

PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA 1966

LUNCHEON AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE,  
CANBERRA

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

21ST OCTOBER, 1966

Mr. President and Mrs. Johnson, Honourable Premiers, Ministerial Colleagues, Your Excellencies, Parliamentary Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen :

Yesterday I was privileged to express on behalf of the Government and people of Australia a warm welcome to our distinguished visitors, the President and Mrs. Johnson. Today we bring to that welcome the National Parliament of Australia and those distinguished guests who are here with us. And joining together in expressing that welcome are the Leaders of the three principal parties represented in the Parliament.

Government and Opposition may differ on many things but this is one of those occasions, too rare perhaps, but welcome when it comes, when we can unite in harmonious agreement as to the subject of our discussion. You will find, Mr. President, as you travel throughout Australia that the warmth of welcome I have expressed is echoed and reaffirmed wherever you travel in this country.

The first visit of an American President to Australia could not fail to be an auspicious occasion, a distinctive occasion, and also a happy occasion. A happy occasion because our two countries have enjoyed a close friendship for many years, a friendship which radiates throughout both our communities as I have discovered wherever I have travelled in your own. And I know that Americans coming either as visitors or to stay in Australia for short or long periods find themselves quickly on a wavelength with us and speak in warm and even affectionate terms about us, and this is as it should be. And it is not surprising that this should be so because we are inheritors in common of so much, as I am sure you will agree, Mr. President.

Even in the words of the grace which I uttered earlier this afternoon, you get an expression of our common devotion to liberty, to freedom, to independence in our own communities and an urge to help others obtain and secure and maintain the independence to which they aspire.

We have a common language. We don't always speak it in the same manner, but the differences that are discoverable between us, I think are less than some of the differences we discover in our own community. We are just saying farewell, Sir, here to one Member of the Parliament who didn't speak very often. It was said he didn't do so because he required an interpreter when he did. He is a Scotsman'. But he proved the other night when we had a farewell function to our retiring Parliamentarians that when he needed to speak, he could speak to very great effect indeed and was very clearly understood by all.

And this is so of the American people. I don't know how hard they find it to follow the Australian accent, as we perpetrate it from time to time, but we get the message from you when we hear your compatriots in their speech to us. And what a wonderful tradition it is and inheritance it is to have this common language, we together admiring the language of Shakespeare and together able to absorb something of the wisdom of a Benjamin Franklin, a Jefferson or the stirring sentiments and philosophic depth of an Abraham Lincoln. This is part of our common heritage.

You and we have drawn heavily upon the political experience of the Mother of Parliaments at Westminster. Our Parliament more closely resembles it than does yours. The founders of your Constitution were troubled by the danger that too much power might reside in one area of government and so by a process of checks and balances you set out to try to balance executive with judiciary and with Parliament, but in the result, such is the pressure of modern circumstance, you have produced in the United States the most powerful executive in the history of mankind.

And you, Sir, have that awesome responsibility in the world of today. Sometimes, no doubt, a lonely responsibility, but at all times a responsibility which weighs heavily upon you. Those of us who have watched and come to admire your tenure of the office of President have realised with what earnestness, with what sentiment and feeling and intensity you concern yourself with the problems of your office. We have marvelled at your skill in achieving through the Parliament of your own country, although you don't have the direct command of it that a Prime Minister with an assured majority can exercise in the United Kingdom or in this country, but despite that difficulty you have succeeded in having adopted by the United States Congress, I think a higher proportion of bills that you have proposed to the Congress than any President before you in history. That is a remarkable achievement in itself.

But we are not merely friends, we are allies as well. You are the powerful ally, we are a staunch ally, I hope at all times. And we in Australia have a full recognition that the security of this country depends tremendously upon our treaty arrangements with you under ANZUS and under SEATO. If I may say so, Mr. President, it is under our ANZUS arrangements we feel our greatest security lies, and Australia has not forgotten those anxious periods in the second world war when we were closer to invasion by an enemy than ever before in our history, and the Battle of the Coral Sea was fought which was the foundation of our subsequent safety and security, and this then led on to the great campaign under your distinguished General Douglas MacArthur.

This diningroom of ours has honoured many distinguished visitors - monarchs, statesmen, soldiers - but this occasion marks one of the most distinguished and notable in the whole history of the Australian Parliament. For us, Sir, this is an occasion in which we honour you and we honour that wonderful woman who has been such a helpmate to you throughout your long political career. Mrs. Johnson is welcomed in herself. This tour will be a great success not merely by virtue of the high office you enjoy but because Australia will like you and does like you both as very human and lovable people.

You, Mr. President, don't want to go down in history as a warrior President - I think I can say that from the knowledge that I have gained of you since we first came in touch with each other. You were kind enough, from the time I took office to assure me that you wished the close and intimate contact that had been developed between my predecessor and yourself to continue. I am glad to say that I was also accorded this privilege by the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Then there have been our personal meetings. And I have learned through these things that you have an aspiration which is not a military aspiration, not that of a warrior. You bring to mind what I remember being taught in my schooldays that "peace hath her victories no less renowned than that of war". You are devoting yourself to great victories of peace for the future. You have an aspiration

for a great society in your own country, you have an aspiration for a better world order in other parts of the world for security for peoples, their independence. You want to see their standards of life improve, their life expectancy improve, hope to dispel the despair that has afflicted countless millions of the world's population down through the ages. This has brought you to study the Asian scene where more than half of humanity resides and which will grow in population even more rapidly than the remainder of the world. You know there is a short life expectancy, a low per capita income and you feel with all the power that flows from a country, which in a relatively short time counted in human history has built up so enormously its economic strength and power, that you can bring that strength and power, the techniques you have developed and often pioneered to the assistance of a needy world.

And we in Australia feel that in Asia at any rate there is a part for us to play with you as well, and you have encouraged us in that belief. Now, we are going together to the conference in Manila and we are striving there to restore peace to a troubled area of the world and we are striving there also to lay the foundations of that better world to which you aspire.

There is much that an Australian could say on such an occasion as this, but we want to hear from you, not the three Australian political leaders, and I have certainly spoken as long as I should on these matters. But I have wanted to bring home to you that there is admiration and affection for you in this country, both as the representative of a friendly country with whom our destiny has been bound through many conflicts of war and many tasks of peace. We see our destinies being linked together for as long as our two countries survive and we see importance in the strength of friendship and the closeness of our alliance.

Because you are so forcefully devoted to these great objectives we welcome you and we honour you.

And now I ask my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will join me and support me in the toast which I propose to offer and I shall then invite the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition to join also in conveying a warmth of welcome to our distinguished guests.

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