

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF
AUSTRALIA, TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY
HOTEL CANBERRA, CANBERRA.

8TH NOVEMBER, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

Sir,

I think I ought not to begin to make a speech on our anniversary, on our twenty-first birthday, without saying something about my wife, (hear, hear) (applause) because not only for twenty-one years, but for twenty-four, for twenty-seven, forwell, whatever you say, dear, she has been alongside of me and every time I have come back and said, "Oh, no, I can't stand it any longer", she has said, "Well, give it another go," and so, Pat, I want to say to you on this great honorific occasion that this dinner ought to be in your honour and not mine.

You know, tonight I am going to exert the privilege of an old man and be a little reminiscent. Do you mind that? I think a little reminiscence doesn't come amiss. I was looking around this afternoon at the meeting of the Council and looking at a young boy like Andrew Peacock, and I sent around a special emissary to say, "How old is Andrew?" and the answer came back - I hope correctly - he's 26. That means that when we had our meetings in 1944 in Canberra and at Albury - falsely called Owlbury by some people - that goes for West Australia but not for New South Wales; that means that at that time, young Andrew was five years old, if not actually mewling and puking, at any rate near enough (Laughter) to give an air of verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative. Five years old. Think of it. Would you mind standing up, Andrew? (Applause) Almost in the cradle when this began. I think this is fascinating; it's marvellous, and I was reminded of it today when as a result of a move to which I lent such venerable support as I have, the Young Liberals were here today speaking quite freely and voting quite freely, I though, "Isn't this wonderful?" because, old man as I am, I will never forget that it is the young men and young women who represent the future of our party. (Hear, hear) (Applause)

Since 1944, about which I will say a word in a moment, we have had many presidents - I will not be giving out a list of names - but we have had many presidents, we have had State secretaries, we have had all sorts of marvellous people who have worked for our party, and among them all I would like to mention here and now Bob Willoughby. (Applause) A tiresome fellow who occasionally tells me where I get off or where I get on, but we will never sufficiently understand the people we have had both here and in the State Departments, the State Divisions - people like my friend John Carrick and McConnell and all the rest - we will never fully understand how vastly important they have been to this party, to this organisation and to the future of this side of politics.

Well, having said that I want to tell you that back in 1943 I had a problem. Might I tell you, being a reminiscent old boy, as to what had happened? In 1941, I was - believe it or not - Prime Minister, and in 1941, believe it or not, I was made to understand that it would be of advantage if I resigned from being Prime Minister. So being the instant obedient of views, I said, "All right", and I did and so I went out and then for a few weeks another government was in control and then at the end of that time, in about August or September of 1941, we were beaten

...../2

by the Labor Party. That produced at once a problem. I'm sure that all of you who have ever gone through this painful experience will understand it perfectly perhaps to be something different, and so I had a meeting of my party.

We were then a rather, well, smallish majority and we had a meeting and then not all my colleagues but some of them said to me, "Well, you know, we think you ought not to be the Leader of the Opposition, though we were much the greatest party in Opposition. And then I propounded a view for which I make no apology which was that a party which is unwilling to lead is not worth leading. I mention this tonight because I think it is something that may perhaps in the future be thought of a little: A party that is unwilling to lead is not worth leading. And so I resigned, and from 1941 to 1943, I sat in the Opposition corner, just about where Jim Cope sits today or words to that effect, do you see? This was very interesting. There I sat.

I wasn't on the Executive Committee when the next election came round. I didn't know what was in the programme. I hadn't been told. I hadn't been asked. And I mention this because there are a few people who think that I was leading the Opposition at the 1943 election. I wasn't. I was over there in the corner. And they had an election and of course being what I am, I went all round Australia. I was counted out and had things chucked at me, but I wasn't the leader of anything except myself, and so we were beaten, and having been beaten we came back. 1943. And that was when the road back began.

Now I want to say this to all of you, all of you great, strong Liberals - that was when the road back began, because after the 1943 election, some of my colleagues came to me and said, "Would you care to be Leader of the party?" and I said with my usual humbleness, "All right". (Laughter) "I don't mind, but I must be the Leader of the Opposition, which had been denied in 1941, and I must above all things have the right, the clear right, to develop a new party to agglomerate the whole of our opposition in Australia." My colleagues having had a severe battering in the 1943 election, strangely enough said, "Yes, that's O.K. We'll see to that." So it was agreed.

Now I don't know whether you all realise - of course the older among you realise this perfectly - but I have been looking around among the young to whom I attach all the importance in the world for the future - do you realise that after that election when our side of politics had the biggest thrashing it ever had, we had fourteen different political organisations in Australia - fourteen. Bill Anderson who took a great part in this matter, he ran a thing called the....Services and Citizens was it, Bill? Look, we had fourteen different organisations over the whole of Australia and the great thing was to bring them together and have one because unless we had one we were not only out in 1943, we were out forever.

