

MAYORAL DINNER, KEW, VICTORIA

30TH MAY, 1964

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

Mr. Mayor, Councillor Ryan and Parliamentary Colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen :

You know, these toasts to Parliament are always dubious affairs - never more dubious than tonight. Here's this wretched fellow, O'Brien (Laughter) who has masqueraded for many years as a friend of mine; he sandwiches me between himself and Arthur Rylah who speaks after me. This, I venture to say, is a dirty football trick (Laughter), characteristic of the Tigers. (Laughter). Oh, you needn't be too perky about this. I've seen a few odd things done by Hawthorn, but still,..... You noticed, though, didn't you, that in the middle of a good deal of propaganda against the Commonwealth, to which I am accustomed, he came back, time after time, to his real grievance which is that Geelong were able to buy a player from West Australia and that now some other team - I don't know which - is subject to the Coulter Law, and is going to buy another player, but his team, the Tigers have fallen so far in public and footballing esteem they couldn't afford to buy half a rover. That this is the thing that works in his wain was quite obvious tonight because in the middle of a bit of high-falutin' about Western Australia and so on, he kept coming back to the real substance of his grievance. Now all I can tell you, Sir, is that my team this afternoon won its second match for the year by one point (Laughter, applause) and this delighted me while at the same time faintly surprising me.

Now I will resist this temptation to instruct my young friend there, O'Brien.... I must interrupt myself. I have a Secretary who gives me a note when something is going to happen and when they referred to him they had in brackets after his name "solicitor". How right they were. (Laughter) But I am accustomed to this. If I go to the Melbourne Town Hall, somebody gets up and makes a powerful speech about the injustice to Victoria and my only comfort is that when I am in Sydney which I am, not infrequently, earnest-looking men of high status in the community say, "You know, it's a terrible thing the way this Government of yours is run by the Victorians. Why don't we have more men from Sydney in the Government?" and I have to say to them, "Well, why don't you send them in?" so I am not unaccustomed to this.

But I have been very interested tonight because here I am sitting with two people on my right who are members for the East Yarra province and nobody among you except the very venerable, like Bill Dickinson, will remember that I was once the member for East Yarra, and by Jove, I know more about how I became the member for East Yarra than most of you will ever know because I stood for East Yarra in a frolicsome moment, being then a barrister with a good deal of business, and in those days nobody had a party nomination - you just nominated yourself and you went around and you prayed that you might get a few supporters. Of course, rightly or wrongly, the great men of the Victorian Government have now made, I believe, voting compulsory, but in those days it was voluntary. About 14,000 votes were cast in an electorate of 90,000 and therefore you had to go out and see whether you could pick up enough of them to win.

Now, I am told there are no press here and therefore I can admit to the most brutal violation of the electoral laws because when I stood, I had to get somebody, a

great friend of mine, to act as my secretary, and then we engaged one or two gentlemen in different corners of the electorate to go around and do a bit of canvassing. They were paid practically per capita. (Laughter) I had 56 meetings, the largest of which at the Hawthorn Town Hall, was 56 people and the smallest of which, at Glen Iris, was four, two of whom were on my staff. (Laughter) That little escapade, quite unsuccessful as it turned out, because a relative of his defeated me by 2 to 1, cost me £1,200. Oh, these were the days.

Then, some months later, there was a byelection and I stood again, and being a little brownd-off after 56 meetings and four people including the staff, I decided I would have 8 meetings. My entire campaign cost me £90 and I won by 2 to 1. Now, there may be a lesson in this. I don't undertake to say what it is, but that's how it happened and that's how I became the member for East Yarra. Thirteen months later I left, voluntarily, and stood for the Lower House. After that, all my troubles began.

Really, Dick, when I look back on the Upper House, my thirteen months there, it was wonderful. Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin. (Laughter) It was absolutely marvellous. It was only when I stepped across to King's Hall and had a look at my colleagues in the Lower House being battered from pillar to post, the conscience stirred in me, so I left the Upper House and went into the Lower House, and ever since then, I have been in one kind of trouble or another. All except one. This I always think about when I come out into my own place and among my own people. You know, the electorate of Kooyong..... No doubt I have said this to you before, but I'll say it again..... the electorate of Kooyong is one of the few in the Federal Parliament that still retains its own name. There has been a Kooyong seat since 1901 and in the whole of that time, they have had four members represent them.

The first was Knox who was the member for Kooyong until about 1909 or something of that kind; the second was Sir Robert Best who was always, when his party, my party, was in office, a Minister; the third was John Latham who represented Kooyong with immense distinction for twelve years and was a Minister at all relevant times and Deputy Prime Minister. In 1934, I went up to become Attorney-General, member for Kooyong, and I had a simple ambition at that time that I might be undetected long enough to be member for Kooyong for twelve years which seemed to be the ruling rate, and as you all know to your sorrow, I've been member for Kooyong now for thirty years. (Applause)

