

KEW MAYORAL DINNER

3RD APRIL, 1965

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

Mr. Mayor, Councillor Stephens and Parliamentary Colleagues,
Your Honours and Gentlemen :

Man and boy, I have been coming around as Member for Kooyong for thirty-four and a half years. I suppose I must have attended a pretty high percentage of the Kew Mayoral Dinners in that time and I am delighted to find that Councillor Stephens has followed a great tradition because on not one occasion can I ever remember not hearing something about the grievances from which my native State suffers. (Laughter) And yet I have still come around. Apparently there must be some balancing factors somewhere.

He has put some questions to me which I don't think I will endeavour to answer except in one or two particulars. As he spoke, I thought I would like to put a question to him. I think while he was up he might have explained on behalf of the Board what its trouble was with the Government of Victoria about the ring road. (Laughter) This is one of the few matters which I can observe from on high because nothing gives us any greater satisfaction in life than to see the other fellow in trouble. But I desist. I wouldn't dream of putting that question to him. I think that's a matter that he might thrash out with Dick Hamer in the Mayor's Room which seems to have a rather attractive connotation about it - the Mayor's Room - or is it a dry cupboard?

I just want to say one thing about Tullamarine. You know, really, this is one of those problems on which you can't win. If somebody decides that something ought to be done about a new jet airport at Tullamarine, there are screams of rage and anguish from Sydney which appears to be under the impression that the abolition of Mascot is under immediate consideration. (Laughter) And as far as Tullamarine is concerned, well, we started this; there is a lot of work that has been going on on the runways.

The volume of work, the volume of airlines traffic in Australia is multiplying at an enormous rate. That is something that is worth remembering. And what was at one stage contemplated as an adequate terminal turns out before long to be quite inadequate for the enormous and growing volume of business. All I can say is that if I were a Victorian, as indeed I am, and a Melbourne man as indeed I am, I think I would be prepared to wait a little longer to get a very much better air terminal rather than have one that was inadequate from the word go. This happens all the way round.

We, exercising our authorities, decided to buy a great aircraft now called the F111A which was the TFX. It was a matter of some controversy, you will remember, at the time. All right, well we had a date for delivery. We accepted that date. We have since agreed to extend that date for a year not because we couldn't get the aircraft by that date but because our experts told us that all the teething troubles that a new aircraft has will be very much better adjusted and modifications made in the United States of America, and if we wait for a year, we will have a much better aircraft and have much less adjustment and therefore much less loss of service when we take delivery

of the plane, and we said "Yes" and that is something I recommend to Councillor Stephens for his consideration. That's all.

I was interested in what he said about oil, off-shore oil because contrary to the belief that I entertained until I came here tonight, I thought the State of Victoria was extraordinarily prosperous. I owe that knowledge to all my Victorian Parliamentary colleagues. It is quite true there is a conference about off-shore oil drilling and it is very necessary because there is a great argument which would be difficult even for the most distinguished lawyers to resolve as to where the State jurisdiction begins or ends and where the Commonwealth jurisdiction begins or ends because some of the drilling may be inside territorial waters as we narrowly define them within the three-mile limit, and some may now be on what we are now calling the Continental shelf and it is eminently desirable that people who are going to drill for oil and who are going to lay out vast sums of money in it should have some security of title, that they should know that they had a valid licence without being confronted some day by the proposition, "Well, you've got a licence from the State and not from the Commonwealth and therefore it's no go." Or "You got a licence from the Commonwealth and not from the State and therefore it's no go."

So, as sensible people, we are conferring with the States, through their Law Offices, to see whether we can't determine some working principle under which the States themselves who have Mines Departments and the like will, of course, administer whatever scheme is worked out but under which the people who are going to lay out their money will know that they have a secure title. As some of this may be within the three-mile limit and a great deal more of it may be outside the three-mile limit, I think we have been fairly sporting on this matter. We have said, "Let's pool our constitutional resources. Don't let us have a lot of litigation and argument. Let us agree on a system of licensing and let us divide the royalties fifty-fifty." Now that seems to me to be a very fair proposition and I hope that in Brisbane it will be accepted.

