

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

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

We are twenty-one today and we have the key of the door. That's something we ought to remember, politically. We have indeed been either fortunate or wise, or a mixture of both because one of the outstanding things about this party, twenty-one years old, is that it has secured the support in Australia, I am quite convinced, of the young and ardent who are ambitious and self-reliant. (Hear, hear) That, I think, is a pretty good thing to be able to say and a better thing if we maintain its truth. We attract the young and the ardent with ambition and self-reliance. It is worthwhile recalling every now and then that Australia would not have made the enormous advances it has made if it had been a community of people with dependent minds. The fact that Australia has grown as it has demonstrates that we have people of independent minds who aim to be contributors as well as beneficiaries.

I think when I have said that I have probably said what is at the very heart of our own approach, of our philosophy and, as I will set out to prove to you, of our practice.

Now I know that if the leader of a party and if the leader of a government in particular talks about what has happened, he is told that he is living on the past. I have no desire to live on the past. I have no particular desire to live in the past, but I think that it is worthwhile recalling a few things because they may explain to us, everyone of us, why we have had this remarkable success, politically, and the reasons for what we must do if we are to continue because the past is never to be ignored, the future is never to be regarded as something that is entirely dominated by the past.

It's very interesting to me, looking back over these years, looking back to that time when to be the Leader of the Opposition was not a frightfully lush occupation. I had a secretary and a typist and I received a private member's salary and a handsome allowance of £300 a year for being Leader of the Opposition. These times have changed very much and, I think, for the better but in those days it wasn't easy.

And I remember all the preliminary work of creating the party being put in hand in my office and I remember that my then Private Secretary, Eileen Lenihan, who did so much tremendous work at that time, was ultimately presented by us, when we became a party, with a silver dish with a suitable inscription. This was rather single-handed business at that time, and for no strange reason, my old friend, Mr. Anderson, who has been one of the great valiants in this party (hear, hear) (applause) will remember well that when I set out on this expedition and first of all found out how many different organisations there were, he was the leader of one which I think was called the Service and Citizens. And there he was, never in much doubt about his own mind, Bill, and therefore when he came along, I knew that he would speak to his people. We had a conference over there in that improbable-looking place along the road and we ultimately began, as the President has reminded us.

Now the first thing we did, the thing that our opponents have not done, was to say, "Well, what do we learn from our vicissitudes?" We had been almost butchered in 1943. I can speak about this with some detachment because contrary to the public impression, I was a private member at the election of 1943, for a variety of reasons I needn't go into. And there we were with a battered remnant in the Parliament. I think that at that time that out of a House of 74, we had 17. After the following election we had perhaps 20 and I will venture to say that there never was a better Opposition in the world, (hear, hear) because we set about it the right way.

We said, "Now, here we are, despised and rejected" and we were, of course, at that time led by a leader whose political life was regarded by most people as finished. So we had no great assets, either in the front or otherwise, but we made up our minds that we would come back, that we would unify ourselves, that we would do the things that had to be done - forget about the past and say to ourselves, "We must have one party, full of unity and fire, and we must have a programme, a platform, which will make people understand that we have been thinking in the future." We set about it in 1944 and 1945 and we produced a new look, if I may use that phrase, for the new party, and the effect of this forward thinking, this liveliness, this being modern, being prepared to be a little adventurous was that although we didn't win more than two or three seats in 1946 (and I remember it so well because the cry went up in all the club armchairs: "You will never win with Menzies"), we went on and, in 1949, had one of the historic victories of Federal politics.

What I want to say to you about that aspect of the matter is that I don't mention it as if we might pat ourselves on the back and be boastful. I want to ask you why, why we won in 1949 and why we have gone on winning ever since. Now why?

There is no simple answer to this. There is an awful lot of luck one way and the other in politics, but I want to tell you that my belief is that over the whole of this period of fifteen, sixteen years, we have won because we have been the party of innovations. Not the party of the past, not the conservative party dying hard on the last barricade, but the party of innovations. And a number of the innovations that have been made I don't think would have presented themselves to the minds of most of us in 1949.

