

PARTIALLY BLINDED SOLDIERS ASSOCIATION
SILVER JUBILEE DINNER

PADDINGTON TOWN HALL, SYDNEY

30TH OCTOBER, 1964

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

Sir and Your Excellency the High Commissioner :

I am quite accustomed to being made a bit of a chopping block, but I have been chopped in three different directions tonight. I have a sort of mixed assortment of tasks. One I will conclude with, that is the task of handing over this remarkable historic volume to Mr. Maloney for the Government.

I think I should perhaps begin by discharging the lightest of my duties. I think it is rather sinister to give a politician the Order of the Double Cross. (Laughter) Don't you? I know that it is well meant, but it lends itself to misunderstanding, if you don't understand these things quite well. I think I had better take it off for a moment so that I can see this. There is a picture in the middle of what I will say is a gentleman and I have had a quick glance at it, and - so help me Bob - I couldn't make up my mind whether it was Khrushchev or Nasser or Menzies (Laughter). Might be any one of the three.

I must tell you about..... I mustn't describe him as the late Mr. Khrushchev.....as far as we know, he is not late. (Laughter) But something has happened. But I had a long discussion with him once in New York in his office there at his Embassy. Well, I want to tell you that he has a nice earthy sense of humour. It may not avail him very much now, but then, humour is wasted when you are out of office. (Laughter) I went in to see him and his first remark - he doesn't speak English - at least he pretends not to - but he had a brilliant interpreter so that the conversation was practically non-stop. He stood up, shook hands with me and then looked at me and said, "For an imperialist, you are not a bad specimen." (Laughter) To which I retorted with that courtesy for which I am famous, "Sir, for a Communist, you are, on the whole, rather better than I expected." (Laughter) And after that we got on fine. He talked about disarmament without achieving any and he went through all the old usual gambits which occur in the vicinity of the United Nations in New York. But there it is.

Come to think of it, you know, the top part, the cap, rather suggests Soekarno, doesn't it? (Laughter) Well, there you are. Isn't it a brilliant piece of work? It looks to me so ambiguous as to make it possible for it to be any one of four men, with a snake down in the corner..... Now, I would be upset about this to be called a Double Crosser, to be called a snake in the grass, or whatever it is, this would be very annoying, except that I would have you know that this is not the first decoration that I have ever received. I am a physician, did you know that, (Laughter) I am a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. Doesn't make the faintest difference to the bill. (Laughter) So there I am, I have a certificate to show. And the medical profession have a symbol, you know, which was vulgarly described by a friend of mine in law once as a snake crawling up a stick. (Laughter)

And so I am not unfamiliar with the symbol of the snake in the grass.

The raw prawn is a particularly Sydney expression. (Laughter) In the genteel quarters of Melbourne in which I used to live once, nobody ever heard of a raw prawn. (Laughter) When I came to Canberra and fell into low company and had to meet a lot of Sydney fellows, you know, in Parliament, I became accustomed to hearing one of them say, "Oh, don't come the raw prawn." (Laughter) They had another expression, "There were sharks in the bay." (Laughter) These, of course, were meaningless to Victorians. There are no prawns and no sharks, or at any rate, no sharks in the bay.

Anyhow, Sir, I thank you very much. This will be hung in a suitable place of honour. (Laughter) (Applause) I will execute, of course, a deed of trust so that it goes to my descendants (Laughter) and if it is valued by some curiosity-hunter some day at a sufficiently high figure, it will attract, so I am told by my colleague the Treasurer, a suitable rate of taxation. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, the next thing I want to say is that I was delighted to find that your guest last year was the General - General Muttukumaru, the High Commissioner of Ceylon. He has only been in Australia for what, only a couple of years now - just under two years. He is a familiar friend of all of us, and I am delighted to think that two years running, he has come here. Indeed, if I may betray a Scottish secret, I may tell you that among the many occupations I have, I am President of the Melbourne Scots, and he is coming down as a guest this year. (Laughter) That, of course, is bad enough from our point of view, but he's going to make a speech. (Laughter) And so you can see that he has established himself.

