

OPENING OF CHRYSLER MANUFACTURING CENTRE,
TONSLEY PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

2ND OCTOBER, 1964

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

Sir, Mr. Premier and Ladies and Gentlemen :

Might I begin with a rather assertive question? Can you hear me? Because I can't hear myself. I've been flying with a cold. In a little time, I will unveil something or other here. I'm still not clear as to whether I declare the building open or the estate open, or declare it duly inaugurated, but it doesn't matter because at a glance this afternoon, you could tell it has been open for weeks. (Laughter) And therefore my function is purely retrospective.

I must say, listening to Mr. Cheseborough, as I did with great interest, I thought he seemed a little biased in favour of this car - the Valiant. (Laughter) It puts me in a very, very embarrassing position, because on one occasion, I opened a factory that was going to produce a competitor car for the Ford Company. On another occasion, I seem to remember opening something for the Holden people. Very difficult to be a politician nowadays (Laughter) but at the same time, I must say that apart from his propaganda, I was the recipient as I came out here, with my wife, of the most pointed piece of propaganda, the kind of thing that could happen to you only in South Australia, (Laughter) only in a State where no poor humble Federal fellow like me can possibly arrive or depart without being the victim of propaganda from beginning to end.

And what happened this afternoon? There we were, sitting in some car that was provided for me - I don't know what make - I looked to the right, there was a Valiant; I looked to the left, there was a Valiant; I looked ahead of us, there was a Valiant, and I thought, "By Jove, this car has got one hundred per cent. of the market." Indeed, without desiring to advertise any other car, it was a distinct refreshment of my spirits to discover in a moment that there was another car on the road. I think it was a Holden. (Laughter) But, there they were - to the right of us, to the left of us and in front of us. Now, I am no expert, Sir, but all I can tell you is that my wife made the most admiring remarks as they passed alongside us and that is a good beginning because women buy cars and men pay for them. (Laughter)

Sir, on any occasion like this, it is very interesting for me to look back a little, if you don't mind. For example, I can look back over a great number of years of very close friendship with Fergie over there. There never was a better representative in negotiations with political people than Fergie. (Applause) Many is the time over the last fifteen years, or several times at any rate, over the last fifteen years, he has had occasion to look at me, sometimes with approval, sometimes with disapproval, dependent entirely on the rate of sales tax, (Laughter) but however it went, he was a man - I want to tell this to you in the presence of his colleagues on this platform - he was a man who was always intelligent and understanding and put a case without pretending that there was no other side to the question. This is a very great asset and I have always had a great respect for him.

But as I was reminding an audience in Sydney the other

day, it is not much less than thirty years ago that I found myself - then being Attorney-General of Australia - talking to a very famous motor car manufacturer in England. I won't mention his name - you'll all think of the wrong one - but he was a rather melancholy chap, I thought, and we met on an occasion and he took me into a corner and he was under the erroneous belief that I was a person of some influence - I was a humble Attorney-General in those days. He said to me, "You people must not make motor bodies in Australia." Well, shades of Adelaide, you know. (Laughter)

Dear me, this rather rocked me because in my earlier days I used to come and be a house guest with Ted Holden and I was very familiar with the motor body works. "You shouldn't make them. You people ought to grow wool and wheat and things you understand." This was a serious proposition, and our modest motor body industry ought to be swept out. I tried to explain to him that what was then a modest, smallish motor body industry would undoubtedly some day be some kind of fragment in a very enormous motor vehicle industry, and that it was very foolish on his part to think that he could stop the tide from moving. However, he was much older than I was, and therefore much wiser and he therefore disagreed with me. (Laughter)

Now what has happened since? It wasn't long after that conversation - only about five years, I would think - that I found myself as a Prime Minister greatly concerned to see whether we could establish an industry of building motor vehicles in Australia, and this was regarded by a lot of people with some horror and we had all sorts of expert advice. Expert advice is the very devil. You want to have at least a hundred experts and then conduct a Gallup Poll among them and then think out the answer for yourself. (Laughter) That's my firm belief.

The experts said, "Oh, but you can't do it. Nobody could build a car in Australia with less than - I think it was forty, but it may have been fifty thousand vehicles a year as the extent of the demand." "And that, of course," they said, "is impossible. Not within remote cocee is the time when you can sell 50,000 motor vehicles in Australia, made in Australia."