Now I really haven't the time, nor have you the patience, for me to be going through a list, but I am mentioning them in this connection. These were innovations, these were evidences of a lively mind and a forward-looking heart. This is the whole thing that we must remember and that we must continue to remember and act on in the years to come.

You take social services. They had a stock pattern. Our opponents thought that they had a monopoly of interest in social services, but you just look back on it and think of the things that we produced - not our opponents - the things that we produced, the innovations in this field: The Aged Persons Homes Act, one of the great social measures of our times (hear, hear), the Medical Health Scheme, the Pharmaceutical Scheme, housing loans, housing insurance, these matters being handled with great distinction if I may say so, and a meticulous attention to detail by my colleague, the Minister for Housing. (Applause)

Foreign policy. We were told that we were just a lot of dead and gone people, we had no foreign policy. It had never occurred to us in Opposition to be offensive to our great friends and therefore we had no foreign policy. And yet, in our time, what has happened? We have had the Colombo Plan and, never forget that it was devised by Australia. We have had the ANZUS pact in which we played a crucial part and we have had the South-East Asian Treaty, now under some ecclesiastical fire (Laughter) but I still venture to think a remarkable treaty in that it exhibits the will of nations, free nations, to help to preserve the freedom of other people. These are three pretty considerable achievements, I think, in the field of foreign affairs, and we are not exhausted by them because quite recently my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs made a speech, a statement, in the House which I will venture to describe as the finest statement on foreign policy to be heard in the Federal Parliament. (Applause)

In the world of finance, I have heard what my old friend, the Premier of Victoria, had to say with great vigour this afternoon, but I would remind all of you that when we came into office, the financial agreement had been operated in such a way that when the Loan Programme had been arranged and had been allocated, the duty of the Commonwealth came to an end. We were the first government to come to the aid of the States on their Works Programme by, in effect - I don't use the word technically - underwriting the approved Works Programme for the year.

My colleague said something this afternoon, I thought rather honest, about this. We have been called on to subscribe out of revenue which we have to raise, the shortfall in the Loan Programme. If we look back over the period of office of this Government, we would find that the shortfall of subscriptions by the Commonwealth must have amounted to £700M. or £800M. over the whole of that time. This was a novelty.

I don't know what the professors of political science teach, except that I have always thought that it was perhaps not very political and not very scientific (Laughter), but that is a mere discourteous remark on my part. I don't quite know what it is that they teach but if they are interested in the history of government relations in a Federation, then they ought to recall that it was a Liberal Government, it was our Government, which for the first time departed from the strict letter of the law under the financial agreement. We did indeed, and undertook voluntarily a policy which would help the States whose responsibilities on public works are so high and who, if I may say so, attend to those responsibilities so well so that we might be able to say, "Well, we don't want you to be scrambling through the year wondering how much the Loan market will produce. If we agree on a works programme, you may have the whole of the proceeds of the Loan market and if there is a shortfall on the borrowing market, then we will see you through." Now I mention this. I don't want to argue about it, I merely recall it to remind you that this was a revolutionary change in the relations between the Commonwealth and the States in respect of Loan raisings.

Now so far, it's not too bad is it? These are revolutionary changes. These weren't produced by conservatism, these were produced by dynamism in a conception of what the Commonwealth meant and what the nation meant and required.

You will recall - I don't need to elaborate it - what we have done in the educational field. I am quite accustomed now to being told by all sorts of people, professorial or otherwise, that we are falling down on our job. What was our job when we came

back into office at the end of 1949? It had nothing to do with maintaining universities. Nothing whatever. We were the first people to say, after the war with all this clamant demand for university training, with all this healthy desire on the part of thousands, scores of thousands of people to get a better education and to be better citizens: "We will come into this field." The first Commonwealth scholarships were produced by us. The first grant to the universities was produced by us, a very small one, a little quiet, tactful thing of about £1½M., but we produced it.

