

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

SPEECH

BY

Rt. Hon. SIR ROBERT MENZIES,
K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,

ON

UNITED STATES NAVAL COMMUNICATION
STATION AGREEMENT BILL 1963.

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 22nd May, 1963.]

Sir ROBERT MENZIES (Kooyong—Prime Minister) [8.50].—When I remember that not so long ago the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell), like myself, was a little out of action, I feel that I ought to congratulate him on having come back in such magnificent form. It is a long time since I heard him to such advantage—for my side. He really was in very good form.

Mr. Stewart.—Where is the Minister for External Affairs?

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—It is all right; I am still in office.

Mr. Stewart.—Where is he? Put him up!

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—He is still here, and I am still here; and I am speaking. You do not mind, do you? Come, Frank, do you mind?

Mr. Stewart.—No, but I want to hear Gar.

Mr. Ward.—He has gone out to get his medal.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order!

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—The Leader of the Opposition has really waxed very eloquent to-night. He follows in the footsteps of one of his senior members who

explained to us earlier, in the second-reading debate, that the House would not be divided on the question of the communication centre and that therefore the motion for the second reading would go through without division; but that in committee and at the third-reading stage there would be amendments. It is very interesting to note that, after the next division, the Labour Party, which wants to be able to go out and say, "We are really supporters of the establishment of this communication centre", will have voted four times against it and only once for it.

Another interesting thing is that, although we were told that the whole of the serried ranks of the Labour Party—now so happily, if precariously, united on this matter—would be put into the battle, so far the divisions on this bill have shown a majority for the Government not of one but of seven and of five. What has become of the Opposition? Has the will of the Opposition weakened? Where are our wandering boys to-night? Why, with a majority of seven or five I could live an awful long time in this office. But, Sir, here it is; for the fourth time we are going to be asked to divide. What about? I will answer that question first technically and then in substance.

First of all technically, I say to the people of Australia who no doubt are following our proceedings with rapt interest—or we think so—that Standing Order No. 237 deals with the third reading of a bill. After all, this Parliament is governed by its own Standing Orders. My distinguished friend, the Leader of the Opposition, made a somewhat obituary reference to Sir Thomas Erskine May, the author of May's "Parliamentary Practice", who, he said, lived a long time ago. He suggested that this is an antiquated idea. I am surprised, because our Standing Orders were not written by Sir Thomas Erskine May who lived a long time ago; they were written by the Standing Orders Committee, with the approval of the members of this House, and they were revised only the other day. So there is nothing dead about our book of Standing Orders. This is the last and final edition of our own Standing Orders. I remind honorable members opposite that in Standing Order No. 237, dealing with the motion "That the bill be now read a third time", this is the provision—

The only amendment which may be moved to the question is by omitting "now" and adding "this day six months", which, if carried, shall finally dispose of the Bill.

Let us understand this. Supposing that in a passion of eloquence or by persuasive oratory my distinguished opponent had persuaded a couple of people on this side of the House to stay away or one person on this side of the House to cross the floor and vote with him, the carrying of this amendment would have killed the agreement and there would be no radio communication centre established at all.

It ill becomes an opposition to say, "Well, of course, we moved it this way because we know that it will not be carried". That would be humbug, surely. Therefore, we must be able to test members of the Labour Party by saying that they moved this amendment hoping that for some reason or another it would be carried. If they care to deny that, if they care to say publicly that it was all a bit of flim-flam and that they moved the amendment hoping and believing that it would not be carried, then we can judge them and so can the people of Australia. But if they are prepared to stand up and say, "We moved this hoping that

in some fashion it would be carried", then let them admit publicly that the carrying of their amendment would kill not only this bill but the establishment of the communication station.

Mr. Reynolds.—What rubbish!

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—It is of no use saying "rubbish". I do not need to talk about rubbish to you.

Mr. Allan Fraser.—We are seeking decent treatment—

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! The honorable member for Eden-Monaro will remain silent.

Mr. Allan Fraser.—I am sorry.

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—The honorable member for Eden-Monaro always feels a little troubled when somebody puts the cold hand of reason on him because he is not a rational man. I shall repeat my point. I know that I will not persuade some of my friends opposite, although I suspect that one or two of them already agree with me, but I think it ought to be made clear to the people of Australia somehow or another that this amendment, if carried, would dispose of the bill and that the bill having been disposed of, this communication centre would not be established.