But there was one other matter that was raised and I did make up my mind when I was coming here tonight that I would like to say something about it. You know, the Commonwealth Government may have a very far-reaching responsibility. In the public eye, their responsibilities frequently exceed their powers because their powers can be extremely limited in various respects. For example, it would be in a broad way true to say that it is the Commonwealth Parliament and Government that has the responsibility for overall economic and financial policy. This is true. But that authority or responsibility is affected very obviously by the fact that there are large tracts in the economic and financial field which we can't touch.

For example, we have a system of industrial arbitration in Australia which is the creation of the Constitution and which really can't be destroyed except by an Act of Parliament which repeals it. Nobody contemplates that. And therefore we await the result of arbitral proceedings just as eagerly as other people would because we know that whatever the result may be, it may very well have a material effect on the whole of our financial and economic policy for the year or over a period of years. So there are great limitations.

There are bodies which have been established which impinge on the Commonwealth's authority in exactly the same way, Mr. Mayor, as you well know as a banker, that although we have some authority over banking and bank interest rates and the like, we don't appear to have any authority over what have been called fringe banking institutions which are not quite banks but which do collect and use very very large sums of money including a large quantity of short-term money in Australia. Well, this is a limitation on our jurisdiction and I am bound to say on our behalf that I think on the whole over these last dozen years we have managed to create and sustain an economic and financial climate which has helped to produce great prosperity in this country. (Applause)

And my old friend then put the question and this is really what I wanted to say a little about, about the South East of Asia, and in particular what goes on in Vietnam. It is necessary, I think, to remember a few facts on this matter because although these words like North Vietnam and South Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos now come rather trippingly to the tongue, these are after all a modern development, speaking in terms of political boundaries, because we are dealing with what used to be called Indo-China.

Somebody said to me only this morning, "How many North Vietnamese are there in South Vietnam?" And I said, "Well, you might as well ask me how many Yorkshiremen are living in the Home Counties in England because we are not dealing with identifiably different people." But when the settlement occurred and when great troubles broke out and when the Committee of Control was established, a line was drawn along the 17th parallel with a provision in the terms of the peace or of the cease-fire (a) that there should be a complete cease-fire and (b) that there should be a completely demilitarised zone for five kilometres on each side of the parallel. And if all that has foundered, I just want to remind you that in my opinion it can't be attributed to any default or aggression on the part of the people or governments of South Vietnam.

The aggression has been quite in the other direction, and it has been made all the more effective because pockets of what they now call the Viet Cong have been established, some of them deep into South Vietnam, some of them very very close to Saigon, and some of them edging into Cambodia, and these are Communist pockets whose main object is to destroy the Government of South Vietnam and therefore open the door to conquest of the South by the North, by Hanoi, and therefore as I venture to say, ultimately by Peking.

Now this is a tremendously serious problem because let me point out to you that if Vietnam fell as a whole, Thailand would be under tremendous challenge with a long and difficult frontier to defend and how long Thailand might be expected to last under those circumstances is anybody's guess. And our friend Prince Sihanouk - there are no Press here, are there? - in Cambodia has rather made it clear that given peace and quiet, he is quite prepared to be under the Communist rule just as much as any other.

Now this is a very serious problem and the Government of South Vietnam invited the United States of America to do something about it. They were well entitled to do that just as they were entitled to ask us because we are parties to the South

East Asian Treaty. We were one of the sponsors and we belong to it and the obligations under the South-East Asian Treaty are several as well as joint. It is worth remembering that, South Vietnam though it isn't a party to the South East Asian Treaty is what is called one of the protocol states. In other words, an attack on it is regarded as something that brings into existence the machinery of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation.

Therefore we, partly as a matter of obligation, and partly as a matter of right, are taking some small part in the operations in Vietnam and the Americans are taking a very large part in the operations in Vietnam, but it is the fashion now of extreme people in Australia to fasten on to the United States, to raise questions: "What are they doing there? What has it got to do with the United States?" If the United States paid any attention to this thing and left, then South Vietnam would be a memory in a fortnight. That's all. And the whole of South East Asia would be in imminent danger of falling into the communist hands. What would happen under those circumstances in relation to Malaysia you can well understand because Malaysia is an integral part of South-East Asia and therefore vulnerable if it is entirely surrounded by and attacked by people who have very superior forces somewhere in the background. All I can say is I am jolly thankful America is taking an interest in South Vietnam. It would be a very sad day for us if the United States were not.

