

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

SPEECH

BY

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

ON

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 5th March, 1964.]

Sir ROBERT MENZIES (Kooyong—Prime Minister) [8.31].—I am grateful to the House for giving me 40 minutes. I hope I will not need to employ it all. However, there are some things that I would like to say in the course of this debate on motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply to the Governor-General's Speech. In particular, I want to refer to a few observations made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) and by some of his supporters. I will come to them in time.

I must say, if I may do so without giving offence, that nothing that the Leader of the Opposition said in this debate varied from what he had said many times in the course of the election campaign. In other words, he gave us a brief retrospective resume of his election speeches. The one thing that went wrong about them was that they did not succeed. I understand the position of the honorable gentleman; I have been through these experiences myself. He has been through deep waters and shallow waters. Most of us who have had long service in politics have had the experience of defeat and of victory. I was very interested to learn how the honorable gentleman would feel after two or three months of reflection. But there is no doubt about

him. I take off my hat to him. He does not bother to learn much from painful experiences. He came up with all the old clichés. He even permitted himself to say that I secured an election prematurely, which I did, in a panic. This is a fascinating observation. He suggests that I was in a panic. I suppose that is why I entered upon an election. This is quite a curious form of reasoning.

Mr. Kelly.—It is a curious form of panic.

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—I thank my friend for his observation. It is a curious form of panic. The suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition that I secured the election prematurely in a panic really astonishes me. I say this for the record; it is no longer of very much public interest. The honorable gentleman had on three or four occasions challenged me to have an election. Unless his performances on behalf of the Opposition were arrant humbug—that, of course, would be an unparliamentary expression—he must have thought that, the Government having a majority of one, he might defeat us in a chance mêlée in the House and produce an election. I am bound to say that the only panic ever exhibited was his when I finally accepted the invitation. That was when

the panic began. Of course, his present panic arises from the fact that the people supported us at the election.

Up to the last week of the election campaign, the Leader of the Opposition had persuaded himself—he is not without talents in self-persuasion—that he would win. Indeed, he did what inexperienced fellows like me never do; he named the seats that he would win. Up to the last week of the campaign, we were pitiable objects. We had tumbled by sheer stupidity into an election. But in the last week we had the panic. Let honorable members recall it. The panic was in the last week. It was then that the Leader of the Opposition began to make the most astonishing series of extravagant and offensive allegations I have ever heard in a political campaign. I am not sure that he did not accuse me of obscenity—I have forgotten—but he certainly accused me of all the most remarkable things. This was at a time when I was saying to myself in the still watches of the night—if there are any still watches of the night for a politician or a prime minister—that my own boys were a little worried because I was, as an old colleague of ours used to say, rather too much of a little Lord Fauntleroy. In the last week it was really fabulous to be able to open the newspaper in the morning and read of the things that I had never said but which I was accused of saying.

The honorable gentleman is responsible for his own tactics. He cannot blame us for those, unless he admits that in some way we applied pressure and forced him into these tactical errors. The honorable gentleman had begun his campaign with the most luscious collection of promises a week or eight days before I delivered my policy speech. He was going around the country talking about an Army group at Grafton, which was very important, and about the abolition of preferential voting. I must say that in almost 30 years in this Parliament I had never heard any member of the Australian Labour Party advocate the abolition of preferential voting, but, of course, I am open to correction. Will anybody correct me? No? In 30 years not a hint of this has been given but in the last week of the election campaign the honorable gentleman,

being himself in a state of panic and apparently a little worried about the state of the parties in the electorates, said, "We will abolish preferential voting". He did not say it in his policy speech, but he said it then. Happily his statement received wide publicity.

All this time in the last week he was, if I may use the expression with the great conversatism so characteristic of me, screeching abuse about his opponents. Of course, when all this happened in the last week of the campaign, I, who had always believed that we would win, became completely confident of success, because these were the marks of panic and the marks of defeat. The honorable gentleman wants a little history and I am giving it to him. The gallup poll, that sacred thing, was published on the Friday before the election. This revived his hopes, but they were dashed within 36 hours. By the following Monday he had revealed himself—I say this to him as a old friend and an old political opponent—as the worst loser in the history of Commonwealth politics. I am not engaging in a post mortem; I am engaging in a post vitam—a very different matter. I leave the post mortems to my opponents.

