

OPENING OF TRAINING CENTRE FOR "GUIDE DOGS FOR  
THE BLIND" AT KEW, MELBOURNE, ON 17TH NOVEMBER,  
1962.

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

Sir and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I was very glad to be reminded not only when I got here but on the way here, that this is in my electorate, and all of you who have the misfortune to be my constituents had better have a good look at me because the way in which I neglect my electorate is well known and, you never know, you might not see me again for six months. (Laughter)

I'm not going to detain you for very long. It seems to me to be a rather hot day and it is going to be just as hot in Canberra, I don't mind telling you, because it was pretty hot when we left there this morning. All I wanted to say to you, in declaring this centre open, was that I believe that the process of civilisation is beginning to get on. Civilisation was supposed to make enormous strides in the nineteenth century. I sometimes doubt it. Civilisation is in the heart and in the mind, and is not always to be assessed by looking at material things.

This century has seen, I think, two very remarkable developments. One has been the vast assumption by communities of legal obligation to people who are less fortunately placed than the average. The extension of social services in the modern world has been phenomenal. All this is good. All this is a splendid element in getting rid of extremes in social life, and in fixing in most of our minds a sense of obligation. But it is not enough. It is not enough that we should think that all our obligations are discharged by writing out a cheque for our taxes, accompanied by a suitable volley of unprintable, and indeed unprincipled, language. (Laughter) That's not good enough. We have - and I am happy to say that Melbourne is a splendid example of it - managed to preserve, over and above our sense of legal obligation, our human sense of obligation, our understanding of the fact that no great body or institute or group or centre which is designed to give human assistance to human beings can succeed unless it has human assistance from human beings - not just doing their legal duty but going the second mile. (Applause)

Those of us who have the great good fortune to enjoy our sight think of those who don't, always with a feeling of sympathy, but perhaps not always with a feeling of understanding. There was a time in our history, not in our generation but in past times, when people who suffered from infirmities which set them apart from the normal run of human beings in normal activities, were regarded as odd people. God had laid his hand on them and there was nothing that man could do about it. This was an uncivilised idea.

We have, in recent years in Australia, thanks to the devoted activities of people, many of whom are here this afternoon, brought about great changes in this matter. Human ingenuity has been exercised. A compassionate interest, not a condescending interest, but a compassionate and understanding interest has been brought to bear on these matters. And in the result, in our time, many of us have seen brought to the

service of people who are without their sight first of all the superb faculty of being able to read. The invention of Braille - all the things that have gone with it - reopened to many a world they thought they had lost, and opened to some a world that they had never gained. This was I think one of the great events in modern history, not always remembered, not frequently remembered, but we all have it in our minds this afternoon.

And then along came broadcasting. Very interesting that the name of Jack Davey should be associated with this memorial, because broadcasting brought into the lives of people not able to read, not able to see but well able to hear and to understand, a new source of entertainment and of instruction. Why some of them here today have even enjoyed the ineffable pleasure - thanks to broadcasting - of hearing me being insulted in Parliament House (Laughter) and returning the compliment with great spirit and decency. (Laughter) (Applause) But broadcasting - it was really, when you come to think of it, the next great step - braille for reading, broadcasting for hearing.

But that left untouched the question of what the Chairman, Dr. Prior, has called mobility. It is not always easy for a sightless man or woman to be taken by the arm through the traffic to the shops, around on the daily chores, by another member of the family, and the discovery that you could train highly intelligent dogs to be their friends, guides and companions is, I venture to say, one of the great social discoveries of our time. (Applause)

Whatever disabilities we may suffer from, not one of us would wish to be unduly dependent on other people. We have a healthy feeling of independence, a healthy pride, a healthy self-respect, and to be given the means of mobility, of moving about, this is a great thing and I, like many of you, am looking forward to seeing a little bit of this work this afternoon. I confess, with shame, I have known little of it, but this afternoon I have already begun to learn a great deal about it. I little wonder that some of the generous, splendid citizens I see around here this afternoon have devoted so much attention to it.

This in short, Sir, is a further exercise in the development of civilisation. It's taken a long time to come, but I believe that in our time it is beginning to come and to come fast, because let me repeat, this is something in the heart and in the mind. It doesn't depend on what you pay, but on how you feel and how you think, because they will determine what you do. And today we have a splendid modern example of what can be done.

I venture to say, Sir, that thanks to the work that you and your colleagues and other people have done, you are initiating a new era for many, many people and an increasing number in days to come, and that as a whole community we can be very thankful that these differences, though they are technical differences, yet have a profound influence on human conduct and human outlook, are being eliminated, not only by the march of science and skill but by the warmth of the heart and understanding of our citizens.

Sir, I have very great pleasure -- indeed it is a very great honour - to declare this Centre open.

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