The one point I want to make is that in the case of Best, Latham, Menzies, Kooyong was always represented by a Minister, except when the other party was in power. In short, Kooyong has the greatest record of any electorate in Australia in insisting upon being represented by people who, rightly or wrongly, achieved some status in the political life of the country. All I want to say to you is I hope that will long continue. (Applause) I don't mean by that that I hope I will long continue. I have that philosophic state of mind now, that state of euphoria which proceeds from the certain knowledge that whatever else happens, I'm a certainty for a State funeral. (Laughter) I really don't want to have a State funeral while I am still in Parliament - if that's the right way to put it - I'd rather like some day to have a few years of private life. Private life is a tremendously precious thing. A lot of you chaps don't realise that the greatest sacrifice that a man makes who is heavily and continually immersed in politics is that he loses his private life. It would be fun, wouldn't it, to have a bit some day, but in the meantime,

what I want to say to Kcoyong, and Kew is the very heart of it, is that I hope the standards will be kept high and that some successor of mine will someday be able to stand here and be spoken about by a successor of young O'Brien, if such a thing is conceivable (Laughter) and be attacked for being a better Australian than he is a Victorian. (Laughter)

Well, I ought to say no more about that, I'm sure, but before I sit down, I want to say this to you. It's quite true, all these arguments go on; it's quite true that in a Federal system there will always be the most intricate problems. You can't treat every State the same, if you are dealing with a country in which there is an insistent demand for development here or there or there. Of course you can't and nobody really pretends that you can. Nobody from Victoria, no representative of the Government of Victoria ever pretends for a moment that there ought to be no more per capita spent in West Australia than there is in Victoria. I've never heard it said. There is, of course, an entirely intelligible argument all the time as to whether this doesn't go too far, whether perhaps a little adjustment ought to be made, but what we must realise here is that we do live in a Federal community and that we live in a very great continent, a tremendous continent, roughly the size of the United States of America, and that if this is in due course, as I believe it will be, a great country and indeed a great power, then we must not be too local in our vision. We must see the continent as a whole and do what we can for the continent as a whole. This, I am perfectly certain, represents the views of most Australians who look outside their own backyard and who see this place from Sydney to Perth from Hobart to Darwin. It's a tremendous thing.

Now, I'm going off once more, and it's no joyride, in a fortnight's time to attend a Prime Ministers' Conference in London, but before I do that, I am going to the United States so that I may have some real talks with the new President of the United States whom I have met, of course, but whom I don't know as well as I knew the late President Kennedy. This is tremendously important that we and the United States - we, relatively small, the United States vastly great - should understand each other not just with that after-dinner back-slapping quality which is so easy, but in true terms, speaking to each other as man to man, country to country. This is of tremendous significance. Indeed, Sir, it is of vital significance to Australia and to Australia's future. Therefore this is one of the number one tasks that I must undertake.

Then we are going to have a Prime Ministers' Conference. Well, I first attended a Prime Ministers' Conference when I was not a Prime Minister. You may say that's rather characteristic of me, horning in, but the fact was that in 1935 there was a Conference, and Mr. Lyons was then Prime Minister and he was ill and he said to me, being also in London, would I go along and represent him. I'll never forget it, at No. 10 Downing Street, Ramsay MacDonald was the Prime Minister. George Forbes was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, or as Ramsay called him, Forrbis. Talk about Sassenachs. (Laughter) Hertzog was there from South Africa. I think that year Bennett was there for Canada. Five of us. We all spoke the same language, not only literally, but we all felt rather the same way about the world's problems. It was quite possible at that time to come out of a meeting and say, "Here is a joint view that represents the view of the British Commonwealth." Now today, all this is gone. South Africa is out. We have about twelve or thirteen new countries in the Commonwealth, half a dozen of whom know nothing about democracy but have dictators of their own.

It's no longer possible to sit there and talk as we could even ten years ago about all the great things that we have in common, the sense of democratic parliamentary existence, the sense of equality before the law, the impeccability of the law, these great traditions which still work, I am happy to say, in what I choose to call the Crown members of the Commonwealth. But today you have all sorts, an infinite variety from Makarios in Cyprus and Nkrumah in Ghana through Ababaka Bulewa in Nigeria, who is a great man who understands all these things to perfection, down to Tanganyika with a frightfully good man like Nyerere and Zanzibar which is, for all practical purposes, a communist protectorate, but which is now engaged in some rather tenuous alliance with Tanganyika.

I don't need to go right through the list, the fact is that we now present a group of people of almost infinite variety and the last time I attended one of these meetings at Marlborough House, no longer at No. 10 because it was too small, it was staggering to see what quarrels could emerge between two new members of the Commonwealth about matters which you and I would regard as the commonplaces of political life. In other words, we now have a new and turbulent Commonwealth, quite different; all the old unifying elements in the case of half a dozen of us have been weakened and this Conference is going to determine, I believe, whether a structure so made can long continue or whether, if it continues, it could continue except by laying down certain principles of life and of understanding which will be the true condition of membership.

Don't any of you envy me going to this Conference. This will be, as I am perfectly certain, one of the crucial conferences in the entire history of the Commonwealth. All I can say is that I will do my best. I have lived long enough to have got over the habits of dogmatism. I know that certain things that seem to me to be inevitably right will not be so regarded by other people and we must learn to live together. In fact, Mr. Mayor, the whole essence of your delightful party tonight is that we are all here living together. We don't need to learn to live together, but there are hundreds of millions of people in the world with whom we will have to learn to live together, and this is not easy. This calls for immense tolerance, for great patience, for the most genuine attempts at understanding. Facing that kind of problem as I do in the next six weeks, I beg of you to be excused from conducting an argument on another matter with a man who is a close and valued friend of mine. He can save it until next year.
