

Pacific Area Travel Association  
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by The Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Well, Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen, they say that confession is good for the soul. I want to admit at once that I don't know just what a "Keynote Address" is. I think this is an importation from the United States of America, but I don't mind declaring the Conference open. There I am on the home ground as you might say. Of course, it is a very pleasant occasion for me because when I look around and I remember all the notes I have read and everything that the Trade Department has told me, I realise that I am looking at a group of people, many of whom might be regarded as invisible exports, and I like this very much.

Since 1957, apart from the fact that I have been re-elected a couple of times - once rather faintly - the most exciting thing is that in 1957 the estimate of income earned in Australia from tourist trade was £6 million, that is to say external money coming in, and today it is £27 million. Now, of course, to some of you who may come from larger countries that may not be any great matter, but I venture to say that in 1957, we were hardly contemplating - although you, Mr. Bates, were always the greatest of optimists - such a great expansion in this period of time. Of course, this is just the beginning of it. I wonder why our figure was so small in 1957, and of course very much smaller before that - almost non-existent. Why was it? Was it because Australia had nothing to show? Well, no Australian will admit that. You know that this is a land of infinite variety. You have already experienced the glittering sunshine of Melbourne and now you are experiencing the overcast wintry skies of Sydney, so we are a land of infinite variety. We have so much to show. Scenery, yes, masses of it, an immense variety. Every country is different from every other one and we do not always realise there is some particular attraction for people who come from the green landscapes of some of the counties of the Old Country or New Zealand - quite a pleasant change for them to see the rather burnt, dry, yellow, pastel shaded sweeps of country that you find in many parts of Australia.

Variety is literally, from that point of view, the spice of life. But I do not believe that the only thing to see, to meet, to encounter, is the scenery. Primarily it is the people, and what they are like, and what they do. And we are all different people. Many of us speak English, of a kind. And many of us do not. But the differences of language, I think, tend to fall away a little and people do manage to get to know each other. And I think - if I may offer a complete truism - that nothing could be more remarkable than the impact on the ordinary mind, of a visit to another country and of moving around even for a few days or a few weeks, among other people, sensing the atmosphere of the place, getting an impression of what people are really like, and above all, discovering that they are all human beings.

This century of ours has been disfigured by prejudice and hatred more than any other century, I believe, on record, far exceeding in these things the worst period of the Middle Ages. There is no cure for prejudice half as good as getting to know the person or race, or community about which you have been prejudiced.

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Now, Mr. Bates, the Chairman of this Conference, is of course the embodiment of the tourist industry. He has been the head of the Australian National Travel Association to which I assure him I came well prepared to pay the warmest tribute. Indeed we have been paying tribute to him for years. I would be saying far less than I should if I did not say that, in my opinion, and in the opinion of the Government, the Australian National Travel Association is doing magnificent work, and very glad I am to say that although only a few years ago a lot of business people in Australia who I would have expected to have known something of the significance of tourism were rather indifferent to the needs, some conspicuous. But I am delighted to find that since 1957, the number of private contributors to the travel association here has increased five times.

This is something that we are all in. There is a bit of a disposition in my own country - I know it doesn't exist in any of yours - to take things to the Government in prayer, and say well why doesn't the Government do something about it, and there are many things about which the Government ought to do a great deal, but a matter of this kind requires, in the highest degree, the co-operation of Government and private industry, and for one very great reason. This is an industry. This is a commonplace remark, but it is almost revolutionary in my country to regard the tourist trade as an industry. I have to go around Australia a good deal and receive requests of one kind or another, and you would be surprised to know how frequently one finds that people, when they speak of wanting an industry in their State or in their community, want something that has a factory connected with it, something that has chimney stacks, something that has great lorries running round taking in materials and taking out the finished product. This is the popular idea of what an industry is, yet here we have an industry which at present produces in real terms from my own country as invisible exports the ninth largest amount among the major export industries. It will stand very much higher in the list as more and more we get to understand the tremendous importance of it.

There are areas in Australia where the tourist trade, if it were even more understood than it is now, could be a very great industry and that trade could be developed out of sight, by better roads and accommodation.