And then we appointed the Murray Committee and then later on the Universities Commission and then later on the Martin Committee on Tertiary Education. And what was regarded as an innovation in 1950 - £1M. or £1½M. - has now become £30M. a year. I know that this produces its disadvantages, in a sense, for the States because none of our programme could succeed without the co-operation of the States, and therefore I am not saying that we are solely responsible, but I am saying that we were the first people to come to the conclusion that tertiary education in Australia was of such overwhelming importance for the future of the nation, we must forget all about constitutional inhibitions. We must simply set out to use our financial resources to bring about a new era in the university world. I don't care much what undergraduates say in a noisy way at a meeting - I used to be an undergraduate myself and no doubt reasonably noisy - but I do know that whenever I go round Australia and look at a university and see the great buildings rising to the sky, I take some pleasure in the fact that it is our Government and our party that has produced these phenomenal results.

Science teaching, technical schools - I don't need to go through the whole gamut of this. I have made far too many speeches on it. I hope you will all have it in mind, but the point that I am making is that this has happened because when we were out and broken and beaten, we didn't simply sit down and decide to refurbish the slogans of the past, but we did decide that in the new world, we must have new ideas, forward-looking ideas, drive and imagination, and all of these things are the result. This is what I beg of you not to forget. It is not a matter of resting on your oars as they sometimes say, and saying, "Well, look what a good job we have done."

Yes, we have done a few good things but I want to remind you that the whole point of this is, that being out and looking forward to being in, we set about developing fresh ideas and drive and imagination. And all of these things I have mentioned illustrate it to you. I could give you a long list in the field of trade and payments, the balance of trade and payments, what has been done in the trade world with treaties and commissioners, what has been done in the mineral world, to which David Fairbairn made some short but valuable references this afternoon. I don't want to take up your time with details on those matters except to say one thing about the balance of trade and payments.

A campaign goes on from time to time in Parliament and out of it to the effect that my distinguished colleague, Mr. Holt, whose services to this party are beyond praise, (hear, hear) (applause) - is constantly assailed because it is said that he doesn't care what happens. He will take overseas money on any terms and under any circumstances. This is an awful lot of nonsense. There are all sorts of attempts made to create divisions and they are created by people who have never read what he said or what I said in a policy speech, but they are anxious to create a countervailing rift in the Government to match that obvious rift - or is it two rifts? or three rifts? - which exist in the Opposition.

I just want to remind you of one thing. It is quite true that in a perfect world, and if we had fifty million people in Australia, we would sell our goods abroad, we would buy imports, we would hope always to have some slight balance in our favour on the balance of trade, and then, of course, everything in the garden would be lovely. Anybody who is out of the kindergarten knows perfectly well that eleven million people with this enormous continent to deal with, with new resources being turned up every month, every year, can't deal with these matters, can't develop resources alone. They would have to rely exclusively on their own savings. It can't be done, and therefore we have adopted the view, and I am sure you have too, that Australia has great value to gain by being able to attract investment capital and in particular private investment capital into this country so that we may develop the country and be fruitful and multiply and inherit our part of the earth.

Well, we are told that this is all wrong. I just want to tell you that although we would always wish to see Australian equity interests in overseas capital invested here - and quite a number of people who bring capital in understand that and act on it - the fact is that but for the inpouring of private capital into Australia in the last dozen years, our development would have stopped far short of what it is today. (Hear, hear) (Applause)

I did notice the other day that, reading Hansard - I don't know whether you read Hansard; I occasionally do - I read a powerful speech by somebody who gave me to completely understand, an Opposition Member I hasten to say, you don't need overseas capital. All you do is to create it inside Australia. You know, a nice docile Reserve Bank, plenty of money for nothing. Inflation? Well, what does it matter? Ladies and gentlemen, I think we have some reason to be proud and therefore you have some reason to be proud of the extent to which development has occurred in Australia with the blessing and practical support of people overseas.

