

AUSTRALIAN TEXTILE EXPOSITION BANQUET

HOTEL REX-AT-CANBERRA, CANBERRA.

29TH SEPTEMBER, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies.

Sir Robert and Lady Webster and all the rest of you :

I want to tell you in the first place that these pieces of fabric, precariously woven, are warmly received. That is the hunting tartan in what is called in Scotland the old vegetable dye, (Laughter) which only goes to show that even Webster can be up to date occasionally, (Laughter) (Applause)

And in the second place, I would like to tell you this. I am about to open this Exposition and therefore all this is relevant, you see. I said I must tell you that I was born a son of a father who was even more violently protectionist than Bob Webster (Laughter) and I leave it to you to understand what that means. From my earliest days, he used to look at me before I ever knew what protection and free trade meant and say, "Robert, understand" and, of course, if I didn't understand..... at any rate, as I have since demonstrated in politics, I pretended to understand. (Laughter) But, really, when I look back on the old man, I think he was a softie (Laughter) compared to you. And, therefore, here we are, my wife..... oh, well, her late father, whom some of you knew, he was on the Council of the Chamber of Manufactures. He was the kind of man who could talk to Anderson (Laughter) on equal terms (Laughter), and here am I, the son of my old man. Therefore we perhaps have, by derivation, Sir, the right to be here. (Applause)

But I am bound to say, and I think honesty requires this, that although I have known and admired Sir Robert Webster for many years and have sometimes been at the biting end of his tongue, until tonight I had never understood the function of psychologists in industry (Laughter). But tonight I have been sitting next to his charming wife who has, for the first time in my life, explained what psychologists do (Laughter) and what their function is in industry, because I learned a bit of psychology myself once.

I want you to understand that although having gone into other fields, I am no longer an intellectual, I was once. (Laughter) I always remember the late Boyce Gibson, father of the present Professor, beginning a series of lectures to us when I was an undergraduate, by saying - and he had a little tongue-tied way of speaking - a charming man, he was a marvellous man, but he said, "Man is an anthropoid with relatively large cewebwal hemispheres." (Laughter) I have never forgotten that. (Laughter) And every time my highly literate opponents say to me something rude, I say to myself, "It's all right, Menzies. You are an anthropoid, with relatively large cerebral hemispheres." (Laughter) What it means, I wouldn't be dogmatic about that. (Laughter) But I like it.

Now, it is a very good thing that in this great Exposition that the man in charge should be Sir Robert Webster because, really, we have our bit of fun, we have arguments about this and that, but if ever there was a man in the commercial and industrial history of Australia who stood for what we could do in Australia and how we could do it, it's Bob Webster. (Hear, hear) (Applause) Now, it is revealing no secret to you who never read the newspapers that I am, on my last birthday, 70, and therefore I am not only entitled to a pension but I am, you know what the boys at Parliament House say, not a bad old chap. (Laughter) And so I am an old chap, and in my lifetime - born in the bush, born in a little country town, going to school in

Ballarat, going to school in Melbourne - I have seen, without always being conscious of it, the history of the textile industry of Australia - never quite conscious, but when I was a small boy, you might here and there encounter a woollen mill, that was it. Then later on when I was a schoolboy and growing up a little, there were clothing factories and a few woollen mills. In my own time - I want all of you who are younger, much younger than I am, to think about this because this will give you an excitement in your mind about this marvellous country of ours. Here am I, the little boy at school, and there is a woollen mill somewhere in Ballarat. Here am I, the little boy at school, who goes to see the first moving picture show on the Ballarat East oval. Here am I, a little boy, who in his little bush village in the country sees the first motor vehicle ever to come into the country. You know, you are all so kind to me that you don't realise how venerable I am (Laughter) Not worthy of veneration, but venerable, because in my own lifetime I have seen the beginning and the development and the growth of most of the great things that we now take for granted, don't we, in our lives, from motor cars to aircraft, television, before that broadcasting.

Broadcasting. Do you mind me telling you that when by some strange chance I became Prime Minister of this country - only twentysix years ago (Laughter) - in 1939, I went to do a little broadcast and I came back to the Lodge and there was my wife, faithful as always. And the dear girl, she was sitting there and wondering, you see, and then broadcasting was on, and I was doing a broadcast, and I turned to her and I said, because I rather approved of what this chap was saying, I said, "Who is that?" And she said, "That's you" (Laughter) That was the first time I had ever heard myself. I didn't believe it then and I still don't believe it, when I hear it.

