

OPENING OF BLIGH HOUSE, SYDNEY15TH FEBRUARY, 1965Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. LeCouteur and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I think it is rather good fun for a politician in these days to be invited to open Bligh House. (Laughter) He had, as we are given to believe, some acquaintance with mutiny and I will pass on to the appropriate quarters in Canberra the fact that I have now been associated with his name. (Laughter)

One other thing struck me as I came in and that was, apart from seeing all the "idle" business community in Sydney - as I always do on these occasions - the quality and depth of the carpets. Do you mind me referring to this? (Laughter) Nothing gives you such a good feeling as to walk along on a carpet into which you sink in the most genteel fashion. I made an enquiry from Mr. Prideaux who was a little uncertain in his reply as to whether the wool in the carpets came from Australia. This apparently remains to be seen, but if you don't mind putting up with me for half a minute on this recollection of mine.....

I remember thirty years ago, almost, being in charge of a little group of Parliamentarians from Australia who went up to the Midlands in England, and we went to a rather famous carpet area, Kidderminster. At lunchtime I had a short but heated argument with the Mayor about body-line bowling (Laughter) and we also went in to this vast display room and we saw carpets. We began with beautiful carpets. We gradually descended in the social scale until we got to the far end of the room where there were the most revolting carpets that I have ever seen in my life, all orange and brown splodges and curlicues. I said to the general manager who was showing us around, "Tell me, how is it that you can bring yourselves to make carpets like these, having regard to some that I have seen?" And he said, "That's all right, Sir" (he didn't know where we were from) "They are for the Australian market, Sir." (Laughter) And do you know that the very next time I went to some provincial town in Victoria for some necessary purpose, I saw the very carpet on the floor. (Laughter) Now, I am not comparing it with this one. This is one of the many proofs available to us that we are getting on in the world.

Now this company, of course, is a very old company. I am talking about the A.M.L. because I know there are other people who will make their humble contribution to this building by becoming tenants - obscure people like QANTAS and so on, I know that, but today I just want to say a few words about this great and famous company, over one hundred years old, and therefore, for over a century, associated with development in Australia in the most remarkable fashion.

Now, whenever I am invited to open something, I usually like to be given a little of what we, in politics, call the "dope" and so I got the "dope", volumes of it, and it was very desirable that I should because I had not as clearly in the past recognised something about the work of the

great pastoral companies in Australia, because going back to the beginning of this hundred years, Australian wool was sold in London, primarily, and somebody had to attend the financing in the interim - six months, nine months - and so these companies of which this one is a conspicuous example came into existence in order to finance the woolgrower, who even then was extremely hard-up - finance the woolgrower until the money came in. And that, I imagine, is how it began. Well, looking back over the hundred years, only a portion of which I can survey with my own eye, I am bound to say and you are bound to admit that the wool industry in particular has been and is the greatest industry in this country. Its prosperity has meant the prosperity of Australia. Any period of depression in it has been a period of depression for Australia. This is our great industry.

And having said that, one should ask oneself, "What has contributed to that?" Well, there is the woolgrower himself who has contributed to it because in my experience of people who have succeeded their fathers and grandfathers in wool, they have always aimed at a higher and higher level of quality and of production. This has been a matter of great pride to the people concerned and of great advantage to Australia, and at the same time, companies, and I, in particular, refer to this one, have been able to make a contribution to the development of wool, and later on, to the development of cattle and so on, without which I doubt whether we could have had all the advance that we have recorded in these years. And why is that? It is not merely that a pastoral company of this kind has been able to make business transactions with people. It is the way in which the transactions have been made that has produced the results that we are witnessing. It is interesting, I think, to ask oneself what are the elements in this matter. Might I venture to suggest one or two of them to you?

First of all, there has been involved complete integrity of dealing with the people with whom the company deals, complete integrity. One slightest breath of doubt could have destroyed everything. But a complete integrity of dealing, maintained over generations, has been a powerful contributing factor, and so I mention it.

In the second place, there is the knowledge, the personal knowledge, the genuine personal interest of the individual and in the individual. This is true of all sorts of things. I don't believe that anybody, whatever he is doing, can achieve success unless he is interested in people, in the individual person, not interested in them as if they were statistics in a blue book, but interested in them as human beings, and after all, the success, Sir, of this great company is fundamentally based upon the fact that you have at all stages been interested in the individual, you've known him, you've known about him, you have been able to form judgments about him, individual judgments, not mass judgments, and he, in his turn, coming into the city, coming into a branch, coming into wherever it may be, has felt that he was an individual and got to know your own people as individuals, so that there was mutual confidence, mutual knowledge, and these two things are, in reality, the basis of the success of an enterprise of this kind.

And in the third place, you have been able to provide for people on the land expert knowledge and advice. This is something of tremendous importance. In my own lifetime, I have seen the move occur because I was born in the country, in Victoria - I have seen the move occur from a stage at which just rule of thumb observed: "This was all right. The old man did this and it is good enough for me." We have moved away from that to a stage where the resources of science, the resources of new knowledge have been brought to the hand, to the arm of the man in the field. This, I think, is tremendously important.