The one thing I want to put into your minds about it is this. If we don't have confidence in ourselves in Australia, if we really don't believe in all the basic elements that make a country like this, we can't expect other people to have confidence in us, and if other people had had no confidence in us, nobody would have been arguing about overseas investment, because it wouldn't have happened. It wouldn't have happened. They do this not because they love our beautiful blue eyes or whatever wretched colour they may be, not for a moment. It is because they look around the world and they see Australia and they say, "Well, now this is a country that has stability and a great future and resources, with a future development of resources. This is the place for us to go with our money." I don't take exception to that, do you? I think that is rather an agreeable state of affairs, and therefore I ask you to remember that because this again is one of the reasons for what has happened in the last fourteen or fifteen years. This has been going on and one of the basic reasons for it is that we have been able, with imagination and a forward-looking eye, to produce an economic climate, a temper of opinion, a temper of hope, which has persuaded people that this is the place to be.

I'm putting all this to you, not as one who looks back and says, "Well, I did rather well, and although I am doing rather badly now, I hope you will hold it in my favour." This is not the point at all. When any government gets to that state, it is time it was changed, and all these things have been done because we haven't looked at it in that way. We have gone on and on and on with new ideas, with new drive, with a new vision for our country.

And so, Sir, that is the lesson of the whole thing, looking back over the twenty-one years - complete re-thinking, a revived attack on the future, modern and progressive ideas, but for those things, we might have succeeded once on a catch vote. We never could have succeeded in seven consecutive elections because the people of Australia are not fools.

Now that is all I want to say about the domestic scene. There is one other aspect of this matter that I thought I might trouble you about in a rather disorderly sort of fashion and that concerns our external policy, I think a policy in relation to the United States, in relation to South-East Asia which is, if I may use the expression, unanswerably correct.

I was rocked recently in the House of Representatives when this was under discussion to hear the Leader of the Opposition say that there never could be a bipartisan policy because on all these matters the Labor Party could never agree with us, and I wondered what it was about our policy with which the Labor Party couldn't agree and what the Labor Party would itself do in substitution for these policies if it were in office, and I can't tell you the answer. Would it get out of the ANZUS pact? Would it abjure our responsibilities under the SEATO treaty? Would it leave Malaysia to fend for itself? Would it ignore South Vietnam and this historic battle, confused by all sorts of difficult things - but this historic battle for the freedom of man in South East Asia? I wish it would get up sometime and tell us what it would do because it can't agree with us and therefore it must do something apparently materially different.

Now, we have had a few discussions lately on Vietnam. I have enjoyed the receipt of some correspondence from dignitaries of the Church of England which I have received with great respect although I am Presbyterian myself (Laughter) but that doesn't matter. I have now received another letter and within the next day or two when I have become free of my engagements here, I will no doubt compile another answer. But it is quite clear that there are mixed feelings about South Vietnam and at the last moment, the Opposition has pretended to discover, and has been encouraged by some headlines in the newspapers, that we are completely at outs with the American Government, the American Administration, in relation to Vietnam, and so perhaps at the risk of wearying you, I ought to remind you of two or three things.

First of all, of course, Mr. Hasluck made a statement in the House in which he stated all the views extremely well which I repeated later on, perhaps indifferently, but he stated the policy of the Government in relation to this matter. All I can tell you is that I have every reason to know that his speech was received with very great pleasure in Washington and with warm approval. (Hear, hear) (Applause)

Well, then, I went down, making one of these weekend speeches of which there are too many and which I am endeavouring to eliminate, and I spoke at a place called Cheltenham in Victoria. My colleague, Don Chipp was there. In fact he took me there. And as part of another theme that I was talking about, I undertook to say something about the American actions in Vietnam.

