East Asian countries - Laos

moderately successfully - North Viet Nam, successfully - South Viet Nam placed in a state of imminent peril - so it goes down the map, towards Australia --- suppose Australia is attacked with nuclear weapons - and who is there here tonight who can say that won't happen some day - and suppose the United States of America said to us, "Very well. Now we are going to come in. We are going to take a hand in this. You are friends. You are our allies. We accept responsibility for you." And we say to them, "Well, that's all right, but you can't put a nuclear weapon on Manus Island in our defence, because it's south of the Equator; and you can't bring in any ballistic missile into Australian territory and fire it deeply into the strongholds of your enemy because we are South of the Equator. In other words, "United States of America, you can defend us, thank you very much, with conventional weapons but in the event of a global nuclear contest, you keep out." Now, what nonsense it is. Does anybody suppose that any one of us wants to see a war of this disastrous kind; but how suicidal, recognising that such a war is always possible, for us to say to the United States of America and to any other power - Great Britain - "You keep out of the Southern Hemisphere. You attend to your business North of the Equator. We won't have you here."

Now, ladies and gentlemen, if such a grim event happened, nobody in Australia could be found to warn the United States off the course any more than anybody could be found in the last war to warn the United States off the course and say, "You are not to come in here. You are not to come into New Guinea. You are not to fight in our defence in our own area." Yet the tragedy is that our opponents have made this great single contribution to thought. They have said, "A nuclear-free zone south of the Equator, and we don't want any ally who is not prepared to respect it." Well, I've been Prime Minister a long time as you know and I have found a fair number of extraordinarily difficult problems to consider. I find no difficulty in this one. I will never be heard to say to the United States, "You keep out" if we are in danger. Nor would you. But our opponents, who are now masquerading for the first time - I think; I am not sure - as advocates of improved defence for Australia, nullify the whole of their argument by striking at its very basis, by striking what they intended to be or what they ought to understand to be, a deadly blow at the ANZUS alliance which is increasingly the sheet anchor of Australian security.

Well, that perhaps enables me to go on a little from that point, because what I have been saying to you about that merely exhibits what I'll call an isolationism of mind. Now, we came into existence as a party because we were not isolationists in mind. I don't mean merely in terms of defence. I don't mean merely in terms of international relations. I mean in every sense of the word. The soul of Liberalism is that we are not divided into little isolated units. We don't say, "Well, we are manufacturers and therefore we couldn't care less about anybody else." We don't say "We are primary producers and we couldn't care less about anybody else." We don't say, "We are employers" or "We're this or we're that and we couldn't care less about other people." There are plenty of pressure groups in the country. There are plenty of pressure groups in the world. The whole of the remarkable events of the last ten days brought to a point by the courage and skill of the President of the United States (Applause) - the whole of these events has arisen because of the existence in the world of pressure groups, the

great Communist pressure group -- not only in the Soviet Union but in all the satellite countries of Europe - a pressure group reaching its way out into Asia, into Africa, constantly maintaining tension, constantly making people live with the fear in the back of their minds of disasters to come - this is the greatest pressure group. But we have some ourselves. It is in a sense the age of the pressure group. It is in a sense a period of time, politically and internationally, in which people seek to promote differences, seek to promote a clash of interests, so that in the waters so stirred up they may fish to their own advantage.

We are Liberals, we are not a sectional party. We represent no pressure group. It is our historic mission in Australia to see that the interests of the community as a whole at all times prevail over the interests of any individual or any group. This is our great mission in Australian politics. And I really came tonight so that I might remind you of it and beg of you never to lose sight of it. Are we the employers' party? Are we the employees' party? Are we the party of the rich or the party of somebody else? Our opponents will frequently try to pretend that we are, but the fact is that we have frequently reached our most unpopular moments by running contrary to what were the superficial interests of people whom we were supposed to represent in Parliament. (Applause) I remember this and remember it with considerable satisfaction (Applause) and we've done that and we'll continue to do that because we believe that the whole is greater than the part, we believe that Australia has interests as Australia and that the people of Australia, men, women and children, have interests superior to those of any particular group or section. (Applause) And therefore I say to you, "Away with all this pressure group idea." Personally, I am sick to death of it and I am happy to say it no longer retains the faintest impact on my reasoning mind. The Liberal Party of Australia is a unique experiment in the history of Australian politics.

