

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON HUMAN RELATIONS
HELD AT MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

3RD MAY, 1965

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

Mr. Chairman :

Such are the infirmities of human memory that I was all ready to address you as Mr. President. (Laughter) I am very glad - or sorry as the case may be - to be reminded that I am the President, though I fear I won't be very conspicuously present for a very long portion of the proceedings. However, I am here to open them.

The first thing I want to do is to read to you, with the permission of the Council, the following message which was sent by the Council to His Royal Highness, Prince Philip :

"The Chairman and Members of the Council of the International Congress on Human Relations in Melbourne send greetings and good wishes on the eve of the Congress. We appreciate the keen interest you have shown in the revolutionary technical changes in industry and commerce and believe that this Congress will assist materially in the understanding of the great social problems of our day. The Commonwealth and indeed the whole world will benefit from the work of this Congress which you have supported by your gracious patronage."

Prince Philip has now replied in these terms -

"Thank you for your kind message which I was delighted to receive. I am sure that each one of you who attends this international congress will learn something of value which will contribute to better and happier human relations throughout the world. My best wishes to you all."

Then there is another message from the Prime Minister of Japan which, very generously, has been done into English for my benefit (Laughter) -

"It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you on the successful opening of the International Congress of Human Relations."

I call that a very intelligent anticipation because it hasn't yet been opened.....

"I would say it is a very timely project to hold this congress at a time when all the industrially-developed countries in the world are faced with difficult social and economic problems resulting from advancement in technology and automation. Japan is no exception. Although Japan was well known for abundant human resources until quite recently, the progress achieved in industrial mechanisation has brought in its wake an increasingly serious labour shortage. Consequently how to turn technical advancement to the true benefit of the human being is now a widely-discussed topic in our business circles. I am happy to know that Mr. Masaru Ibuka is participating in this congress as a lecturer.

"I am sure that Mr. Ibuka with his profound knowledge and experience in modern management will be able to contribute to this conference in many ways. I sincerely hope that closer co-operation will be further promoted between Australia and Japan as well as among the participating countries as a whole to solve the various problems common to our industries."

Well, having read those two stimulating messages to you, I just want to approach the task of opening the Congress and of saying, with your permission, a few words about its business.

Long experience has shown me now that the first thing to do when you have to open something is to discover what it is. I find this is no small advantage and therefore I looked very closely to see what was the broad theme of the congress, and there it was, and here it is : The Social and Economic Impact of Automation and Technical Change.

Now, Sir, in the presence of a great number of pundits in this field, it is not for me to undertake a technical examination of this theme. All I can do in a few minutes is to present you with what you will regard as platitudes but which I might hope to regard as a few elements of commonsense in approaching this problem.

Change. Change is a fact. It can't be ignored. It must not be disposed of by wishful thinking, and yet the curious thing about us human beings is that we are always chronically demanding change and equally chronically afraid of it. I think that's basically true. We are all progressives in politics and we say so, repeatedly. There are no people in the whole political arena who are not desperately anxious for change and no voters that ever I have been able to discover who don't share that desperate anxiety. But when it comes to the point, there is not much change, is there? There is a certain amount of resistance to change. You get this curious paradox in the human being.

Well, on this problem we, I think, might present a question to ourselves: Does technological change threaten full employment? Because a lot of people think, and very seriously, that it does. That always seems to me to be an error, an error about as old as the Industrial Revolution. I would just like to make the briefest of analysis of this point with you.

First of all I have no doubt myself that full employment stimulates the demand for technological improvement. In a human world - we have just agreed that it is - a surplus of jobs over men, which is how some people will define full employment, a surplus of that kind tends to mean, doesn't it, a little less personal effort, some bidding-up for the employees who are required for some enterprise, some initial increasing unit cost of whatever it is that is being produced.

Well now, of course, there are some industries, perhaps represented here this morning, which believe they can pass it on, and if they believe they can pass it on, they think that is all right. They will accept the causes of the passing on. But in industries which have to meet the market in a competitive world and those industries include an increasing number of manufacturers in Australia, for example, for export, rising

costs which result from the initial application of over-full employment or full employment will stimulate two things. One is technological advance. This will at once be seen as something which provides the answer, something that reconciles the new standard of pay or the new standard of competition for labour with the need to produce and to produce effectively for a market. So technological advance is stimulated, in my opinion, by full employment, and market advance is also stimulated by full employment because as the pressure comes on so the search for the market and particularly for the variation of the market will grow stronger and stronger.

Now that is one side of the picture, as I see it - full employment really stimulates the demand for technological improvement. The other side of that proposition is this that technological improvement need not threaten employment. All sorts of short-term expedients may have to be applied to cushion the impact, the immediate impact of new labour-saving devices and I anticipate you will be hearing some expert views on those matters before you finish. But it would be to despair about the reality and substance of human progress to ignore the dominant facts that technological advance will cheapen the processes of production and therefore give rise to a greater demand and therefore directly and indirectly stimulate employment.

I emphasise "and indirectly". One has only to recall the history, the modern history of the motor car industry and its mass production to realise that what is indirect is even more extensive than what is direct in the employment field and yet this has been in an industry where immense technological progress has been made. And again, technological advance leads to new types of production, new commodities to create new demands and to meet new demands. Whole new industries can arise as indeed they have been increasingly during the last forty years.

I just pause for a minute to emphasise this point that the advance in technology leads to new types of production. One is frequently conscious of the fact - to take Australia by way of example - there is a certain orthodoxy in our minds about what we can sell to other countries, just as, I venture to say, British industry was for a considerable time handicapped by a similar belief that there were certain things the world could buy and if they didn't want to buy those, it was just too bad. Now we Australians here have constantly to be on the search for a new product which a new market will be willing to take, and in order to do that there will need to be the most tremendous pressure in the technological field - not a fear of it but a use of it, a stimulation of it for those purposes.

There is another aspect in my own country which is also quite material. We need here, and are at all times moving towards it, a better and a speedier application in industry, both primary industry and secondary industry, of scientific and technological research because that will tend to reduce costs and therefore to increase the stability of the whole economy. The process has been a little too slow, I think, in the past. I have a strong feeling that there are many items which could lead to great technological advance which are sluggish in their journey from the lab. to the farm or to the factory. This is a matter to which we are constantly directing attention, and of course that will be no threat to full employment. On the contrary, this constant application of

new ideas to stimulate old productions and to create new ones is the best guarantee, properly considered, of useful employment for a rapidly-increasing population.

I venture to say, Sir, that it is dangerous to be distracted by isolated instances or to suffer from a fear of becoming a technologically-advanced community. Nobody need fear that. On the contrary, we should all pray for it. The great questions, Sir, on which this conference of distinguished minds will throw much light are therefore : Are we willing to respond to the challenge of change? Are we competent to respond to the challenge of change? And in all this the role of education is of course of supreme moment, not only scientific education, not only technical education, but also education in humane letters without which our whole sense of proportion and perspective can weaken with disastrous human consequences as we have had every reason to learn in the course of our lifetimes.

Sir, those are purely preliminary observations. I don't profess, as I said at the beginning, that there is any novelty about them but I have found it interesting to bring a few of my own thoughts together in this fashion. I wish this congress great success. I can't imagine a better time at which to hold it. I can't imagine a more useful theme to discuss. Men are thinking about it all over the world. You can throw so much light on it in this conference that you will be able to provide that light in other countries around the globe.

I wish you every success. I now declare the Congress open.