I do not really feel called on to rehearse our policy, the immediately operative aspects of which are referred to in the Governor-General's Speech, because the simple truth is that the people have approved of our policy and we are putting it into operation. Therefore, I will deal very lightly with matters that have exercised the Opposition in this new session of Parliament. I will refer to just a few matters. I would need not 40 minutes but three hours to expose all the weaknesses in the Opposition's position so I will deal with just a few of them.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about Malaysia. That was a bold exercise on his part. I quote these words from his speech—

. . . we support the creation of Malaysia to the extent that it will promote the welfare of its people and the stability of South-East Asia and will strengthen the area—that is, our area—against Chinese aggression or Communist imperialism.

Honorable members—at least those on this side of the House—will realize that that is a statement that we might have welcomed

very much at the time when Malaysia was under discussion. But the honorable gentleman then went on to say—

But Indonesia's policy of confrontation cuts across those objectives and raises new and important issues. We need an anti-Communist Malaysia, but we also need an anti-Communist Indonesia.

That was the end of the statement of policy. What does it mean? Does Indonesia's policy of confrontation cut across our support for Malaysia? We do not think so. When we made our statement in this House, we were not unaware of the Indonesian tendency to confront, to threaten and to raise issues. Indonesia's policy of confrontation does not cut across our support for Malaysia.

But the honorable gentleman, in effect, asks this question to himself: Does this cut across our support for Malaysia or does it strengthen our support for Malaysia? If the honorable gentleman was asking, "Does this policy of confrontation, which is being conducted by a country with which we all want to live in a state of peace and harmony and which is directed at a country which we are pledged to support and whose political integrity we are pledged to support, introduce new problems?", he should have told us what those problems were. I wonder how Malaysia—at this moment the threatened country, the country across whose borders forays and infiltrations are occurring—would regard these Australian Labour Party ambiguities. There is no ambiguity about our position. We have stated it; we have repeated it; we will adhere to it.

The Leader of the Opposition described my statement about Malaysia on behalf of this Government and on behalf of this country—a statement now completely reinforced by the electoral decision of the people—as vague and unsatisfactory. From the master of ambiguity, that is indeed a tremendous charge.

When the honorable gentleman had said what he wanted to say on that matter, he took a side swipe at me—I believe that is the expression. I seem to be rather a disagreeable person, not enjoying as much favour with my opponents as I should. The honorable gentleman permitted himself, as he not infrequently does, to rewrite modern

history. Let me occupy the time of the House for a few minutes on these matters. He said—

When President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal the Prime Minister, with his limited imagination—

I admit that part; I have never had enough imagination to imagine what members of the Opposition would do about any matter—

... tried to adjust the facts to fit his favourite formula. It was all a Communist plot as far as he was concerned.

I did not know that such a question had ever been raised over the Suez Canal matter and my association with it. The Leader of the Opposition went on to say—

Of course, he failed to get his view accepted because the United States itself saw the folly and danger of the course being pursued by the British Conservative Government.

This is becoming the stock-in-trade of a number—I except some—of honorable gentlemen opposite: That I rushed in; that I was wrong; that in some mysterious fashion I persuaded eighteen large nations and small nations to agree with me—in an aside sort of way, rather a compliment. I was the actor in the drama.

The honorable gentleman knows, or ought to know if he reads anything other than propaganda, that when President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal I was on my way back to Australia and that when I was in the United States I was told about it and was told that a conference of 22 nations was to be convened at once in London. I telephoned my Acting Prime Minister in Australia and said: "What do you think? Perhaps I ought to go back," because we in Australia have a lively interest in the Suez Canal and its future. I was told, "Yes, you ought to go back". I went to the conference. I do not need to elaborate this matter. All I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that after two or three days in that conference a scheme of proposals was produced and those proposals were put up to President Nasser. They were drafted by Mr. John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State of the United States. They were American proposals. I thought they were very good ones, and so did the representatives of seventeen other nations. A resolution was carried that those proposals—eminently reasonable, sensible and fair proposals—should be presented to President

Nasser, although not with very much hope of their being accepted. But intrinsically they were pretty good.

