

FORD MOTOR COMPANY DINNER HELD AT
HOTEL CAMERRA, CAMERRA
ON 17TH JULY, 1963

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Having just been in Great Britain, I ought to begin by saying: "Milords (Laughter), Miladies and Gentlemen, but I won't. I am, as a matter of fact, torn between three emotions - one is that I have to get back to see that my colleague, the Minister for the Interior doesn't get away with murder on the Budget discussions. The second is that I am, you know, pretty broadminded. I had a great affection - and still have, thank God - for Charlie Smith and a great affection for my friend on the left, and my wife is one of the enthusiastic drivers of a Falcon car.

Well, that's all on that side. On the other hand, Henry Ford II once got me into a lot of trouble at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa because I was there and my wife was there and somebody arranged that I was to eat with him - probably Charlie, if I remember. Bonnie Prince Charlie. And to cut a long story short, we became so interested, had our elbows on the table, took a little touch of this or that as it arrived, you see, and at 4 o'clock in the morning, I got back into my suite at the Chateau Laurier and really, it took me three months to recover. (Laughter)

But I do want to say to you, Mr. Booth, that you are following upon two people who have conspicuously identified themselves, while they have been here, with this country. You will hear a lot of argument and of course Canada hears a lot more about the pressure of events from outside investors and all this. We understand. But I believe that one of the greatest things that a great company can do, coming into Australia, is to have people who identify themselves with our country.

Now, Bonnie Prince Charlie became the greatest living expert on Australian Rules football. (Laughter) This was a wonderful thing to do, except in Sydney. (Laughter) I haven't really pursued you enough, John, to discover whether you get taken up in the same way, but I would strongly advise you, Mr. Booth, to devote some of the long winter evenings to studying Australian rules football, to getting to know the things that excite the genuine passions of mankind in Australia. It's a very great mistake to think that people in Australia are passionate about politics. They're not. They go along on polling day and say, "Is that old so-and-so still there? Well, he's not bad" and they vote me back or they say, "Oh, it's time for a change" and they vote me out. This doesn't excite passion in the public mind. The only people who get passionate about it are politicians. But what does excite passion is what side you are on in the football, or the cricket, or that strange game they play in Sydney - what's it called - ragby union. (Laughter) This is, I think, tremendously important.

But quite seriously, the great thing that has been done by your predecessors is that they have, within a remarkably short period of time, acquired a circle of friendship, of interest, which has made people feel quite quickly that they are one of us. Now this is the essence, if I may say so, of the Australian character. We don't stand off and sniff and snoop. We really are not so difficult as some in the world appear to think, but

we do like to meet people and deal with people who, in our judgment, in our instinctive judgment, are on the same wavelength. We talk their language, they talk ours. They are one of us and you could not have succeeded one-half as much as you have if it were not for the fact that you have been one of us, and I am perfectly certain that Mr. Booth will be one of us. He's made a jelly good start anyhow, he's living in Melbourne. (Laughter)

Now, we have to go back to work and all that, but I do want to tell you one little reminiscent story. Charles Smith, whose faithful Parliamentary representative is my colleague, the Minister for Transport now, Mr. Opperman, spoke to me in a dissipated moment after a political meeting or something, and said, "The Vice-President of Ford in Canada is coming out and somebody else is coming out and I am bringing them up to Canberra," and in an expansive mood, I said, "Of course, my dear boy. Let me know a fortnight ahead, and I will be delighted to give them a luncheon. We'll have a few Ministers," and all this, you see. And he said, "Well, that's very nice of you." So the date was fixed, and promptly passed out of my mind, but was of course retained by the mind of my private secretary who had written it down in the diary. This is one of the discomfortable things about having a good private secretary.

So time wore on, and we had a powerful impulse and we produced a little Budget and I was the humble instrument of Providence to deliver the speech in the House one night. This increased the sales tax on motor vehicles; it did all sorts of things, and I needly hardly say, wasn't received with ultimate rapture by the people concerned, and I went off home. The next morning when I arrived in the office, the entire staff was lined up. I thought they were going to give me a presentation or something. They said, "We've just been arguing as to whether you ought to be given the Victoria Cross or certified as a lunatic." I said, "These are hard words. Why?" They said, "Today, you are having the Ford people for lunch." (Laughter)

And I met Charlie Smith in the corridor about a half an hour before - he was darting into a chambre privee somewhere - and I said, "Good morning, Charlie," and he said, "Good morning" and I said, "Still friends?" and he said, "Well, yes, but of course with a certain amount of difficulty." Then we went to lunch. Hubert Opperman was there. Now I was delighted with the chief Ford man present who, when I said to him, "I don't know what to do. Should I get under the table?" He said, "I listened in to you last night. I heard every word of it." I said, "Well, mind you, it's right, you know". He said, "I agree with you. You know, a lot of people take a short view - what is going to happen in the next twelve months. If you are running a show of our dimensions, you don't look at the next twelve months, you are looking ahead over a period of time." And he said, much to my relief, "I don't mind saying that in your case, I think I would have done exactly the same thing." And that gave me a passionate belief in the statesmanship of the Ford Company that I have never yet lost, Sir.