And so I sat back in my box, being then a very humble Leader of the Opposition. These were the days when a Leader of the Opposition drew a private member's pay and had an allowance of £300 a year and lost and lost and lost year by year, and I had the great good fortune to have with me a woman who is here tonight - Eileen Lenihan and she had with her Miss Wilkinson whom some of you know (Applause). In my brash innocence, I said, "All right. Now I am going to have one party in this country" and we got to work. I did what I am always pleased to credit myself with, the brainwork, you know. There were fourteen organisations - "Well write to them. They'll write to me." Oh, I had great assistance - Bill

Anderson, he conducted one of the most lively of these factional groups. He was all on my side. And, look, forgetting all names, in 1944, in that rather revolting building - you know what I mean, don't you Jock - you know, that thing. Anyhow it was that building that looks flat on the top. We had a meeting and we had a great argument - fourteen different organisations. This was really the most incredible affair in the world, and the fourteen met. We had great arguments. I even had a great argument with Tom Playford - where's Tom? Even had a great argument with Tom, but in the long run, we agreed that instead of being fourteen, we ought to be one. Now this was a remarkable achievement, and it happened.

And so we were agreed that we would have a meeting at Albury, fondly called Owlbury by McBride. It's like Freeth who always insists on Albany being called Owlbany. Anyhow, it was Albury and we had another great conference, and being what I am, I sat down and wrote out in my own unfair hand a constitution and a platform. At this stage, young Bob Willoughby, he came to work. He's a tiresome fellow, you know, who has the signal dishonour of devoting the whole of his adult life to the service of our party, and he got to work on it too. Anyhow, the constitution and the platform. And of course they were both altered; in my recollection, both to the worse, and before 1944 was out, there was a new party, the Liberal Party of Australia, which had begun to ring the bell all around the world.

Now I wouldn't want you to believe that there were no problems to be solved. There were great problems to be solved. One of the very first was this, that in my earlier days in politics and in the earlier days of perhaps nobody else, anyhow mine, we had financial bodies which raised the money, which told the party organisation what to do. In Melbourne the National Union; in Sydney, (thank God, it was under the control of a very wise and great man, the late Sir Charles Lloyd Jones), the Consultative Council. And the first thing that we had to determine in Albury was whether we would continue to be a party organisation, financed by other people and therefore to that extent controlled by other people, or whether we would raise our own money, raise our own funds and be in command of our own resources. And the first great decision made by the Liberal Party of Australia was: We will raise our own funds, we will control our own funds, and ever since then, nobody has ever been able to say that we were doing what some moneyed fellows wanted us to do. (Applause)

And the second thing that happened was that we had to determine whether the platform of the party and the policy of the party should be under the control of the organisation. Now, this was a very great issue, and I want you all to remember this because as the first draftsman of the platform of the party, I had a very clear idea that nothing should happen that commanded the people who were in Parliament. In other words, by a sheer stroke of luck, I anticipated the idea that if the people in Parliament were told what they were to say, then there would be the thirty-six faceless men. And this, believe me, is one of our great strokes of fortune. Nobody has ever been able to say that about us - "the thirty-six faceless men" because we have from beginning to end said, "The platform, the broad principles on which we live, of course we announce them, of course we do, of course we publish them, but when it comes to an election policy then we pay regard to our leaders, to the Parliamentary Members. We must not have them put in the position of being told what they are to say in amplification of the platform, in pursuance of the platform, in the policy that they pronounce." And therefore we very early established a system in which a proper status was organised for the Australian Parliamentary leaders and party instead of subordination. That's very important. And this enabled us long afterwards to attack effectively the thirty-six faceless men.

Now having said that, may I go back a little. You see, 1943, we lost, we were thrashed; 1944 we created the new party; 1946 we had some victories, some, not many, and after the 1946 election, all round the club rooms in Sydney, Melbourne, even Adelaide, they began to say, "Oh, you can never win with Menzies." This is worth remembering....."You can never win with Menzies". And they had all sorts of ideas, quite prolific ideas, as to who ought to do the job, and nobody could agree with anybody else, and so poor old Menzies he was still there for the 1949 elections.

And in the 1949 elections, look, we had the most enormous growth, we had the most marvellous enthusiasm, reaching a pitch that had never been approached before. We had enlisted a remarkable and young set of candidates and we had developed an issue. I don't know that we are entitled to all the credit for the issue, but we had developed one - socialism, which up to that time had been a sort of academic idea - you know, a sort of debating society idea, and which was then taken out of the realm of academic debate, thank Heaven, by the Chifley Government which had reduced it to terms in the Air Services and in banking - airlines and banking. And this enabled us in 1948/1949 to concentrate the public attention on socialism as perhaps we could never have concentrated it before, and so we won in spite of Menzies.