All this, I believe, is improving. But it will need to go on improving and it will go on improving so long as the people who provide accommodation and facilities and transport in the receiving country understand that this is one of the great national industries, and that they must contribute to it by skill and good management, and good capital provision, just as much as they would when they established some modern factory to produce electronics or some other modern device. This is a matter of broad understanding, and so of course you have a Conference of this kind, magnificently representative of the countries around the Pacific, and you are here to encourage tourism, to encourage it in every direction, particularly in your area. I hope that nobody will fall to the comfortable and social temptation, to be over-polite to each other in a Conference of this kind. The developments of tourism in the world, and particularly in these newer parts of the world, as we see ourselves, is dependent upon hearty criticism.

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Let us, in Australia - let all the people who are here who are Australians who have some contact with some aspect of the tourist business - understand what is wrong. They will tell you what is right. You need not worry about that. But you must tell them what is wrong. Because there was a good deal wrong once; there is a good deal wrong now, but it would be a miracle if there were not still plenty of ways in which we could improve our capacity to receive and deal with and entertain tourists.

When people go around the world, either on business, which I believe some do, or on pleasure, which I believe some do, or on business and pleasure, which I am sure a great number of people do, they are consciously or unconsciously doing something much needed in this century. First of all, they are extending the boundaries of their own knowledge of other people. I have said something about that, and by extending those boundaries, they are breaking down some of the prejudices and hatreds that have disfigured our time. And in the second place, they are extending the borders of economic co-operation with other countries. When somebody from Japan comes over here to buy wool, or somebody from Australia goes to Japan to buy some textiles, they would both think it rather pompous to be told they were extending the boundaries of economic co-operation between the two countries. One says, "I am here to buy wool", and the other says, "Well, I am here to buy textiles". But as they are intelligent people, and I assume that they are, they will realise that what they are doing is dealing with one facet of a whole complex of an economic co-operation between two nations - two-way trade. All the economic and financial considerations that are involved in two-way trade, and this of course is a tremendously valuable thing where people have business dealings together, where everything has become completely normal in their context, where they have learned to trust each other, and have had years of honourable dealing with each other, the chances of hostilities between them, I believe, are sensibly diminished and therefore this trade which I shall call the tourist trade for this purpose is of tremendous importance as a remover of sources of international friction. Similarly, on the political side, suppose you have somebody who visits another country in the Pacific area, with all sorts of preconceived ideas. He may be there purely on a holiday but he has time to move around to see people, to do a little reading about what goes on - if he has the language of the country that he goes to - to acquire some friendships, to find out what the local man thinks about the local man which is always so important - and he comes back even after a relatively brief journey with his mind enriched. There is one thing that must be said about all of us when we travel (unless it is exclusively on business) one thing to be said about us when we get home we are not silent about where we have been. I have yet to meet a taciturn tourist, and now that we all have expensive cameras, the tourist goes and he sees and records and he comes back (and in this case "he" includes "she") and in due course we tell our neighbours and we tell our friends about it so incessantly that we run serious risks of losing their friendship. This is a secondary effect of travel. Not only does the tourist himself learn something and have something to remember, but other people through them will learn something and will want to go and want to see for themselves.

Now this is in our time, I believe, a magnificent social international revolution. Nothing better could be going on, socially, politically, economically. All this travel that you are encouraging - for which so many of your constituent members are providing - all of this is I believe one of the civilising influences in the modern world.

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When I was a small boy it was considered a phenomenal thing for anybody to move into another state on a visit. We were parochial, but today with all the facilities of transport, with all the revolution that has gone on, assuming we can pay the fare, we have no excuse for not travelling. The average man and woman today is immeasurably better able to pay for some travel than their grandparents ever thought of being. Therefore there is opportunity, and in the case of our own country, thousands and thousands of people coming in, and thousands and thousands of people going out, all engaged, whether they realise it or not, in this ameliorative work in relation to our contacts with other countries.

This is a Conference of enormous importance. The industry will continue more and more to produce these great results if there is more and more and more co-operation between all those particular segments which go to make up this complex or to serve it, and governments, more and more co-operation, more and more understanding, and (above all) more and more completely frank criticism of what we see and what goes on.

I hope that from this Conference as from all the others you have had you will, on the basis of a most frank examination of what goes wrong here or there, come out with an improved organisation, with an improved prospect of serving the people, because first and last let it be remembered that this is not just a source of pleasure, Sir, in declaring the Conference open.