I asked them why they thought the United States of America was sending its men into Vietnam and spending vast sums and producing vast stores of equipment, and I said, "Why do you suppose they are doing it?" This is not a bad question, I put to you: I hope I won't have anybody suppose that they are doing it because they want to make South Vietnam an American colony. That would be too silly for words. That would be, in the homely phrase, buying

trouble. I don't think any of us would want to have one of these countries as a colony. Of course not. Is it because the Americans have enormous financial interests in that country? I venture to think they have practically none. Then why are they doing it? Why are they, with all the temptations in the world to be isolationist saying "Well, we won't protect our own interest at home so much. We have the wide seas on each side of us but we won't allow that to influence us." Why are they doing it? They are doing it because they believe that what is at issue is human freedom and they believe that human freedom ought to be defended wherever it is challenged and that they, as the greatest power in the world, should accept the greatest responsibility for it.

Now I hope nobody thinks that to talk about human freedom, after all the experiences of this century, is to talk high-falutin'. This great issue, this basic issue of human freedom has wracked the world twice in this century, has cost millions of lives and distorted the whole economic history of country after country. Don't let us treat it as if it were an expendable commodity. And I take off my hat to the Americans who only fifty years ago were deeply sunk in isolationism, who had the Monroe Doctrine around them - I take off my hat to them because twice now and in particular since the last war, they have assumed enormous responsibilities for the preservation of human freedom - including our own. (Hear, hear)

Well this, of course, was regarded by our opponents, particularly those of what I believe is called the Left Wing, was regarded as absolutely sabre-rattling stuff - you know, no relation to the facts of life. And then President Johnson made a speech, but before he did, I was asked a question - oh, this was a gaffe as I have gathered since, an awful gaffe by me. So I thought, well, I am as capable of making a gaffe as the next fellow, I will have a look in the Hansard to see what it was, because I had been asked whether I was prepared to urge on the United States that they should negotiate a peace. Urge on the United States.....Nobody would be silly enough to ask me to urge something on Peking because I don't suppose they ever heard of me. I don't suppose they will ask me to urge something on Ho Chi-Minh at Hanoi because we are not on the closest of terms, and therefore it was America. We had to say, "Come, come" and so I was asked a question and I said, "What I was directing myself to on each of these occasions was a suggestion, about which some people have been quite vocal, that the United States, instead of fighting should negotiate." I emphasise those words - "instead of fighting should negotiate....negotiate with an enemy which has violated its obligations in relation to a cease-fire, negotiate with a country that has ignored its international obligations, and negotiate with people who keep on shooting when the Americans have stopped shooting." I see nothing in that that I would want to withdraw or qualify for half a minute.

Well then, of course, the fat was in the fire because they said, "Well, the President, three or four days later, he said, 'Yes, I'll negotiate'" It hit the headlines, quite misleading headlines, and in case you have been beguiled by them, I think I ought to tell you what the President said. I have the full text before me. What the President said at Johns Hopkins was almost, word for word, what Paul Hasluck had said and what I had said in the speeches that I made. He went on to talk about the principle for which Americans were fighting in the jungles of Vietnam :

"Tonight, Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change."

That was well spoken if I may say so.

"Only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure."

That is worth recalling. If I may say so, I can imagine a state of affairs in which the United States of America could maintain its safety and security with South East Asia in communist hands. I can't imagine such a thing in the case of Australia, and therefore everything that he says can be accented two or three times for us.

"Only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure. This kind of world will never be built by bombs or bullets yet the infirmities of man are such that force must often precede reason and the waste of war the works of peace."

This is the President at Johns Hopkins. Then later on he told what was happening -

"Trained men and supplies, orders and arms flow in a constant stream from the North to the South...."

(the North the innocent party I gather some people think) From North Vietnam into South Vietnam, replenishing the Vietcong, already with powerful formations of troops, the communists in their pockets in South Vietnam and over the border into Cambodia, and the North feeding them. And who feeds the North? Well, I don't need to answer that question.

"Simple farmers are the targets of assassination and kidnapping. (This is Lyndon Johnson, not myself) Women and children are strangled in the night because their men are loyal to the Government. Small and helpless villages are ravaged by sneak attacks."