Then of course since then we have had victories in 1951 and 1954 and 1955 and 1958 and 1961 and 1963, in spite of the old man. This, I think, is rather fascinating. But it is one thing to say we have won seven consecutive elections. It is quite another thing to say, "Why have we? What have we done?"

Now this is really the No. 1 question: "Why have we?" and the only answer to that is to say, "Well, what have we done?" I know it is commonplace to say, "Oh, you know, his opponents have made errors." I don't doubt that. I've usually watched for them. Suppose our opponents have made errors, what have we done in the last sixteen years to justify going to the country and saying, "We want another term." Now this is the great question. You can't live on the past. And so I have been saying to myself, "Well, now, what have we done? What have we done in the last sixteen years to give us what I believe to be true, an unrivalled reputation all round the world." This is true. What have we done?

Well, in international affairs, we started off with the Colombo Plan. That was ours, you know. Never forget that. The Colombo Plan, the plan under which Australia and twenty countries have lent their aid to people in the Eastern world. ANZUS. I remember being taken apart by dear old Winston in

London, because he said, "You know, you have forgotten us." And I said, "No, not at all. ANZUS - Australia and New Zealand and the United States. And if anybody who is concerned with the history of our time who is not bemused by being an intellectual will just think a little, he will realise that the ANZUS Pact meant so much to us in Australia and to our security and to the security of our children and our grandchildren - this is out of the world, the ANZUS Pact, and the Americans understand it in exactly the same way as we do.

And then there was another achievement of ours, the SEATO Treaty - the South East Asian Treaty organization. Well, now you know, all sorts of people they are very clever, they understand that this doesn't mean a thing. Doesn't it mean a thing? You know, Dean Rusk himself being challenged as to why the Americans were in South Viet Nam, said, "The SEATO Treaty". This is right. He is there, the United States is there, our people are there, many other people are there because this great treaty was designed and consummated. It is a treaty against communist aggression. So therefore SEATO is a wonderful thing.

Then apart from all these things, well, look, I would weary you if I tried to explain to you how our trusteeship has been performed. Defence. Some of you heard my colleague this afternoon on the subject of defence. Defence. Would you have supposed five years ago that Australia would be doing so much in defence as it is now? No, not a bit. Defence has been one of the great things, the development of resources. You know, it is always easy for people to say, "Oh, well, of course, you know, you just want to leave things alone." We don't want to leave things alone. If I were to say to my colleague, my distinguished Liberal colleague, David Fairbairn, "Tell us about development in Australia; tell us about uranium, tell us about bauxite, tell us about all these things", the whole story would be so tremendous, somebody would be bound to say, "Yes, but what is the Government doing about it?" This is true.

If we were to talk about.....I look across there and I see Oppy.....talk about Immigration. Immigration. This is the most fabulous story in the world and this has been going year after year. Somebody then is heard to say, "Well, of course you couldn't do these things without capital from overseas," to which I reply, "Why not?" Believe me, all these remarkable things that have happened in Australia are happening because we have money and we have manpower and they marry together. Now Immigration has produced a great deal of the manpower and the money has been produced time after time by investment from overseas. And for people to say, "We don't want it. We don't want investment from overseas" is almost as if they said, "We don't want people from overseas." Really, ladies and gentlemen, this whole problem, this whole tremendous earth-shaking problem from our point of view is one which requires the marriage of money, of people, of enterprise, and one of the great fortunes of your Government in all these years has been to say something and do something about the marriage of all these developments so that this marvellous country of ours can proceed.

Now that is all I want to say except one thing. I mentioned earlier one or two of my younger colleagues in this conference. You know, many years ago I was one of the founders of the Young Nationalist Organisation in Australia and later on, I saw this and did this and did this.

Look, the future of this country doesn't belong to you of my generation or to others of my generation. It belongs to

the young ones of this generation. (Hear, hear) (Applause)
It's not just funny for me to think of somebody as I mentioned
earlier who was five years old when this movement began. This
is tremendously important. People like me - I will be 71 next
December - people like me are not to be regarded as eternally
in charge of an organisation or a great movement. What is
needed is that all of us should understand that it is the young
who not only have the responsibility for the future but who must
have the authority for the future. Now this is tremendously
important, tremendously important.

Oh dear, if I could only sit down carefully and write
my benediction to my successors, I would indeed be happy, and
I want to say to all of the young who are here tonight: This
is your job. The future is not only within your power but
within your responsibility, and so far as we are concerned,
my wife and myself, we hope to live long enough to realise how
well you are doing your job and how much you are doing for
Australia.