Just let me remind you of it because this is not only our future task but it's part of the pride that we ought to have in our own history. I have been in Parliament, one way and another, man and boy, for a long, long time, and ever since I was a boy at school, I have been hearing politics talked in the house. Therefore I might claim in a rough and ready fashion to know something about politics in Australia. But look back on it. When did we ever have a completely concerted body until this party was established? I was Leader of the Opposition from 1943 on and I very well remember sitting down and casting up how many organizations there were that were theoretically on our side in politics in Australia, and there were fourteen. Fourteen. Well, you remember when Woodrow Wilson produced his fourteen points, old Clemenceau said, "Le bon Dieu n'avait que dit." Ten was enough he thought, for the Lord. But we had fourteen like Woodrow Wilson. And with an effort, with a lot of understanding men and women, we created a party of one out of a dispersed number of groups of fourteen. I don't think this ever happened before. There have been parties, there have been compromises. There have been changes across the floor of the House. I don't think in the history of Federation, until then, we had ever had one party which was united - not by a series of particular doctrines - but by a consuming faith, a faith which is superior to doctrine or to dogma. We had people who a year before were arguing with each other because "You're a bit too far to the Right - you're a bit too far to the Left" - some of you will remember this; and then we realised, all of a sudden,

that there's room for many mansions even in our heaven, that there is room for many views in a party which gets together and which has one ultimate faith. Let us argue on the sidelines about what we think of this, or this, or this. I don't grudge all the argument that you will have on the various resolutions that are on the Notice Paper. I'll read others when we come to our Federal Council Meeting. And I'll say, "Good. Let's fight it out. Let's thrash these things out, but don't let us believe that the details are more important than the whole." Don't let us believe for one moment that we ought to allow our magnificent unity in our task to be dispersed by partisan disputes. Now this is tremendously important in Australia. Tremendously.

We've been in office a long time. I know even my best friends when they meet me in the street will say to me, "By jove, old man, now how long is it that you've been in office?" Well, I shrug my shoulders and admit to the truth and they say, "Oh, yes. It's a long time." And I wonder what they are thinking about in their minds. (Laughter) Now, I've no great ambitions on these matters. Any man who is not content to have been the Prime Minister of his country for a quarter of its Federal history is greedy and I hope nobody will think I am greedy. (Laughter) So don't think I am displaying any personal interest on this matter (Applause) but I tell you that much more important than who is Prime Minister, much more important than who is a Minister, is the importance of this party as a party not growing old in its ideas, not losing sight of its historic mission.

Men may grow old; women, in my observation, never do. (Laughter) (Applause) Men may grow old. We all get older. We get tired. We perhaps worry a little more about things than we did once. Well, that's in the course of nature. But the Liberal Party as a party is young. Have that in your mind. There may be people in it who have grown white-haired in the service of the party but the party is young. Compared with the great historic parties of the United States, of Great Britain, this is a boy, this party, and if it is to retain its youth, if it is to grow at all, sturdily, into maturity, then it must do it by remembering that its great mission is to serve all the people of Australia, to keep up our friendships with great nations around the world, to preserve our standing, our credit, our repute, and to allow sectional arguments to be dealt with, but not to cause divisions at the heart of the party. (Applause)

Now, Sir, that's one great mission we have. There's another one that I would like to say a word or two about because I don't want to speak too long. We are living in a Federal community. We are living in a nation which was created as such only sixty years ago, but it was created as a Federal community with sovereignty which, in the long run, attaches to the people, divided between a Commonwealth, a great central administration, and the administrations and governments and parliaments of the States. The essence of federalism is that there is a division of sovereignty, not that somebody is sovereign and that somebody isn't. A division of sovereignty - this is the complete essence of our democracy and of federalism. Federalism in Australia for which we stand which is one of the keynotes in our policy, will not be destroyed by overt acts. Nobody is going to come along and put up a referendum to abolish the States. Well he may, if he is feeling gay and enterprising, but he won't succeed. The people of Australia, once you put the question to them - "Do you want to destroy the States?" will never say "Yes".

But things can be changed by subtlety more easily than they can by direct attack, and one of the subtle things that is going on today, practised perhaps by some people in this room inadvertently, is to put more and more and more responsibility on the Commonwealth and still pretend the Commonwealth powers haven't increased. Ladies and gentlemen, if this bad habit of taking everything to the Commonwealth --- something crops up; well we're short of money, we want to do this or want to do that - "Let's go to Canberra" - and you know this happens every day. I get only a percentage of them on my desk, but it happens every day. What do you suppose is going to happen if the Commonwealth is ultimately given all financial responsibility? Then it will have a pretty powerful case some day to have all political authority, because it is a pretty good thing to have responsibility and authority married together.