One night I was telephoned at my hotel just as I was about to come back to Australia, and I was invited to go up to the American Embassy. This is very interesting, having regard to this falsification of history. I arrived at the embassy at about 2 o'clock in the morning, and there people were discussing this business. There had been a proposal that a committee should be appointed to present and explain these resolutions to President Nasser. There and then these people who, according to the Leader of the Opposition, regarded me with complete contempt, urged me to become chairman of the committee and to go to Cairo to put these matters to President Nasser. I did not want to go. I had been a long way from home for a long time. I had problems to attend to in Australia. But when the Prime Minister of Australia is invited by representatives of eighteen nations, including the major nations in the non-Communist world, to do a job, however difficult and hopeless it may seem, I do not believe it is any part of his responsibilities to say, "No, thank you; I would sooner go home". So I went and put the case and, of course, we did not succeed. I am free to admit that I did not ever think we would succeed; but we argued our case. I was the spokesman. Having received what I rather thought was something in the nature of a compliment from eighteen nations, I returned home to find that the Labour Party in Australia regarded this as a ridiculous exercise. Very well. Time does not permit me to re-write history for the Leader of the Opposition, but if he wants to know whether I look back on that painful and difficult exercise with shame I say at once that I do not; I look back on it with a certain amount of self-respect.

Having fired a few shots on that matter—not for the first time; and indeed this is the first time I have ever bothered about them—the honorable gentleman went to 1960. He has never got over 1960. Neither have I. It was the only time I ever went to the General Assembly of the United Nations. A number of honorable members have been there, and I went there in October, 1960. I had some discussions

and moved an amendment to a resolution. The amendment was defeated. My speech was never reported in this country. Other speeches were. The honorable gentleman, who prefers second-hand sources of information, said the other night—

In 1960 President Eisenhower and Mr. Macmillan, being shrewd judges of men, saw that the Prime Minister—

that is me—
would risk almost anything for the sake of an hour or two of international limelight.

This is it. What the honorable gentleman does not know—if he does know it, he suppressed it—is that at that meeting of the United Nations a motion was submitted by some nations the effect of which was for President Eisenhower to have a conference with Chairman Khrushchev—not with the United Kingdom and not with France—a sort of half-summit meeting. What the honorable gentleman has forgotten is that President Eisenhower had already made it clear that he would not have a bi-lateral talk. Honorable members will remember, I hope, that in that year everything was lined up for a summit conference in Paris, and then the incident of the U2 occurred and the summit conference was abandoned. I do not know whether the U2 incident was the sole cause of the collapse of the summit meeting or whether there was some other cause. The people concerned in the summit conference and therefore in the peace of the world—our peace—were the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States of America and France: At this meeting of the United Nations it was moved, seconded and went on the record that there should be a conference between the two, one of whom—President Eisenhower—had already made clear that he would not have a bi-lateral conference. Therefore it seemed to me—and I hope honorable members will not think this is stupid—that to carry a resolution that there be a meeting between the two when at least one of them had said he would not attend was rather beating the air.

So far from me horning in on this matter, which is the legend on the part of the Opposition and its academic advisers, I was invited by President Eisenhower—I do not boast about this—to come to Washington to discuss this matter. He also invited Mr. Macmillan to go to Washington to discuss

the matter. I went. Dean Rusk was there as well as various other people connected with the American Administration. We had a discussion about this matter at the White House later in the afternoon. I had suggested that it would not be a bad thing, instead of having a blank negative, to have an amendment moved which called on all four parties to have a summit conference, to get back to the one thing that represented some hope for the world. These gentlemen whom I am supposed to have log-rolled in some way are not insignificant people. When I put my submission they said, "This has great merit". They asked me to draft an amendment. I drafted an amendment. We discussed it that afternoon and I submitted it at the United Nations. I am happy to say that although the amendment was defeated, to the intense joy of Her Majesty's Opposition in Australia, it was supported by Great Britain, the United States, the Republic of France, Australia and Canada. The Soviet Union did not vote against the amendment; it abstained. Was that an unhappy event?