I don't need to go on. He gave a vivid account of what is occurring and then he put the same question as I had put to the worthy citizens of Cheltenham. He said :

"Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep."

So have we, don't forget, ladies and gentlemen. The South East Asian treaty is a treaty which imposes upon us obligations which are several as well as joint and South Vietnam is one of the protocol states whose security is guaranteed by the South East Asian Treaty. Therefore this applies to us:

"Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954, every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam. We have helped to build and we have helped to defend. Thus over many years we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence"

and he went on to say (so far from running for cover as some of these critics thought he should) he went on to say,

"....and I intend to keep that promise. To dishonour that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemy and to the terror that must follow would be an unfortunate wrong. We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe from Berlin to Thailand are people whose well-being rests in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Vietnam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and the value of America's word.....We must stay in South-East Asia as we did in Europe. In the words of the Bible, 'Hitherto shalt thou come but no further!'"

Now I think somebody would need to have a great deal of ingenuity and almost genius for falsification to find any difference between that and what we have been saying, and that is why what we have been saying has been received with such warm approval in Washington. Then the President goes on a little later :

"What is our objective in Vietnam? Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves, only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way. We will do everything necessary to reach that objective and we will do only what is absolutely necessary. In recent months, attacks in South Vietnam were stepped up. Thus it became necessary for us to increase our response and make attacks by air. This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires. We do this in order to slow down aggression. We do this to increase the confidence of the brave people of South Vietnam who have bravely borne this brutal attack for so many years and with so many casualties..... We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement."

That's what he said, that is what he means. That is what the people of America stand for, and later on he came to the question that has vexed some people, well-meaning people, people of the highest intentions. He said, "Should we negotiate?" Well, of course, having regard to what he said, to negotiate in the sense of abandoning the position would have been unthinkable. Unthinkable. And he knew perfectly well that the one condition that has been put forward by North Vietnam, by its communist backers is that they won't talk about anything unless the Americans get out. In other words, unless the Americans abandon South Vietnam to their clutches. That has been their condition. And therefore he said -

"We have stated this position over and over again fifty times and more to friend and foe alike and we remain (no change of policy here) - we remain ready with this purpose for unconditional discussion."

That is to say, for discussions which don't involve the condition that has been put forward and which has now, I notice, been violently repeated, that we get out - because we are not getting out. We are there, and we are there to do our job and we will do it.

But if, under some circumstances, discussions could occur which meant that we didn't abandon South Vietnam and that they were not left exposed to violent attack from the north, then of course we have no abmition to have our men killed, we will be prepared to discuss. This, in effect, is what the President said.

This is so elementary, isn't it, so simple that it is hard to believe how it could be distorted or misinterpreted. The speech by the President ought to be made compulsory reading. I have read only a bit of it. It ought to be made compulsory reading because I will venture to say that if the President of the United States has no other claim to being celebrated in the history of his country, he would have established a right by this one speech and by this one simple policy.

Don't be misled by the superficial readers or the headline-clutchers who think there is a division between us. I am happy to say that I have had very good messages myself from Washington about what I have had to say and as I have indicated, Paul has too.

There is no difference between us on this matter. We are in the closest, most constant contact. It is perhaps one of the things that our Government has done in these years that I have been describing that beginning with a somewhat dubious relationship with the United States, we have established an intimacy of contact, a daily exchange of views in Washington on the most friendly terms which I can only regard as one of the invisible but all-powerful elements in the security of our country.

Now I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time on that. I hope I have been sufficiently clear in what I have said because I set off to review the past and to remind you that it was the result of an activity and imagination which must continue for the future, and in the second place I wanted to deal with this current matter to demonstrate to you that the foreign policy of this government is one which may incur some momentary hostility with other people but which involves the deepest friendship, the deepest co-operation, the deepest mutual understanding, with the great nations of the world.