Well, now, I don't want to make a long speech to you and I know that I am not to make a political speech to you. Indeed, I have never been brave enough to make a political speech in Paddington Town Hall. (Laughter) You understand that, Jim, don't you? (Laughter) Anyhow, I never have, but I must say that in the same electorate one year, I made what was regarded as a speech at the stadium. Now, you take it from me, if you want to have a novel experience, make a speech at the stadium, standing in the middle of the ring, with an all-direction microphone and nobody there with you (Laughter) and 8,000 people, 2,000 of whom hate the sight of you and occupy the first three or four rows. A very remarkable experience. Every now and then, I would look down and I would see my wife. She was there. She never misses, do you see. My secret weapon. And she was there and she was in the front row there and she couldn't hear a word I was saying. I've never seen her look at me with such mystified respect. (Laughter) Not a word could be heard. We finally got away, sound in wind and limb, and went back to the hotel and they were rebroadcasting this speech of mine. Honestly, with very great respect to the surroundings, I hadn't a clue as to whether I had begun a sentence or ended one. Because if you can't hear yourself, it is very difficult to know whether you are talking. But that's been my experience. I like to hear myself because sometimes I have a shrewd idea that nobody else is listening. (Laughter) When we got back to the hotel, and heard the radio, I said to my wife, "By Jove, this fellow's doing well. Who's this?" And she said, "It's you." (Laughter)

Well, I don't need to tell you that I went on from then through the next three weeks, won an election and have been in office ever since. (Laughter) So peace to Paddington and good luck to the stadium! (Laughter) Is it still called the stadium? There is one in Melbourne they now call the Festival Hall. (Laughter) They have a festival there this afternoon. You'll read about it in the papers in the morning.

But, Sir, I didn't mean to be so absurd as all this. I just want to say this to you. This eye bank scheme, this, I think, is one of the most remarkable things in Australia. It would bring credit on any organisation that thought of it and put it into effect. This is a tremendous thing and it is a tremendous thing done by people, so many of whom have already done tremendous things for this country. These are matters that we must never forget. And I was thinking about tonight and saying to myself, "Well, what is there beyond the usual platitudes that one can say on an occasion of this kind? What is there as we look forward to the future that ought to be in our minds?" And I came to one conclusion and I venture to state it.

It sounds a truism but it is more than that. It is that every year is a new year. Now this of course is quite right, but every year is a new year. You begin a year, you look back on a year in which the problems have been A and B and C and in the next year you find that the problems are D and E and F. They are changing all the time because every year is a new year and the world is a new world every year. The world is a new world for every person born into it. We all, don't we, remember our own childhood and so on. That's the kind of world we know something about and we've lived in, but for everybody it's a new world, for every year it's a new world.

This year is, as usual I think, a year full of most critical events. I read them from left to right, I won't detain you very long, but it is worth thinking about them. Next Tuesday there will be an election in the United States of America, the election of a President. Now, I am not taking sides, this is not my business or yours in that sense, but the Presidential elections may have a profound effect on the relations of the United States with the rest of the world. It may. I don't know. There are controversies going on in that country. I don't know one of the candidates - Senator Goldwater. I do have the honour of knowing the present President. But the important thing is that whatever comes or goes in an election of this kind, whatever mud is thrown or whatever extravaganzas of argument may occur, it is vital from our point of view, isn't it, that America should continue to be the greatest stronghold of freedom in the Western world, of tremendous importance to us because of her strength, because of her goodwill, of tremendous significance to Australia's future security and freedom.

When I say that, let me remind you that nothing would ever persuade me or you to be anything else but British. We're proud of it. But the facts in the world today are the greatest single power, with its resources and good will, is the United States of America. It is, from my point of view, vital that the United States of America and Great Britain and the whole of the Commonwealth should be as close together as two groups of nations can be because we have a common purpose and, I think, a common destiny. I think that's one rather crucial event that has been played out and we will all be listening at some time on Wednesday to discover the result.