It is worthwhile when we hear these critics say, "Well, why do the Americans take a hand in South Vietnam?" - does anybody believe that they want to annex the country? You know, I have heard more nonsense talked about imperialism and colonialism and neo-colonialism, and I suppose neo-imperialism, than would fill volumes. It is all rather silly and rather nauseating. They don't want to have South Vietnam as a colony. I can't imagine any more uncomfortable position than to be the Colonial Minister in an American Administration with Vietnam as one of your colonies. This doesn't make sense.

Well are they there simply to attend to their own defence in a limited and local sense? Of course not. Whether we can live without a relatively free South-East Asia is a major question for us, but a relatively minor question, if you like, for the United States of America. This grudging habit of mind, this great temptation all the time to be questioning the Americans and their motives and so on, and if one of us defends it, one is told, "Oh, well you are just squaring off with the Americans" Squaring off with them..... I repeat: Why are they there? Why are they losing men? Why are they sustaining battle casualties and bombing outrages and all these things? Why are they spending millions and millions and millions of money in the defence of South Vietnam? The answer is quite simple.

Because they know that though South Vietnam may be of minor importance to them, it has a particular significance for the defence of the free world, for the defence of a world which still retains some religious principles and faith and doesn't want to be overrun by a lot of materialistic and atheistic Communist powers. And they know that. The Americans have had wisdom, I think, on this matter. They have made it quite clear that to them freedom is not divisible so that you yield it there and preserve it there. They believe that the great issue in the world is: How far those people who are now free will continue to be free. This is a tremendous and an imaginative and a generous outlook on their part. We sometimes think they are not

very imaginative about certain matters. I believe they have been imaginative on this to the nth power. They know. They see the world as a whole. They see the menace of an aggressive communism as a whole and they have made up their minds that where they have in the world people who are free and who want to live their own lives and have no ambition except to live at peace and cultivate their own gardens, they the United States of America will put themselves in the front of the defence. I find this admirable. Admirable. And I have indeed great occasion, as you have, to be thankful that that is their point of view.

Now that, I think Sir, is my answer to the question about South Vietnam. The whole of this South East Asian business is completely bedevilled by all sorts of cross currents and special issues. There is the attitude of Indonesia which I think is unthinking and wild and really irresponsible but still it is an attitude which has put our people into battle, which has put thousands and thousands of British troops alongside Malayan troops into the defence of Malaysia. These are not good things. These are not happy things, but we can't be happy all the time.

We are an astonishingly happy people and we have every reason to be. We are jolly well off. We are very well provided for. There has been a revolution in our economic position in modern times in Australia and we have every reason to be thankful for it. All these things have to be bought for some price and one price that has to be paid is that we can't have all this comfort and satisfaction to ourselves and leave it to the greatest power in the world, the United States, to defend us, because ultimately that is what it comes to in these countries, and then give ourselves the luxury of saying, "Well, I wonder what they are up to. You know, the Americans they oughtn't to be there. They ought to cease fire. Whatever the other man does, they are to stop." This doesn't make sense. Or when they are confronted by an enemy which is quite ruthless, penetrating and uncommonly successful, they ought to say, "Well, now, wait a moment. We would like to come and negotiate with you." It is like negotiating with a burglar when he was well inside the house, and making a composition with him: "Well, you can have all the jewellery as long as you leave me the banknotes." This is, I think, a hopelessly impractical idea. Of course we want to see peace. We never will see peace in this part of the world until the communists are persuaded and persuaded by force if necessary that they are not going to overrun decent, innocent people outside their ambit.

Well now, Sir, I think that is all I wanted to say except to tell you that I have had quite an interesting time tonight because I have seen about four men here tonight whom I hadn't seen for donkey's years. All of them are contemporaries of mine to within a few months and I am happy to say that I found them all looking astonishingly young. They thought so too and I waited anxiously to be told that I did but none of them had the gall to say that. However, we parted temporarily as very good friends.

Sir, I am delighted to be here. Thank you very much indeed. You always entertain us magnificently and I am now going to sit down and listen to Dick Hamer tell us all about the Ringstrasse.