But this is a mere scrappy way of saying that we, half of us here tonight, have lived in a period in which there have been the most tremendous developments, and so I go back to what I began by saying..... We began with a woollen mill or two, and then we had cotton and then we had man-made fibres. We started off with growing, with manufacturing, with processing, with weaving, with fabric, with clothing, with dyeing, with printing. It's little wonder that Sir Robert has tonight told us that here is a massive industry in Australia which employs 74,000. It's little wonder this has become one of the very great industries in Australia. And, of course, this has involved all sorts of things - primary production.

We are not to think about the woolgrower, the cotton-grower, whoever-it-may-be grower in Australia as if he were quite separate. He is part of the great textile industry. We are not to think of manufacturing efficiency as if it related only to that phase of the work that is to be done - it is a very important phase, but is part of the phase. We are not to think of promotion - that's a blessed word "promotion". It's wonderful, you admire people who do it. Anyhow, we are not to think of promotion, of encouraging people to buy as if this were completely detached from everything else, because in reality, the man who grows the fibre, whether it is wool or cotton, the man who manufactures the fibre, whether this is nylon or whatever it may be, the man who assembles it into some form, the man who designs it, puts it into form and sells it, these are all people who are involved in the great textile industry. (Hear, hear) This is really perhaps the most significant though obvious thing that I want to say to you.

Now I know, Sir, that in modern times where people are all engaged in politics, where they all know why they are right and why the other fellow is wrong, I am old enough to belong

to a generation in which I think on the whole I am right but that perhaps I might be wrong. This argues a degree of wisdom that will come strangely to some of you. (Laughter) But it's true. It's true. There is nothing all black or all white. A few years ago, I was a little worried because although I wear wool rather more than the average human being (Laughter), I never was quite able to persuade myself that you had to wear a woollen handkerchief or a woollen tie or a woollen shirt - otherwise you were a traitor to your country. I still don't believe it.

The truth is that as every married man here tonight knows, the secret of happiness in life is a good marriage. (Hear, hear) (Applause) And therefore I have always believed that in the long run wool, man-made fibres, all these things would be married together to the greater enjoyment of mankind. (Applause) I think that any man who is engaged in the production of man-made fibres - to use this revolting expression (Laughter) - any man who is engaged in that production who said, "I hate wool" would be a fool. He would. And any man who is engaged in the production and processing of wool who said, "I can't bear the thought of man-made fibres," he would be a fool, because in the long run, it is marriage that will solve this problem. This is so true.

You look back over the whole history of mankind, over the whole history of our race, do you suppose that without some intermarriage, we would have amounted to very much? Do you suppose that if the Anglo-Saxons had said, "Anglo-Saxons we are, and out with the rest of them," we would have been the magnificent people that we are? (Laughter) Do you think of what would have happened if the Anglo-Saxons had ignored the demands of the Scots (Laughter) (Applause) The truth is - and I say this quite seriously - that in the long run, the future of fibres, the natural fibres of wool, the man-made fibres will depend very largely on how far they both realise that if they act together, there is a bigger and brighter future for both of them. (Hear, hear) And it is because I believe that - I haven't consulted the Department of..... you know.... I haven't discussed that (Laughter) I know, I am always making some indiscreet remarks. I believe this, partly because I believe that the future of wool is vital to Australia and partly because I believe that the future of wool is involved in this kind of marriage that I have been talking about. Now, that is all I want to say on that point. By the time I have been reported on this matter, I won't know what it was I said. (Laughter)

I just want to say a few words on another aspect of this matter. It's a very great mistake, Sir, for your industry or for the wool industry or for any other industry to think that it will sell its products by the Divine Grace of the Almighty. It won't. It has to sell them, and to sell any commodity in the world today, you must pay enormous attention to design, to quality, to presentation, to design. This, Sir, I venture to say, is a matter to which we have devoted rather too little attention in Australia. A little bit inclined, aren't we, to say, "Oh, well, you know, it's wool, it's good, it's fine quality, it's got all the things in the world. Whether it looks a little unpleasant, that doesn't matter." Design, design is the whole background of salesmanship, just as my wife occasionally reminds me that a capacity to produce the goods behind the presentation is equally important. Something, I hope, we will not forget.

