

YOUNG LIBERAL RALLY

HAWTHORN TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE, VIC.

21ST MAY, 1965

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

Sir and Young Liberals :

It is great fun for me to come here. It is thirty-six years ago, which is before most of the Young Liberals here were born, that I first stood for Parliament - you must treat me with respect; (Laughter) I am an old and doddering fellow - it is thirty-six years ago. (whistle blown) I couldn't even whistle like that. (Laughter) This was in the days when the Legislative Council was a distinguished body and I aspired to its membership. (Laughter) Having been in it for thirteen months, I left it - quite voluntarily. But the biggest meeting I had in the whole of that campaign was in the supper room at the Hawthorn Town Hall - I must tell the Mayor about that. There were fifty people there. That was the biggest meeting of fifty-six meetings I had in 1928 and the smallest meeting was four (Laughter) at the Glen Iris Bowling Green, and of the four, three were members of my committee. (Laughter) Now I tell you that because I think it may encourage you to realise that you may have small beginnings. You can't start off, you know, completely winning. I learned a lot in the course of that campaign.

Then about two years later, I sat down in my house with two other men, and we decided that there were too many of the old brigade who were running the Parliament, we really ought to do something about it. So we started the Young Nationalist Movement. I am telling you this because I would like you to realise that I have been young myself (Laughter) and nobody understands better how you feel than I do because we were a bit disgruntled and we said, "We will form the Young Nationalists." And we were terrific, tremendous. We made speeches at street corners. We received over-ripe tomatoes on our faces (Laughter) in the vicinity of the Prahran Market; an egg or two descended on us. It was really great fun. These were spirited days. (Laughter)

But because we knew what we were at, because we believed in things, because we had enthusiasm just as you have, at the very next election in Victoria, we came in with very little short of half the Members on our side of Parliament belonging to the Young Nationalist Movement. That's worthwhile remembering. Because however necessary it is to have people of experience and judgment and what-have-you, it is vital for any party to be refreshed constantly by young people who come in with their own ideas, with their own fervour, with their own determination to do something about the state of the nation. This is, believe me, the most important thing in the world. And so whatever I talk to you about tonight, you must understand that what I really ought to do is to say I move a vote of thanks to you, and that would be eloquent in its own way.

But what I really want to do is not to talk down to you as if I were educating you, as if I were patronising you because this is the last thing in the world I should ever dream of doing. I am talking to you as a veteran in politics, and I am talking to you as my successors in politics. I am talking

to you as people upon whom the future of our country in a political, and vastly important political sense, depends. And so I just want to talk to you about one or two matters as I would wish to talk to members of my own family, knowing that before long inevitably there will be great changes in leadership, in personnel, but that inevitably there will be a growing need for people who believe in things and who know why they believe in them and who are determined to promote them. And this Young Liberal Movement whose tie I am wearing tonight is therefore, in my opinion, the heart and soul of our side of politics, and it is indeed the heart and soul of the future of the nation.

Now we have been having a good deal of discussion, a good deal of controversy (though it is sometimes difficult to discover exactly where somebody is in these matters), about the position of Australia internationally. There are people, some of them of eminent respectability, who keep on saying that we are all wrong, that our foreign policy, our approach to the rest of the world ought either to be one of peace at any price or, in the alternative, one in which we leave the responsibilities to other people. I have had considerable controversies about this matter myself, as the older among you will remember.

I had a correspondence - Epistles to the Bishops - (Laughter, Applause) and one advantage I had over the Apostle Paul was that when he wrote an Epistle to the Romans or the Corinthians or whatever it might be, as far as I know there was no reply. (Laughter) But I had replies. Well the problem was exhibited. I think it was clarified, and the more I think about it, the more I realise that this business really does and must give us furiously to think: What is it we believe in, what is it we stand for. Not as a section but as Australia, because I beg of you, never let it be said about the Liberal Party that it speaks for anybody except Australia - not for just some people, not just for a party, but for Australia. I sat down, knowing that I was coming here, and said to myself, "Well, now, this might be a good opportunity of doing a little quiet analysis, for the benefit of my younger colleagues, of our foreign policy and in particular our desires, our objectives in relation to the countries of Asia."

Now, of course, the first one which apparently needs to be stated frequently is that we desire to live at peace with all of these countries, with mutual understanding and assistance. Now this is true. We have some reason to be irritated, in fact that is a mild understatement, with the President of Indonesia, but we have continued to do everything in our power to maintain some friendly contacts with Indonesia. We have been criticised for some of them. Of course we want to live at peace. Nothing could be more terrifying for us than to think we might by erroneous judgments or foolish actions find ourselves in conflict with the whole of the people of Asia. Of course we don't want that. We don't want it for two reasons.

One is that there is no future in that kind of position and the other is that there is no sense in that position. We want to live at peace. We want to understand our neighbours. We go to great pains to see that we do. But at the same time, Sir, our next objective is that we are to defend our own security and that of our territories - I say "territories" because, technically, that is right - and

of all these people in Papua and New Guinea for whom we have assumed, in the eyes of the world, tremendous responsibilities.