Then the next thing is this, in respect of which this is a new year. We have a new Commonwealth. You mustn't suppose when you look at the General - which is something to give you pleasure; look at me which is perhaps in a different category - you mustn't suppose that we are typical of the new Commonwealth. He comes from a country which has a parliamentary system, which has elections and parties. We have elections and parties. We live - as Winston once said to me - in a fine eighteenth century fervour of politics. We do. We, on the whole, rather enjoy them. But here we are, we are both democracies, Great Britain, of course, the father, the mother, of the whole democratic system.

The interesting thing about the new Commonwealth, and we will know more and more about it over the next two or three years, is whether the new Commonwealth will be something that advances democracy or retards it, because don't be under the misapprehension that some people are in other countries that all the new Commonwealth countries are democracies. Not at all.

I don't think Nkrumah would pretend for a moment that Ghana was a democracy, because as I have had occasion to say to him, playfully, more than once, "At any rate, we don't put the Leader of the Opposition in gaol in Australia" (Laughter) and therefore, any description of Ghana as a democracy must be one, I think, rather modified by the facts.

And, of course, a number of the other new countries have declared themselves for the one-party State. The one-party State. Indeed, when Mr. Mboya of Kenya was here during the year, he spoke to a great number of Members of Parliament about the one-party State and the reason for it. It's a rather simple conception. There is just one party, there is no-one else to vote for. This is, depending on your point of view, a rather agreeable conception. But, of course, it would be impossible with us.

One of my Labour friends in the House, when Mboya was getting warmed up on this, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry, old boy, you've had it for fifteen years." (Laughter) But, you see, a one-party State in which you have no choice, tends to consolidate a species of dictatorship. Now I believe, myself, implicitly that in all these new countries, these new colleagues of ours, the whole process will tend to break this down, to establish from a beginning of highly-centralised power in government, what we call a democratic system, so that people are free and free to vote and to make their choice. I think that's going to be the process, but don't expect that to happen overnight.

But whether the new Commonwealth survives in the form in which we now see it, in my opinion largely depends upon how far over the next five years or ten years its activities and its attitudes advance democracy or retard it. Now that's the second thing that we are looking at a little distantly at the present time in this year of grace, in your twenty-fifth year, your jubilee year.

And the third thing is, what's going to happen in this corner of the world? Will South-East Asia continue to be non-Communist, continue to be free from the Communist drive? Now, I am not just talking a lot of hot air and politics on this business, but everybody must realise that our future, the

future of neighbouring countries, the future of New Zealand, these are all wrapped up in whether South-East Asia, this area of the world manages to remain outside the Communist orbit, whether the Communist orbit is Russian Communism or Chinese Communism, and this is something on which really we must begin in Australia to rise superior to detailed party differences. There can't be any difference on this matter, surely, that our freedom, the future of this country, the future of free people like the Malaysians who have a democratic system of government, people in New Zealand, our close kinsmen, we must all be in a position to feel that we are the masters of our own future and that the peace that we enjoy is the peace of freedom and not the peace of submission.

This is the great issue in this part of the world. I won't elaborate it, but you see what I mean when I say each year is a new year - in the United States, in the New Commonwealth, in South East Asia, we have seen problems emerge, crystallise, become known, sometimes become critical, sometimes become easier, all in the space of one year, and next year will bring its new problems, problems to which we will all have to devote whatever talents and courage we may possess.

Now everything that I have said is really an expansion of what I said to you at the beginning because I am here in the presence of men who have done great service to freedom in this country, great service. And they have themselves, with this splendid effort of imagination, established this bank in order that lots of people may have the opportunity in future of having their sight improved or saved. This is an imaginative, bold thing and I am delighted to discover how magnificently it has succeeded.

And therefore I take the most sincere pleasure in handing over the Volume Three of the eye bank to Mr. Maloney who will receive it on behalf of the Government of New South Wales.
