

AUSTRALIA DAY LUNCHEON
ROYALE BALLROOM, MELBOURNE

26TH JANUARY, 1967.

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT

MR. HOLT:

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Lady Delacombe, Distinguished Guests, - and this includes my Parliamentary and Ministerial Colleagues - and Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, Sir Norman, I must congratulate you, and I do so on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, for the work that you and your colleagues are doing to bring a wider and deeper observance of this National Birthday of ours and it must be very gratifying to you to look around at this room today and see how the initiatives which you and those with you have set in motion some years ago are now producing this wider recognition. In this part of Australia by the stimulus you have given, I believe, about Australia generally - certainly in my own experience and this is perhaps not merely a product of any particular initiative of any organisation, but of the degree of progress and development and maturity that is going on inside Australia itself - there is this deepening awareness of the significance of our National Birthday and the growing desire to recognise it and participate in it.

The other thing which I feel you must be congratulated upon is the enterprise you have shown in making each year a selection of the man or woman who in your judgment is the Australian of the Year. I make no complaint that Parliamentarians are disbarred from this very fitting recognition. We get our recognition in other ways usually a three yearly interval, either favourable or unfavourable, and we get enough of the limelight anyhow, but it has been truly said that a great nation is a nation which produces great people. It doesn't have to be a large nation, or a powerful nation, if it produces great people it is a great nation, and we have confidence and pride in the quality of the Australian people, and we do well to recognise those Australians who have shown such distinction in the year under review that they have earned the accolade of their fellow Australians and have been honoured with this proud title. You have chosen well, you have spread your choices through various fields of activity of interest and importance to us and this year's selection is well up to the high standard of your earlier selection and I offer my personal congratulations to Mr. Brabham as I did when he secured the World Championship.

I want to say thank you on behalf of us all, that includes my Government and your organisation and all assembled here, indeed all to whom his warm, thoughtful, generous words will come. Thanks from us all to Mr. Whelan for that remarkably eloquent address to us. I felt that we could not have expressed for Australia and to Australia more admirably the things that we are feeling at this time, and how appropriate it is that these words should come from the representative in this city of our great Pacific partner and ally, the United States of America.

I say that advisedly because the year that has just closed has seen our two countries brought closer together than ever before in their history. The tangible evidence of this is that at four separate sets of meetings the Heads of Government of our two countries came together for our common purposes. Never before in the history of our two countries have the Heads of those Governments

met so often and for such common purposes as was the object of our discussions, twice in Washington, at Manila and here in Australia in the course of the year which has just closed; and that is significant, I believe, of what is occurring in this area of the world.

It is, of course, no accident or coincidence that these meetings should have taken place with such frequency because we, with the United States, have so much in common in this area of the world and indeed in the world at large; our common principles of democratic freedom, our adherence to principles of social justice, of a prospering world at peace, is the goal to which we constantly aspire, our common determination to play such part as we can in improving the lot of those people who live with us in the Pacific and Asian region.

These are things which have held us closer together, our comradeship in the issue of Vietnam, where such a massive effort has been put forward and so much sacrifice by the people of the United States in initiative which is vital to us and indeed important to the free world as a whole.

You spoke, Mr. Whelan, of the influence which this small country, small in terms of population, can exert and those were not fullsome or overly flattering words, because we recognise that this is a fact of modern history so far as our own country is concerned in this area of the world and various factors have combined to produce this. I discovered in my first few days of office that both President Johnson and Prime Minister Wilson were inviting me to maintain with them the same close, intimate correspondence which had been developed between them by my predecessor, Sir Robert Menzies, and this surely was an indication that this small country has a voice which is valued and respected. Some times, people say, we are going American; in my boyhood I used to hear people say that we used to cling to the skirts of Downing Street; we are not going American or for that matter going English, we are going Australian; we are going Australian. That is why the Heads of these great Governments respect our views, they want independent views and frank views from a friend and from an ally and that is what they received from us. I can assure you communication is frequent. It is helpful, informative, sincere between us all and it helps us in the common purposes to which we aspire. And so, as this becomes more widely known around Asia and indeed throughout the world Australia's influence and prestige develops. Then we have had the task in this vast continent not always favoured by climate nor seasons nor fertility of the soil, of building one of the affluent societies of the world - and you have referred to our standard of living, our high standard of living. This impresses our neighbours in this area of the world, who themselves have problems of development. They seek advice technical assistance and help of various kinds from us. They don't do so with any feeling that in that way they are demeaning themselves. We have from their point of view no great power aspirations. We have no colonial past to embitter the relationship between us. And we are a frank and friendly people whom, generally speaking, they find they can like. This, too, helps to build our influence and the bridges of friendship that we can create in Asia are bridges which help us all. I could give you one short illustration. Cambodia is a country which at the present time is not supporting our policies, indeed it has no diplomatic relations with the United States of America. And so in Cambodia Australia represents the United States' interests, and in South Vietnam Australia represents the interests of Cambodia. Now this is an example of the kind of thing I have in mind when I say this country can be of value and is recognised as having that value by our friends in this region of the world.

It is only in comparatively recent years that we have built up our capacity for these things. In the foundation of our Federation in 1901 there was a place for a Department of External Affairs in the seven States then created. But it seemed to have

so little to do and there was so little interest in its activities that it was abolished in 1916 and it wasn't until 1935 that we re-established a Department of External Affairs. It was in 1946 that we set up our first Mission to the United Nations in New York. But since that time in the 20 years that have elapsed there has been a growth of the establishment of the Department from 410 personnel to 1,570 personnel. Where there were then 19 posts abroad representing Australia, that is in 1946, today there are 54 and the largest number of any section of the world in which these are found is the area of Asia and South East Asia, where we have 19 posts, 18 in Europe, 7 in North and South America, 7 in Africa and 3 in the South Pacific. In addition, of course, we have built up our trade posts, our immigration posts and other means of carrying Australian interests out into other countries. But you will gather that this is of comparatively recent origin. My Parliamentary colleagues will know that it wasn't so very long ago that a debate on External Affairs in our House would attract very little interest or attention. Now it is the most eagerly sought after for participation by Members of the Parliament.

You spoke, Mr. Whelan, of the standards we have built up and this again illustrates how Australia can have an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. If you look at the situation in India - and I don't say this in respect of either of the two countries I mentioned in any reflection on what they are doing for themselves, we know quite clearly the problems which exist in these countries - but India is a country with a population 42 times that of Australia, and it has just doubled the value of gross national products of Australia. Indonesia, which has nine times the population of Australia, has a value of gross national product one third of that of Australia; and you will see that the reference made by Dr. Whelan in carrying on some remarks of mine that we have ranked among the top ten or twelve trading nations of the world. This has revealed that our country, small in numbers, nevertheless has an impact both in influence and in its economic strength, its trading capacity out of all proportion to the population of our people.

So we can, I believe, on this our National Birthday, feel that we are favoured people, that we have achievements behind us to which we can look with pride, yet, as the proposer of the toast so eloquently stressed, there are brighter horizons ahead for us. We share that judgment and confidence, Mr. Whelan, we Australians believe that our tomorrows will be the greatest days of Australian history. Given a world of peace we cannot only expand our own country's capacity, build our population, improve our standards but make a growing contribution to the welfare of those around us.

So, with that bright prospect before our eyes, with a vision of a greater Australia, greater in influence, greater in strength greater in security and prosperity, we can today in all certainty say it is a happy birthday for Australia and may there be many happy returns ahead. Thank you again.