Now I say to you - beware of this. The States have great powers. We have great powers. Admittedly in the financial world by reason of a number of events, we have predominant financial powers in the Commonwealth, but it is still true that there are things in the hands of the States, masses of administrative responsibilities which, in my considered opinion, after a lot of experience, they are much more competent to attend to than we would be at Canberra.

Therefore, it's one of our tasks - it is the other task that I wanted to mention to you - to preserve the Federal structure, to preserve a system of Government under which the national Government, the national Parliament have responsibility for great national affairs and the State Parliaments, the State governments have responsibility within their own borders for very great local affairs. It would be a dreadful thing I think if this came to an end, because, you know, to talk of freedom, individual freedom, may be thought occasionally to be rather old-fashioned, but it is the great thing that matters, individual freedom, and if you get all power concentrated into one set of hands then freedom begins to disappear. It is in the division of power between governments that freedom flourishes. The moment you get some other state of affairs there is an enormous temptation to subordinate the freedom of the individual. I will take a single example from overseas.

In the United Kingdom, all power is at Westminster and therefore you have the possible danger that I have referred to. But the British invented self-government - but for Great Britain, nobody would have heard of self-government. It is not only the mother of Parliaments, it is the only mother of Parliaments in the world and because they understand these things and because there is a passion in the British heart for freedom, no tyrant for hundreds of years has been able to prevail in Great Britain. (Applause) But across the Channel, in France, a country of which we all speak with profound respect, we have had a different history. Somebody was under the impression - in fact I said something about it at the London Conference - that because the French had had a Revolution, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, it must be taken that they understood democracy perfectly. This, of course, is a complete non sequitur, because the plain truth is they don't understand democracy very well. For years and years, right through this current century, their system of Parliament has been so dispersed, the Frenchman himself so individualist in his views that any average government lasted six weeks, sometimes six months - changes of administration, changes of administration, five years, 22 governments or something of that kind and in the result, what we call parliamentary democracy became ineffective

and the country was increasingly run, if there was to be continuity, by what they are pleased to call the bureau or what we are pleased to call the civil service.

Bureaucratic control is the inevitable result of grave uncertainty of government because somebody has to carry on, somebody must do the job. In the last two or three years, of course, we have had the remarkable episode of President De Gaulle who has, let us face up to it, almost dictatorial powers, but who because of his strength, his flaming patriotism, has restored the pride of the French, as I ventured to tell him the last time I spoke with him in Paris. But after him, what do we know?

Now, the one thing I am illustrating to you is that you must have a passion in the mind for preserving individual freedom and for restraining the powers of government then, and particularly so in the case of Australia. You do well to say, "We have a system of division of authority. We have a great country that is going to be greater and greater as time goes on, and we must be careful not to allow ourselves by folly or inadvertence to lose a Federal system which has in reality served us so well." (Applause)

Sir, there is just one other matter that I would like to say before I conclude and that is that the task of government in Australia was at one time thought to be distributive. "We have so much wealth, let us divide it up. Let us reduce the inequalities between the rich and the poor. Let us develop our social services, so that there will be a proper protection for people who have, so to speak, fallen by the wayside." All this is great stuff and your present Government has had a hand in it, not to be surpassed in the history of the Commonwealth, but we are rapidly reaching a point of time when the main business of government is not to distribute but to create, to help to create (Applause) to help to have more and more production, because if the mind is concentrated blindly on sharing out what you have, then before you can say, "Knife", you won't be having any more next year or the year afterwards. The creation of resources in Australia, their development, the creation of markets for Australia, their development, the creation of ingenuity in research, in technology in Australia and, what's even more important, speedy application to the problems, the practical problems of production - these are the great challenges of the next ten years. I have only to mention them to you, this great creative task, for you to realise that in spite of some commentators I am not sitting down in an armchair at home with my back turned to the future, and contemplating the glories of the past, not at all.

We haven't done all that badly in the past, but we have a great job, and that is to do twice as well in the future. It is a creative task, a task which will be based upon our understanding of government and its function and its division. It will be based primarily upon our realisation that the time has gone by for little sectional conflicts between farmer and manufacturer, between employer and employee. The time has come in a pretty difficult world for ten million of the best people living in the world to go on and demonstrate that they can command by their own efforts a magnificent future.

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