I hope nobody will want to make us believe for half a minute that a defeated Australia, an enslaved Australia is the kind of Australia in which we would want our grandchildren - mine or yours or yours - to have to live. This is a matter of national security - preserving our integrity as a nation, preserving our own right to live our own lives according to our own standards.

Now these two things are not easily reconciled, are they? A desire to be on the best of terms with your neighbours and at the same time a resolute intention to defend the security of your own country. No reason why they shouldn't be reconcilable but for some of the events that we have been looking at recently. But we have recently been looking at events in South-East Asia which exhibit in the most practical terms the aggressive quality of world communism, and in particular the aggressive quality of Chinese communism because as the Russian communists have played it a little more and more softly, so have the Chinese communists emphasised more and more that they have no patience with peaceful co-existence, they are out for world domination.

These are not just phrases. These are demonstrated in the field. India knows all about it, because India has been invaded. Tibet knew all about it because Tibet was overrun. Laos knows a great deal about it because in that country the vexations, the conflicts in an attempt to create a peaceful government have been enormous and have by no means finished. And of course in Vietnam we have, day by day, a demonstration of the fact - and these facts can hardly be denied; I have not heard them seriously denied - that inside South Vietnam there are great pockets of what they call Viet Cong who are communists and who are out to overthrow the Government of South Vietnam by force, by terror, and who intend to convert South Vietnam into a communist community just like North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh. These are the simple, painful, horrible facts and this is all a matter of communist aggression.

These facts are not very well understood. I hope you will make them well understood. I have had to listen or read remarks from eminent people who don't seem to understand that these are the facts. It has been said to me, as you may recall, that it is really the fault of South Vietnam that there haven't been free elections in Vietnam. Now I ask you - free elections in Vietnam! Can you imagine a free election in a communist country? Did anybody seriously believe that there could be a free election in Ho Chi Minh's territory? And how would you like to have an election being organised and the ways and means worked out and the electoral act created if we at this very moment were having a civil war in our own country, with not a thousand or two of Viet Cong but with scores of thousands of Viet Cong grouped in centres, invading villages, masscring people, all done in the closest communion with the communist power from the North. To talk in this theoretical, academic way about free elections is really to ignore all the facts of life. There can be no freedom, or free election, or effective self-government in any country which is being torn asunder by aggression from outside and insurrection from within.

Therefore we, in Australia, have found ourselves compelled to face a problem which the United States of America with its immense power has also had to confront; What can we do to preserve the freedom of our Asian friends, to help them to remain outside communist control? Now this is a problem

that hasn't arisen all of a sudden. I want you all to remember that this Government which I have the honour to lead thought of all this quite a long time ago. We were one of the promoters of the South-East Asian Treaty, and the South-East Asian Treaty has been in existence ever since, and in it you have the United States, you have France (a rather hesitating partner at present), you have Great Britain, you have Australia and New Zealand, you have Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, and that treaty which set out to establish the proposition that we wanted to protect people's freedom, we wanted to draw a frontier against communist aggression in Asia has, I think, had considerable significance. Under that treaty, one of the protocol countries, as it was expressed, is South Vietnam, one of the countries an attack upon which the SEATO powers would regard as an attack upon them. And so the first reason why we are there - if you want to be technical about this matter - is that we bound ourselves by treaty to be there should the South Vietnam Government ask us to come, in just the same way as did the United States of America.

All right. Well how do we offer to protect, to do what we can to protect our friends - and I am talking about our Asian friends. Don't let people get away with the idea that this is a line between the Asian people and the Australian people or the American people. It's our Asian friends, it's the people of Vietnam, it's the people of Thailand, the people of Laos, the people of Malaysia - these are the people in South East Asia with whose freedom we are concerned, and in order to concern ourselves, we believe we have to do this in concert with our allies and, as I have just indicated, pursuant to our treaty obligations.

Now, in concert with our allies..... just think about what that means. Most astonishing business. I don't want to advertise it - though no doubt it will be well attended - but Sunday afternoon in the Richmond Town Hall there is to be a great meeting, a mighty protest against the Federal Government's decision to send Australian troops to fight in Vietnam. And to my intense astonishment among the speakers are Mr. Calwell (Laughter) and of course, Dr. Cairns. (Laughter) Now I said to my intense astonishment because I don't think quite honestly Calwell and Cairns agree on this matter at all (Laughter, Applause) but with our distinguished opponents in the Labor Party, a good deal depends on whether you are reading the first edition or the Late City because things happen in between, don't they?

Now, let us go back to the first edition on the 18th February of this year - I repeat, of this year - 18th February, the Federal Labor Party issued a statement on these matters. This was very good. The Executive had attended, a great deal was said to and fro - and I know who are the "to's" and who are the "fro's" (Laughter) - and then the statement came out. Could I read you three paragraphs of it, in a clear voice? (Shouts of "yes") :

"In its statement to the Security Council on February 7th, reporting the air strikes against military installations in the south of North Vietnam, America insisted that its object in South Vietnam, while resisting aggression, is to achieve a peaceful settlement maintained by the presence of international peace-keeping machinery and that it would not allow the situation to be changed by terror and violence.