I must tell honorable members opposite what was in my amendment because they are badly in need of instruction on this matter. I wonder whether anybody on the other side of the House will disagree with a single word of this amendment, putting all flim-flam of a political kind on one side. My amendment recalled that there had been an arrangement for a meeting, that the meeting did not begin its work and that the President of the United States, the President of the French Republic and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom had made public statements saying that they would welcome such a meeting in order to reduce world tension. I went on—

Believing that much benefit for the world could arise from a co-operative meeting of the Heads of government of these four nations in relation to those problems which particularly concern them,

Is this disagreeable to the Opposition? The amendment continued—

Believing further that progress towards the solution of those problems would be a material contribution to the general work for peace of the United Nations,

Urges that such a meeting should occur at the earliest practicable date.

I have heard Labour members, former Labour Ministers and Labour candidates

time after time stand on platforms and say that those are their views. But when a Prime Minister drawn from a party other than their own expressed those views, and, if I may say so, with some vigour, and secured the support of the great powers which, alone, if they act in concert, can reduce tension in the world, the result is the kind of jibe—the kind of sneering remark—that we have heard on this occasion.

Sir, I will not occupy any more time on that matter. I do not want to re-write history for my opponent. I am too busy for that. So I will go on to a few contemporary issues—very few. In the course of his speech he once more returned to King Charles' head—the TFX bomber. The honorable gentleman became frightfully mixed up about this during the election campaign. At one stage I thought that he would repudiate the contract to buy the TFX. I am not sure that was not his intention. At another stage he said to the electors, "Elect us to office and we will buy a replacement for the Canberra", as if you could buy it in a pawnshop. There was no appreciation of the fact that if you are to replace a magnificent vehicle like the Canberra bomber, which only the other day was the last word, then you must ensure that you will get the latest word and, if possible, something which will be operative and effective for a reasonable time to come.

The whole case about the TFX was stated. But, of course, there are people in various countries who do not like orders being placed for aircraft other than their own, so the other day some scribbler wrote an article—my distinguished friend the Minister for Air (Mr. Fairbairn) who knows about these things referred to it in the course of his speech yesterday—in which he said, "The TFX is encountering enormous difficulties". My distinguished opponent, always willing to snatch at even the slightest straw in the torrent, said: "There you are. You won't get the TFX until 1970." In fact, nothing is known either from the United States, which has a vast interest in the performance of this aircraft, or from the people who are building the aircraft, that lends the slightest colour to these arguments. I do wish that the honorable gentleman would not continue repeating false figures. The position is that the American Government has undertaken to

deliver the TFX order beginning in 1967. The Australian Government has accepted this estimate. We believe it is a sincere estimate, and nothing has occurred to cause the American Government to indicate that it will not be able to meet the delivery dates. Therefore, to use the old Australian phrase, this is another furphy. I say that, with great regard to the honorable member whose electorate includes Shepparton.

I should like to refer to two other matters. I seem to remember that during the election campaign and during last year—I am open to be corrected—the Opposition devoted a great deal of its forensic talent to explaining that we were ruining the economy, that we were introducing a period of massive unemployment. Indeed, a little before then the Opposition was explaining, in the most learned fashion—because I am sure its adviser was in a technical sense a learned man—that the loan market had been ruined. We were told what the Labour Party would do to restore it. Unfortunately for the Labour Party, this is all in the past now. The economy has not been ruined; on the contrary. The loan market has not been ruined; on the contrary, it is almost embarrassingly lush and fruitful. So what does the Opposition do? My friends on the other side of the House—I do not blame them—day after day have been asking, "Will the Minister for Labour and National Service, through his counsel before the arbitration commission, tell the commission how tremendously prosperous this country is, how lush the loan market is, how marvelous is the state of the economy, how much productivity has increased?" Having been through this kind of thing for some time I cannot find it in my heart to blame honorable members opposite. I suppose you try one thing and if it does not succeed you try another. If the solution turns out ultimately to be the opposite of the one you tried first, well, you know, life is full of mutations, so one can understand and forgive.