Of course, there are some honorable members opposite who imagine that if this agreement were disposed of we could, in due course, at leisure and with some comfort—or they could after another election—have a pleasant negotiation with the United States of America. How unrealistic this is. The fact is that the United States has not all that time to burn. When it wants to establish a communication centre, it wants it soon. When its Congress is asked to vote for proposals of this kind, the members of Congress want to know that the proposal will contribute to the safety of the free world and that it will go ahead. Yet this poor, bemused Opposition puts itself on record with an amendment which, if carried, would mean the destruction of the bill and the destruction of the agreement. Sir, anybody with a most elementary knowledge of the procedures of Parliament could not doubt for one moment that that is the position.

All I want to say on this point—because there has been a long debate and there is not much to be added to it—is that this amendment is the fourth attempt by the Opposition to destroy this proposal by destroying this bill and this agreement. The only other thing I want to say is this: This afternoon and, indeed, yesterday a careful campaign was conducted by the Opposition to suggest that Labour members alone are interested in the rights of Australia, the sovereignty of Australia and our right to determine our future. I do not want to be preached to by these people about this matter because, as a matter of fact, in the last war it was I who, as the head of the then government, stipulated that the Second Australian Imperial Force which was going to the Middle East was not to be submerged in other formations; that it was to be under Australian command; and that it was to be in contact with the Australian Government whenever it wanted to be. This is an old practice. Nobody can claim a monopoly in this. It was established twenty years before I and those who sat in government with me re-established it at that time.

But, Sir, this is a case in which the Labour Party, however it may cloak its intention, wants to establish a proposition in the name of our own sovereignty that this signalling station is not to be used by the United States, except with the express approval of the Australian Government under circumstances in which the United States is at war. That is what the Opposition members are saying.

Mr. Calwell.—No, they are not.

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—Of course, they are. The Leader of the Opposition is rather handicapped in debating this. He began his speech in the second-reading debate by saying, in effect, that there was joint control. It now turns out that he agrees with us that there is no joint control. There is a power to consult. Therefore, he has gone to all this trouble and called all these divisions to try to produce the joint control which a few days ago he said already existed.

We must be alive to the circumstances of the times. Australia is not a nuclear power. The United States is the greatest of the nuclear powers, much to our comfort. The

existence of a nuclear deterrent in the United States and in Great Britain—although at present to a much smaller extent there—is the condition by which we live. I repeat that. The problem that has to be considered is whether we want to have a deterrent that does not deter, whether we want to have a deterrent that cannot be used at the right time and in the right place. Picture the position to the north and west of Australia. Go west into the Indian Ocean, south of Communist China and south of Communist Russia. The United States is the great power that has the deterrent weapon in the air, from submarines and otherwise. I put this to everybody as a matter of plain common sense. Suppose the Communists decided that they would attack. Nobody would be so silly as to think they would send a courteous letter giving notice. When the Communists think that the time has come, they will act, and from that moment it will be a matter of minutes before the instruments of detection ascertain what they are doing and where their missiles are going. In those circumstances, literally with ballistic missiles in the air, we are told that there must be political consultation before the United States can retaliate from the Indian Ocean in order to render unprofitable the attack by the Communist powers.

Sir, this is bedlamite nonsense. Why talk about a lot of theoretical matters when the fact is that it will be a matter of mere minutes before, the word having come through, the President of the United States will have to send a message to his own naval forces deployed in this part of the world, "You are to strike". We are told by the Labour Party that in those circumstances we must stipulate that before the United States authorities can send a message from our soil which might impair our neutrality they must have a political discussion with us. If I were running one of these great Communist countries, I could wish for nothing better than to see the most powerful enemy of communism hamstrung by having to engage in consultations of this kind before the return blow could come.

We do not want the blow or the return blow. No honorable member of this House has any monopoly of humanity. We are

men with families and we are men concerned with the future of our country. Of course we do not want to have this diabolical disaster come on the world. But the best way of guaranteeing that it will come is to impair the efficacy of the counter-stroke after the stroke comes. In other words, the best way to destroy our future is to put an impediment in the way of the great Western nuclear power—the great home of freedom for this purpose and the great protector of so many free nations in the world—and prevent it from being able to make its retaliation both certain and swift. A retaliation that is not certain and swift is not a retaliation at all.

I beg honorable members opposite to come up to date on this matter. We are

living in a world in which a war, if it came, would not leave a matter of months to do things and to prepare as in the past. If a war came, and it was a war on the global scale, it would have reached its peak in a day or two days. The first massive blows would have been delivered in minutes, not days. Sir, I am an Australian and I am proud of my country. I would not willingly abandon any of the rights of my country. I am a great believer in them. But, in the name of a theoretical protection of Australia's rights, to abandon Australia's real interests, to leave this country defenceless in a war of this kind and to leave Australia, as I said earlier, as the prize of victory is something that I will not accept, that my colleagues will not accept and that the people of Australia will not accept.