"This statement of American purposes is unexceptionable "

Mark that - "unexceptionable". Although there are various interpretations of the English language, that doesn't seem to me to be very ambiguous. "Unexceptionable". This is what was said by the people who are going to invite people Sunday afternoon at Richmond to condemn the sending of troops to Vietnam. Well let's go on.

...."and the case for the American action of recent days, as based on the aim of shortening the war and achieving a negotiated settlement which would establish and maintain the rights of the South Vietnamese people, deserves sympathetic Australian understanding."

This is the best thing they ever said. (Laughter)

"At this moment, it seems clear that President Johnson is determined to limit the areas of American retaliation to the factors believed to be assisting the Viet Cong attacks."

Isn't that right? He has said so time after time.

Well, now what do they mean on Sunday by saying, "Yes, that's all right for the United States. We quite agree that the United States is justified in putting Americans in there or on the water - the Navy, the Army, the Air Force. This is all right. It is quite unexceptionable that they should do that in order to help to preserve the freedom of South Vietnam and the people of South Vietnam, but (and this is the appendix that will be produced on Sunday afternoon, let it be understood) that's good for the United States. It's not good for us. Not good for us. What we ought to be doing is to say to the United States - 'Look, it's your job. You do it. We'll give you a few kind words. We'll make an agreeable speech or two, but when it comes to the business, you understand it's for you.'"

Well, really, I am happy to say I know the American Administration very well and I know that we enjoy some repute with them because we don't say that kind of thing, because we have made it clear right through that although we, to a very large extent, depend when it comes to the last desperate thrust on American help and American power, we don't regard this as one-way traffic. When we executed the ANZUS pact with the United States, we didn't believe for a minute that this meant that America was to help us but that we were not to help America.

There is a great and continuing reciprocity about international engagements. We must never forget it. These are not one-sided things. You may be disposed, some people may be disposed to say, "Oh, yes, but we are a small country, what can we do? It's very little, and because it's very little, perhaps if we didn't do it, it wouldn't be noticed." Look, my friends, I remember the first time I ever made a speech to the American Congress. I've been a little bit lucky - or they have been unlucky - because I have made about four now, over the years. But the first time, I reminded them that in this century, they had become the greatest power in the world and that in the nineteenth century, Great Britain was the greatest power in the world, and in the nineteenth century when Great Britain, by her command of the sea, commanded the strategic position of the world, she was an unpopular country, hardly had a friend in Europe - delivered Europe from Napoleon, delivered Europe time

after time hardly a friend. In France, perfide Albion - the whole attitude of criticism of a great power, a powerful power, one that could help us. It's the old business, you know, the old business. Rich relatives and poor relations. (Laughter) Not too many thanks in the world. And she was unpopular.

I said all this to the American Congressmen, and I said, "In this century, you have the power and you are beginning to worry as to why people aren't more grateful to you for what you do, and you do wonderful things for the world. Forget about it. Don't think you are doing anything for public gratitude. Realise you are doing it because intrinsically it's the right thing to do, and if it comes to having a friend or two, well I now declare Australia to be your friend. We are quite small but even a small friend is better than none." (Laughter) (Cheers) And quite frankly, ladies and gentlemen, they have never forgotten that. I have been reminded of it every time I have been there since. I don't think they ever will because they realise that our policies in Australia have been policies of action up to our capacity for action and not just kind words.

Now all this adds up to something which is at the very heart of all this. Of course we want peace. We are not going to try to secure peace by appeasement or by surrender. I would have thought that the world by now would have discovered that there is no future in that. We want peace, a peace based on understanding, a peace based on a genuinely friendly approach, a peace based upon not exacerbating any little differences that may occur between us and any of our neighbours, but when it comes to the stage where there are hundreds of thousands of armed people engaged in war-like operations in Vietnam and the very frontier of freedom is in that country, then we must make up our minds that we are not just bystanders.

This is not only the freedom of South Vietnam, it is our freedom. It is the freedom of all countries in this part of the world that is involved, and therefore we say, and I am sure you agree with us, we are not appeasing, we are not retreating, we are not going to subscribe to any foolish view that the right way to solve the South Vietnam problem is for the Americans to desert South Vietnam and for us to go out with them. What fantasy! You settle an argument with communism, aggressive communism, by yielding at the field and delivering millions of people into its clutches. This is not the Australian spirit, and it is because I have never doubted as to where the Australian people stand on this matter that from first to last we have said what we have said and have done what we said.

Now, time marches on and my years are not illimitable and yours are to come. It may be in theory that when you have come into your estate, politically, it may be thought that we were wrong. I hope it won't be. But when you have come into your estate, I hope that you will have concluded in your own time that there are some things in life for which you must stand, for which you must battle, in which you must believe, whatever the dogs are barking. This is the secret of liberalism. It is in your hands.