The other day I was looking at the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, of which for some reason understandable only to the Almighty, I am a Fellow (Laughter) and every now and then the Royal Society has a symposium of people who discuss certain topics. The other day they had a great symposium on design with Prince Philip in the chair, and when I picked this out of my mail basket and glanced through it, I reminded myself of a time when I - oh, many years ago before the time of half of you - I was in England on a Parliamentary Association visit. You know how onerous that can be.

We went to Kidderminster, and I was Attorney-General of Australia at that time so I was in charge. The Manager of the Kidderminster carpet factory we were visiting, he didn't know who we were and I am bound to say in his favour he couldn't have cared less. (Laughter) And we went along to a large display room, oh many times the size of this. We saw some lovely carpets and then not quite so lovely carpets and then some good carpets but not quite so lovely, and when we got to the far end, we came across a floor full of carpets of the most horrible description. You will all understand me when I say they were all orange and black flecks, you know. They were terrible. And in my then innocence - this was many years ago (Laughter) - I said, "But, Sir, would anybody buy such revolting carpets as these? And he looked at me and said, deadpan, "Oh, no, we make these for the Australian market". And I am bound to tell you that I thought he was having me on, you see, until the next time I went to a provincial town in Victoria - I won't name it - and had to stay overnight and there was the very carpet on the floor. Well, it was no doubt having this kind of thing in mind that the Royal Society of Arts decided to have a discussion about design and I don't apologise for mentioning design because design in the textile trade will sell more than any individual salesman. (Hear, hear)

It is a fundamental error to think that most people have bad taste. Some have bad taste but in the long run, you must cater for people who have taste. When we do this constantly, then I see no limit to the textile trade in Australia, but at this Conference, they had a series of people.....I read this only yesterday, that's why I have it so much in mind..... with Prince Philip in the chair, and they gave a few medals to people. Do we give medals, Gordon, to people for good design? Well, we ought to. (Laughter) Make a note of that, Mr. Carmody. Then each man who received a medal had to make a speech. A more revolting exercise you can't imagine. But one of them who received the medal was the managing director of a world famous whiskey and gin firm.

Now, I say nothing to all our wives who don't understand about whiskey and gin (Laughter) but it wasn't easy, was it, to associate in one's mind the idea of selling whiskey and gin and what-have-you with design. And yet, of course, this man was able to establish quite clearly that they had paid a great deal of attention to the problem of how they presented their goods to the world, and I made a note of one thing that he said. Might I read it to you, bearing in mind that this is a man who was the managing director of a firm that sells spirits but is equally applicable to every man here tonight who is in the textile trade. He was talking about the head of a business and he said, "He will happily plough revenue into technical research, into capital reserves, into the shareholders' pockets, into splendid staff welfare schemes, but into the appearance, taste, function and elegance of the article on which this part of his commodity empire is to be founded, still I fear, all too rarely." Something in that, isn't there.

I am an immeasurable believer in the textile industry in Australia. I don't have to be converted by my friend, Sir Robert, but I think that in the long run, the permanence of any industry will largely depend on how far it compels the taste and judgment of the people of the country, and in textiles above all things, there must be superb quality or there must be a mere wretched dependence on what some government may do or on what some tariff board may do.

And this is tremendously important because as you have been reminded here is an industry that employs in the direct sense, 74,000 people in our country. In other words, supports in a full sense a quarter of a million, an industry which has done more for decentralisation than any other that we know of an industry which employs more female labour than any other industry we know of. This industry, viewing it broadly, has tremendous claims on Australia. It can't support them merely by saying, "You must help us". It can support them best by saying, "We will help you. We will help the country because we are prepared to say that we will let everybody understand that what we do has great design and great quality and will be bought on its merits."

Do you see what I mean? I hope you do because great believer as I am and faithful as I am to the memory of my father who would have murdered me if he thought I were not a protectionist, as indeed I am, but in the long run, the whole purpose of a tariff, the whole purpose of protection is to give you a first-class opportunity of seizing the market; but whether you hold the market, having seized it, will be up to you.

Sir, it seems an odd thing to do at a dinner party, but I declare this Exposition open.
