

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

PADDINGTON TOWN HALL, SYDNEY

20TH AUGUST, 1966

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is for me a very happy and stirring occasion because I come to you both as the present Head of the Australian Government and also, as our Chairman has reminded you, as the former Minister, who can regard himself in a sense as the godfather of many of you in this room tonight.

I have had now, many years of service as the head of a Department in an Australian Government, altogether, I suppose, about 18 or 19 years. Seven of those years were spent with the portfolio of Immigration and I don't recall any time in my public life which gave me a warmer and richer sense of satisfaction than those years I spent as Minister of that portfolio, helping to build the Australian nation that is progressing year by year into the promising future that awaits us.

Now this function tonight is, I think, a very happy expression of the blending into the Australian community life of the traditions, the customs, the cherished recollections of many nationalities who have come to settle in this country. I know that for the Hungarian people, the celebration of St. Stephen's Day is an occasion of great significance, an occasion of intimate recollection, perhaps even nostalgic recollection of the history of a people who have contributed so much in the history of mankind to the development of the human personality.

Although many of you today are fully Australian, both in the legal sense and in the sense of the full adoption of your new country, we can think of you for the purposes of our gathering here tonight as the Hungarian community in Australia. And here you are recollecting the things that help to build character and personality - hope in the years that were with you before and in the years that are with you in your adopted homeland.

Now one could imagine that in a less favourable environment a national community such as the Hungarians might have wanted to conduct an occasion such as this exclusively to themselves, but it is a mark of your own feeling of Australian citizenship that you gladly welcome into this gathering the head of the Australian Government, other Parliamentary representatives and many Australian friends. Now we appreciate this.

You may recall, some of you, that several years ago, as Minister for Immigration, I was at a gathering at which the Hungarians were represented and the other national groups in the community life of Sydney, and I said then that they must not imagine that we Australians of native birth in any way resented the fact that the national groups should maintain their customs and their traditions, sing the songs of their country, and preserve those things which they cherish from their former homeland. Now we meant that, and I remember illustrating that comment with a reference to the Scots in Australia, and no-one could wear weirder costumes than the Scots. Certainly no-one could play weirder music than the Scots and yet Australians had managed to tolerate them very satisfactorily for many years.

The Hungarians, of course, have their own special attributes. I was told many years ago that the most beautiful women ... /2

in the world came from Hungary. (Applause) I don't want to lose too many Australian votes by saying that the Aussie girls can't match the Hungarian girls, but I am quite certain that we have lost nothing from your presence as a continuing element in our midst.

Now it is a stirring thought, ladies and gentlemen, that in the Australia of today, one in every five is either a migrant of the post-war period or a child born to migrant parents. Indeed, if you take the younger age groups in this country, one in every four is a migrant of this post-war period. One in every four in employment in our manufacturing industry. One in five of the work force of the nation. This constitutes a very considerable addition to our national strength, but also in subtle and sometimes undiscernible ways, personalities, the traditions and habits of life of those who have come to join us are making their impact on the life of the Australian people. I speak as a fourth generation Australian when I say I think it is a very much pleasanter life that we enjoy today because of the variety that has been brought to us by so many national groups who have come to join our community in these post-war years.

In that influence, the music, the culture, the science and the skills of the Hungarian people have also made a significant contribution.

Tonight you celebrate an influence in your lives which has been something moulding character, something which has served as an inspiration over the centuries for the Hungarian people in order to preserve an identity, an identity through centuries of domination; whether that domination lasted for a short or long period of time, it has sought at times to crush the spirit of the Hungarian people and their own traditions. And yet such has been the strength of character, the toughness of fibre of the people of Hungary that you have preserved that entity and the traditions which you are cherishing here tonight.

We, your fellow Australians, can rejoice with you in an occasion which is moving to you and because of that becomes significant for us. The things which St. Stephen worked for and brought into your country are to be found in their own form in this country of ours. He was a great statesman, a great reformer. He was devoted to his people. He gave them a religious fervour and faith which has withstood the test of pressures through the centuries. It is proper that the memory of this great man, influencing the development of your national history should be honoured in this way. We in Australia can't point, in the life of our own country, to centuries of history and tradition. Those of us who come of British stock, even if we are removed, as I am, by three generations as a fourth generation Australian, we still have a heritage which has shaped the institutions of this country, and I believe that you, too, have come to appreciate that democratic heritage.

Here you can breathe the air of freedom. Here you can find opportunity. Here you have found the incentive which has enabled you to build a life, a prosperous life, a happy life, a secure life in the community of Australian people. Because you and we cherish that spirit of freedom, we are determined to play our part in its preservation, either inside our own country, or if the challenge comes outside our shores. The Australian people in two world wars fought on European soil and suffered nearly half a million casualties in the cause of freedom. So it is not surprising that at this time Australian men, some of them of Hungarian origin, are now in Viet Nam, fighting again for the cause.

Freedom extends to our institutions. We can point to free elections. We can point to a free press. But we must always remember that freedom is never free in the sense that freedom can be preserved without cost. And some of you in this room tonight fought a battle for

freedom, and you went into exile from your own country only when it was clear that if you did not, freedom could not be preserved.

I remember very vividly in 1957 going in Austria to the border and watching the points across which there were still many Hungarians coming. I went to the camps in which there were still many Hungarian refugees seeking a new homeland, and it was as the result of the arrangements that we were then able to make that some 14,000 of you came to this country. And what was Hungary's loss became Australia's gain.

You have shown a high sense of responsibility in the country of your adoption. I don't think I know any national group which has a higher proportion of its settlers taking up naturalisation inside Australia. I have had through my time as Prime Minister, and then through the years, the longer years as Minister for Immigration, no cause that I can recall to regret, through any episode which has occurred, that we should have welcomed so many of you here. You have done well, you have behaved as responsible, contributing citizens to Australian causes and we value your presence with us.

The ideals which St. Stephen gave you, you have cherished with us and they have contributed to our own Australian way of life, and it is the hope of myself and my colleagues that over the years ahead you will continue to find happiness with us, that your prosperity will march with the prosperity of the Australian nation. A great Australian Governor-General in the person of Viscount Slim, whom some of you will remember, wrote to me recently and said, "What a fascinating time to be Prime Minister of Australia" and what a fascinating time to be part of Australia, part of its growth, part of its promise, part of the years, the shining years which we see ahead of us, because we have every confidence that given freedom from war, given opportunities for the development of our national resources, this country will become one of the leading nations of the world.

We have no wish to lead or to be in the rating of leadership or amongst the leading nations simply for selfish ends. We know that left to ourselves, we can build a life a happy life, but there are responsibilities, and we haven't shrunk from them whether in the military field or in the field of international aid, and perhaps the events of the past few days in Viet Nam are symbolic of the Australia of the future. Brave men serving their country with devotion, skill and courage, and helping to build the greater Australia of the years ahead.

Now in that growth and greatness, your community will be playing its part. It will be helping us with the variety which comes from centuries of culture in which we have had no part, but you can become part and your traditions can become part of that Australian nation made up of people of many nationalities. I believe we have succeeded in avoiding some of the problems and errors which developed inside the United States. We studied what had happened with their migration programme and we applied those lessons in the development of our own. So it is that we have had far fewer social problems, far fewer national frictions. Indeed, with a Good Neighbour Movement joining in the work of integration, we have had an experience which has proved itself to be the greatest peace-time achievement of the Australian people. You are part of our success and tonight we salute you for the way in which you have joined with us and become an integral part of an Australian family.

I wish you all happiness in the years ahead and together may we go on to build the Australia to which we all aspire.