I shall refer to one other matter because I see that my time, so generously extended, is running out. During the last four sitting days I have been fascinated to discover an almost concerted plan by Opposition members, egged on a little, if I may say so to my old friend, by a speech from this side

of the House, to talk about gerrymandering the electorate. "Gerrymander" is a beautiful word. It hails from America and it has a resonance in it. It is intelligible in English, so it is used. The Opposition claims that what we propose to do about the Commonwealth Electoral Act represents a gerrymander. I would have ignored this had it been just a passing exercise on the part of one honorable member but I suppose about ten honorable members opposite have claimed that we are proposing to gerrymander the electorate. Fortunately for us, and fortunately for Australia, most of them have explained what they mean by the word. As I understand it—I speak subject to correction, because I am always willing to be corrected—they mean one vote, one value. They claim that there must be no discrimination between a large, widespread rural electorate like Kalgoorlie or a compact metropolitan electorate like my own. There must be no discrimination because the moment you depart from the principle of one vote, one value, this is a gerrymander. I know that my friend the honorable member for Leichhardt (Mr. Fulton) treats the statements of his colleagues with a certain amount of congenial contempt, but this apparently is the new Labour doctrine. The Labour Party has been in office in the Commonwealth for seventeen years altogether, perhaps not long enough from its own point of view. The Electoral Act of the Commonwealth of Australia first became law 62 years ago in 1902—62 years ago! I was so cut to the quick by all this talk about gerrymandering that I put myself to a little trouble and said to my officer, "Bring me the 1902 Commonwealth Electoral Act". Here it is. It is 62 years old, give or take a month or two. Section 16 of the act states—

In making any distribution of States into Divisions the Commissioner—

There was one commissioner in those days—shall give due consideration to—

- (a) Community or diversity of interest,
- (b) Means of communication,
- (c) Physical features,
- (d) Existing boundaries of Divisions;

and subject thereto—

I hope honorable members opposite will hold their breath so that they will not die of shock now—

the quota of electors shall be the basis for the distribution, and the Commissioner may adopt a

margin of allowance, to be used whenever necessary, but in no case shall such quota be departed from to a greater extent than one-fifth more or one-fifth less.

That was the position in 1902 and for many years thereafter. The current legislation is almost indistinguishable from the original except that the number of the section is different. It is now section 19, which is in these terms—

In making any proposed distribution of a State into Divisions the distribution Commissioners—

The plural, "Commissioners" is used now. I hope that is not fatal—

I shall give due consideration to—

- (a) Community or diversity of interest,
- (b) Means of communication,
- (c) Physical features,
- (d) Existing boundaries of Divisions and Subdivisions,
- (e) State Electoral boundaries;

Then follows the provisions about a tolerance of one-fifth up or one-fifth down. So, if honorable members will trouble themselves to read what appears in the policy speech on this matter, and what appears in the Governor-General's Speech, they will discover one or two points. I attach great importance to one of them and that is the trend of population in various areas. This was mentioned even by some honorable members opposite to-day. These are im-

portant factors. We modernize them. There is no compulsion to make a quota difference, but there is the same permissive authority to the commissioners to go up or down by one-fifth. Yet I have lived long enough—too long, some may think—to find that what has been completely accepted in this Commonwealth, what has produced, by and large, sensible, honest recommendations, what has been left untouched and untouchable by every Labour government that has sat in the Commonwealth Parliament, is now to be described by honorable members opposite as a gerrymander. All I can say is that it is ludicrous; it is out of proportion; it is unreal. But I welcome it, if I may say so, because it shows after their defeat and after the failure of their ambitions, how barren members of the Opposition have become. This is all that they can find to come up with—an allegation which has only to be examined by a boy reading acts of Parliament to be exposed as utter humbug.

Mr. Cyde Cameron.—Wind up. Your time is up.

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—I have wound up. I thought it was a very good ending, and I hope you will remember it.