Well, it is only twenty-five years ago that that was happening. I remember it very well. There were all sorts of misconceptions, there were all sorts of expressions of anxiety and inferiority on the part of people, and today we have in Australia a state of affairs in which 400,000 new motor vehicles go on the roads every year. Four hundred thousand.... and there will be thousands and thousands of them that will come out of this great factory. The whole scene has changed, and so far from great motor vehicle people in other countries regarding with hostility what goes on in Australia, they have steadily, one by one, come to Australia themselves and invested in Australia.

I remember in the same impudent period of my life when I was much more impudent than I am now, having a talk in America to the then head of General Motors and telling him that if he wanted to feel any assurance about his position in Australia, the right thing to do was to put some money here and do some work here and produce a few jobs here, and

this rather surprised him, though perhaps it wasn't entirely without effect. It may have had some small effect because, much later on, it happened.

And the same way in Great Britain. Wherever you go in Australia today, you will see engaged in the business of car and vehicle production companies whose names are household words in Great Britain, in America, in Germany, in France. This tremendous movement of enterprise into Australia is the most exciting thing of our time and we ought to be proud of it and we ought not to be too frightened of it and we ought not to believe that whatever is done to prevent it from running into excesses is something wrong. What we want to maintain in this country is something that we have been enjoying for years, a remarkable stability in the value of money, not unimportant to the investor, and also the most astonishing rate of growth, growth of population, growth of employment, growth all along the line.

It's a marvellous thing, isn't it, how all these things, properly considered work together. I go around a works like this. I don't need to be told that there are quite a number of people here, as I go around, who are what we used to call New Australians, who are people who migrated here since the war. There are millions now - anyhow, something well over a million - in Australia, and every large factory I go to contains a high percentage of people who have come in in these years.

There could not have been an immigration policy or programme without employment on this scale in industries of this kind. The rural industries, vital as they are to the survival of Australia, can't employ people by the scores of thousands extra every year. We know that they can't. It is industries of this kind which enable the migration programme to continue, and the fact that the migration programme continues, that you have this remarkable increase in the population year by year has given strength and tone and optimism to the people who run retail stores in Australia, to all sorts of other manufacturers who produce things that are in demand by stores and which are bought by them because they are in demand by their ordinary customers. This is a whole interwoven structure.

I don't profess to have any particular credit for this. I just think I ought to remind you that the prime political responsibility for economic policy and financial stability in Australia comes flatly on to the Federal Parliament and the Federal Government. (Applause) And this is perhaps a matter that gets a little overlooked occasionally. I look down here. I see one of my colleagues in the Ministry, Dr. Forbes. This is a great responsibility he carries. I carry a bigger one, because when anything goes wrong, everybody knows whose fault it is. (Laughter)

But this is our sole contribution, that we must try to be sensible, try to have a stability in money, try to have an economic climate that will favour the growth of industry in Australia, and if we do that, we have made some useful contribution to what goes on. But in the long run, at the operating end, it is the people who have the imagination to establish an enterprise of this kind in this place, it is the thousands of people who work or will work in it in all sorts of degrees of employment, these are the people who really make the result because it is on the skill of their work, the

fidelity, the honesty of their work, that the industry that they are working in will depend. This is what will persuade the people to buy the product and this is what will mean in the long run a growing prosperity right down the line.

Sir, whenever I come to a matter of this kind, these thoughts pass through my mind. I think I am one of three people who went into the Federal Parliament thirty years ago and is still there in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence. (Laughter) Only three of us. Very interesting, because looking back over that time, I would say that they were by far the most exciting thirty years in the history of Australia. Indeed, that is the last thing I want to say to you.

Don't let us fall into the error of thinking that all the history is in the books, the books that we read at school. Some history is there, but don't let us think it is all there. There is more history being made around us each year than was made in twenty-five years in earlier generations. Tremendously exciting history, wonderful things, new generations coming on, and I, though I belong to an old, and I suppose, partly exhausted generation, I am all for it. I think this is the most tremendous thing. We ought to be realising it, we ought to be proud of it and when we come along here, we ought to, as I am sure we do, look around us and say, "This is the perfect illustration of the world that we are living in and the Australia that is and is to be."

I now do whatever it is, retrospectively.