My own Government - and it is not the only one in this field - my own Government has for a long time been concerned about the great problem of extending the results of research to the man who is actually on the farm, and this may seem a simple enough matter but it is an almost intractable problem because we rejoice, as you know, Sir, in Australia in having seven Governments, of which mine is merely the least considerable, (Laughter) and some Governments have a power, and some have another power. It isn't easy to say, "Well, that's it. This is what has been discovered, this is what the research men have told us, this goes out tomorrow under proper organisation to the man on the farm, on the station, wherever he may be."

A great deal of work is being done in this matter, a great deal remains to be done. There is still too far great a gap between the work done by the scientist and the applied scientist and the work actually done on the property itself. We think this is improving. We hope that it will improve very much more, but I want to express my public acknowledgment to companies like yours which have been practising this in a very real sense for many years, who have gone to great pains to have experts in their own staffs, who have gone to great pains to see that their expert knowledge and their expert advice has reached the client of the company in the quickest possible time and in the most effective possible way. You have been engaging, although you are in a business, in extension services in the most practical sense and I therefore take the opportunity of saying that what you have been doing is work done - in parallel and sometimes more quickly - in parallel with the work that governments are seeking to achieve in Australia.

Then the fourth matter which presented itself to me was this. I don't believe in the theory that some people have that a business will succeed as long as you have a lot of hard-faced fellows on the board who insist on getting the last drop of juice out of the orange, or if the days are rather bad - out of the lemon. (Laughter) I don't believe in this. I don't think that any concern of this kind can possibly grow so dramatically - and it has grown dramatically - unless it has a vision which goes beyond the profit and loss account. Indeed, if it has the vision, if it has an imaginative grasp of the problems of the man on the land, its profit and loss account will turn out to be all right because it will represent the results of imagination and vigour.

The two things that have to be kept in mind if the imagination is to be exercised in this country are the necessity for productivity - more and more productivity in unit terms, and growth, growth with productivity. This is what we depend on.

In Australia our population is growing very rapidly for one reason or another, but it is growing very rapidly, and

the demands of our people are growing very rapidly. As living standards rise, as purchasing power becomes greater, so we have a greater and greater demand. This demand can't just be satisfied by more imports - though it may have to be to a degree - it can't just be satisfied by the inflow of capital from other countries, although we've been rich in that over a long time now; fundamentally it has to be met by an increased production and activity in our own country, leading to bigger exports, leading to greater strength in the international exchanges, but above all, leading to an increased development of wealth in Australia. Therefore, productivity must never be overlooked and the need for growth must never be overlooked. I venture to say that every man who has an executive responsibility, either here or in a branch or in the field is conscious of this and knows that the best thing he can do for the client of the company is to help him to improve his productivity, to help him to have a contemplation of growth for the future so that he is never satisfied with what is going on today but has an imagination big enough and lively enough to contemplate what is going to happen next year and in ten years' time and in fifty years' time.

Now, in all these things, this great company has been carrying out work, I think, of national importance, and it satisfies me very much as no socialist, as you may understand; it satisfies me very much that you have not done this as the servant of government but as the ally and friend of government. I know I didn't come down in the last political shower and I know that even in your board-room from time to time rude noises will be made about my Government - it's my Government at present - but somebody's Government some time in the future. I know that. This is good, this is very healthy. I have always been more receptive to hooting than to applause. I find it very stimulating. (Laughter) And in the middle of all that, never forget that we are playing in the same team, we are in the same interest, we are both serving this country - we, occasionally, by compulsion; you, not by compulsion but by a great voluntary and highly intelligent effort.

Now, Sir, I don't want to weary this audience, but I thought I would like to mention those particular matters because this is a great day in the history of the company, a wonderful day. It is a pity that a nice old building had to be knocked over, isn't it. I sometimes think it is a pity that in fifty years' time by which time, I assure you, I will no longer be Prime Minister of Australia (Laughter) - it comforts me to know..... it doesn't comfort me rather it shocks me to know that in fifty years' time, almost every city will look like almost every other city. I suppose this is inevitable in the course of nature because there are some lovely things in this city, but still, they can't stand in the way of development, for practical purposes, of the kind of thing that I have been talking about. I therefore want to say to you, publicly, that I thank you on behalf of the Government for the work that you are doing, and that as an individual, I esteem it a singular honour to be invited to come here and to declare this building open.

Before I conclude, I must tell you this is one of my better deeds, but not entirely voluntary, because about six months ago, I said to my Secretary, "Look, I've had this. I must cut down on my public engagements. There are far too many speeches to be made and I am very tired of it. Let's refuse all the invitations that come in for the next three months." That was a bold stroke, you see; this is what I believe they call a crash programme - "Let's refuse them" - and so I think I refused this one, and then it turned out that my Deputy High Commissioner in London, in some way having become involved with this company - I mean in a perfectly honourable way (Laughter) - he kept sending messages saying, "As a personal favour....." and so when a Prime Minister is confronted by a Deputy High Commissioner, it is always difficult but when the Deputy High Commissioner turns out to have been the Head of the Prime Minister's Department for half a dozen years, it becomes impossible, and so I said, "I succumb. I will do it." I have done it very badly but I assure you I have done it with very great pleasure. I declare the building open.
