

DINNER IN HONOUR OF SIR GILES CHIPPINDALL
AT HOTEL WINDSOR, MELBOURNE
ON 23RD AUGUST, 1963

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

Sir :

I think you did all that protocol business frightfully well, I never can remember it myself so I won't try. The last remarks you made about Chipp had a slightly obituary flavour, you know, almost as if he had passed on. (Laughter) I have long since come to understand that with Chipp, it is just passing from one phase of immortality to another (Laughter) and that is why we are all delighted to be here because we want him to be immortal and we think we might have a little of it brushed off on us in the process.

The other day in Canberra by some extraordinary feat of activity on the part of the post office, a telegram was delivered to me at the Lodge (Laughter) and by some more remarkable feat, I was outside the house when it arrived, and a young, athletic gentleman with red hair put one foot on the ground - you know the way it happens - and produced the telegram, the gist of which, if I remember it correctly was, "I always knew the thistle was a noxious weed" (Laughter) but it's rather nice to have a telegram anyhow. (Laughter) In my innocence, I said to this boy, "Now, my boy, what are your ambitions? Do you want to be a Cardinal? Do you want to be Director-General? Do you want to be a Minister of the Crown? Do you want to have a knighthood around your neck?" And he pulled his foot up, got on to the bicycle, rode off home and said to his mother, "Mum, I talked to the old fellow. He's mad." (Laughter) And yet, of course, even Arthur Calveil, who professionally hates me and has me now under summons or sentence of death in the Federal Parliament, even Arthur would agree that I am not quite as mad as all that. (Laughter)

It is a remarkable dispensation of Providence that - how long ago, Chipp? - forty years ago, fifty years ago, probably, there were all sorts of young boys around wanting to earn an honest living who became telegraph messengers and in reality they have produced the only Cardinal we have ever had. I don't know whether they ever produced a Moderator-General of the Church of Scotland (Laughter). I don't want to raise the sectarian issue (Laughter).

I remember at one time I had a Postmaster-General before Charlie Davidson who had been a telegraph messenger and when he and Chipp got together, I wasn't in the hunt because they were both members of the Old Boys' Union. (Laughter) This, I think, was a remarkable vintage in the history of Australia because the young telegraph messenger became a very distinguished public servant, or as I'd say for some reason or other, civil servant, who enjoyed as much respect from my opponents in politics as he does from my friends and supporters in politics.

This is a very remarkable life that Chipp has had so far. I've no doubt that in thirty years' time he will write a letter to the paper saying what a nice fellow I was after my funeral. (Laughter) But forget about that. It is a very wonderful thing that a man of his ability, of his tremendously rich commonsense, judgment and utter integrity should have found

himself in high places under one side of politics and in high places under another side of politics and I venture to say, Arthur, as warmly regarded on each side as he was on the other. (Hear, hear)

Now this is not to say that Chipp was a sort of time-server. I have known a few people in my time who could, you know, have the best of all worlds. That is not our friend. No, no. Chipp has never sold the truth to serve the hour, ever. But his great quality from the point of view of all political administration has been that he has been utterly competent, utterly sensible, utterly honest, so that any of us could sit down and say, "Well, Chipp, tell me what you think about that," and know that we were listening to wise words from a wise man.

In fact, I don't speak for any other administration than my own because I find it difficult to remember the other one. (Laughter) All I can tell you is that every now and then, you will be surprised to know, the Government commences together and it says, "Yes, well, of course, that's the thing to do, but we need to have a man who can do it. We need to have a man to put it into effect." You know, old Diogenes was so right. He went around ancient Athens, do you remember, with a light and when they said, "What are you looking for?", he said, "I look for a man." They all thought he was mad, but, of course, he was the sanest man in the country because it is always in public administration a matter of looking for a man. You don't need to be very intelligent to know the kind of thing that might be done with advantage. Our difficulty is that we know it and other fellows know it and we have to do it and they don't and therefore you get this kind of affair. But it is always a business of looking for a man.

And, gentlemen, I want to say to you quite bluntly that when you've got to that point in this marvellous country of ours, you find yourself coming down to a very narrow field. Somebody thinks of one, somebody thinks of another, somebody thinks of another. It is hardly common for anybody to think of six or seven or eight people and one of the oddities in my time has been that whenever we have had something that fits into this general pattern, I've said, "Well, boys, we all know what we want. Has anybody a name in mind?", and four times out of five, they say, "What about Chipp?"

Now this is true. This is true, and I want him to know that this is true because this is a proof, in fact as I understand it, a conclusive proof - I speak subject to the authority of the Supreme Court Judges here tonight - this to me is conclusive proof that Giles Chippindall has had a reputation with all men of understanding and goodwill and responsibility in this country, as a man of immense good sense, of immense experience, of immense administrative judgment and of the highest integrity.

I think that we are tonight, Sir, entertaining on one stage of many stages in his process of immortality, a very great Australian (hear, hear) and when I heard that this Dinner was on and I was asked whether I could come, I broke all the rules and said, "Well, I am to be there". I dare say we cancelled something else. I dare say somebody somewhere is very angry about it. I couldn't care less.

The only other remark I want to make to you, gentlemen, is this. I see a great number of you businessmen from time to time. You come to see us and to explain to us

how wrong we are, and on some occasion, I am credibly informed though I don't recall it - how right we were (Laughter). Anyhow, I know most of you and I am happy to say that most of you are my friends and for a long, long time - I speak now as a man who has been a Minister of the Crown of some species for - what 20-odd years - and a Prime Minister of a sort for sixteen years. I am an expert about the Civil Service. You will allow me that. I have had more to do with them than any other politician, outside Tom Flayford, in Australia (Laughter) and I always remember a friend of mine when I was quite early in Parliament in Victoria, saying to me - "You know, old man, the Civil Service provides a standard of competence below which no Minister may fall (Laughter). I regarded this as a rather light-hearted remark. I have long since come to understand that it is true. I would have hated to be a Postmaster-General with Giles Chippindall as my Director-General if I wanted to do something that was either stupid or off-beat in any way. And of course I would have.

He is one of the classical civil servants of our time and, interestingly enough - I say this to all you tycoons - you know, I'm looking for them. (Laughter) Yes, I'm interested enough. You have occasionally in the club armchair permitted yourself some denigratory remarks about civil servants and bureaucrats. I've been delighted to find in my own time that from time to time you eagerly take one of them and he becomes quite significant in the business world. This is a tribute to the upper bracket of the Civil Service - and when I talk about the upper bracket of the Civil Service, I talk freely and warmly and affectionately about one man who represents that more completely than any other man I can think of.

And therefore, Sir, on this occasion, I propose his health and on this occasion there is no "No Confidence" motion. Arthur is going to get up and agree with me - as he usually does, between you and me - but anyhow, he is going to get up and agree with me because on this matter we are on common ground.

Good luck to you Chipp and may you live long enough to attend my State Funeral.
