

OPENING OF YOUNG LIBERAL YEAR 1968

BRISBANE

18th January, 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Senator John Gorton

I don't think that it is possible for me really to communicate to you the great warmth of feeling that rises within me by having you here and by having such an undeserved reception from you. But I can say this, that though I think that as of now this reception is undeserved, I will promise you that as far as it lies within my power, I will try in the years ahead to make it deserved.

One of the things that has been worrying me since the party elected me to be Prime Minister and the reception that I feel that this has had throughout the country is the feeling pressing in on me a little that there are great expectations of dramatic changes, of sudden variations in direction, of immensely exciting things happening all at once. They can't happen that way in the field in which we are engaged. You can't all of a sudden, in the middle of a financial year, in the middle of a particular course, have pyrotechnic displays which change everything in one moment. But that doesn't mean that we cannot start on new courses, that we cannot think in new directions, that we cannot, with increasing momentum, although that momentum may take eighteen months or two years, but with increasing momentum, set the goals before you and the people of Australia, indicate what is required to reach those goals, call on you for the effort needed to achieve those goals and in that way, perhaps, meet these new challenges that you expect us all together to meet. So if there is no drama immediately, bear that in mind. If there is no sudden pyrotechnic, bear that in mind. This does not mean that there will not be for you and us together, new paths to follow which you may help to indicate to us.

You, Sir, spoke of an Australian national anthem - "God Save The Queen" and "Australia". It reminds me of somebody who, I think, went to Canberra with their small child and saw the House of Representatives beginning - as you remember the House of Representatives always begins - with a prayer. The small child said, "Are they praying for the Members of the House of Representatives" and the mother said, "No, they are looking at the House of Representatives and praying for Australia". Actually, that was first told against the American Senate.

But you did speak of a National Anthem. While, of course, "God Save The Queen" is the over-riding anthem for Australia, and I regard this as of some significance in a growing country, I must tell you I am a "Waltzing Matilda" man myself. I know that song may have originated during the Marlborough wars - somebody once told me that was true, I don't know. I don't think it matters. What I think matters is that it was first sung when this country was first discovered and first developed. And not beyond the bounds of this country was it known for some while, but then it began to be known, and those who went from this country in the 1914-1918 War spread "Waltzing Matilda" and marched to "Waltzing Matilda" and it became known a little in Europe and other countries of the world.

In between times whenever two or three Australians might be gathered together in some foreign country, sooner or later, somebody - usually with a frightful voice - would begin to sing "Waltzing Matilda" and it would become even more known. I remember myself during the Second World War we were in England and stationed in London and wearing a different uniform from the RAF, a dark blue RAAF, and walking into nightclubs, because in those days, they were still interested in nightclubs and that was relatively early, and the band when we walked in would begin to play "Waltzing Matilda". There was a warm feeling spreading through one at that just as there was when the slouch hat was hauled to the peak of the flag pole above Bardia to the strains of "Waltzing Matilda". I think this song is so integrated into Australia that whatever a government might do, whatever an ABC might do - and, of course, ABC's are far more important than governments in relation to this - "Waltzing Matilda" will never be able to be taken away from what is the ethos of the Australian people. Have your anthem, Sir, but please do not ever allow this song to fall into disuse.

I remember once I went into Taiwan, and the leader of our delegation was a very distinguished gentleman called Sir John Latham who was the Chief Justice of Australia, and he confided to me on the way that the one song he hated above all others was "Waltzing Matilda", and I said, "Why?" And he said, "Well, I am a lawyer, and it is absolutely ridiculous that a swagman would jump into a billabong and drown himself merely to escape a charge of stealing a jumbuck, which would, at the utmost, mean about five days in gaol." So I had great pleasure when we arrived in Taiwan in persuading all the Chinese authorities that the one song that the leader of our delegation liked better than any other was "Waltzing Matilda", and it would have been thoroughly successful except that they had played it in Chinese music and he never knew what was being played, and neither did I! But it is, I think, a part of the blood of this country of Australia.

Having an anthem, having a song, what really does it mean, what do we build on it? Because, really, the important thing at any given moment in history is what are we going to build for the future, and what can we draw from the past to help us to

build the future. I think that here in this country we have a great deal to draw from the past and a unique opportunity for the future. Just use your imaginations for a moment - forget that you are living in a capital city in the Australia of today, in which you were born, in which many of your parents were born, which is your country, and think what it must have been like at the beginning when to these shores came people from England, from Scotland, from Ireland, from the United Kingdom. Think of them living in some loneliness, fairly isolated from the countries which gave them birth, pushing out, further out into the country with the women isolated from contact with other women to gossip (which women always like to do) living alone, clearing the land, raising a family in strange surroundings, in unusual circumstances, in loneliness, calling for effort, calling for fighting against drought and flood and fire and famine, and of the steadfastness which kept those people there and which, over the years as this country developed, built it first in the hinterland, and then as a result of the riches grown there because of the years of effort put in there, built the cities which in turn provided the technological and other advances required. Think for a moment, just for a moment of that history, where you depended on bullock trains for transport, where you depended on horseback or buggy for travel. That is not history for which any country need have anything but pride. It has enabled us to reach the stage we have reached today. From it we can draw some inspiration for what it is we wish to reach in the future. But what is it that we wish to reach in the future?

Very largely, this is in your hands. It is in the hands of your leaders, but your leaders will be swayed by the feelings that you have as to what it is you wish this country to stand for, as to the paths you wish it to follow.

I am sure - and I now talk politically in the best sense - that what you would want to see in this country for the future is a continuance, and perhaps a refinement of that political freedom that we have today, that you would be prepared, as at some time you might have to be prepared, to fight against some doctrine of absolute and autocratic rule from the top, that you would be prepared to see that it is impossible for a society to live in anarchy, and that you would seek to find between that autocratic rule from the top and that anarchy from the bottom, some arrangement by which the general will could prevail, giving freedom to all but not allowing that freedom to extend where it became licence and threatened the freedom of others. This, I am sure, is the political base on which you would want to build our future country. But having given that political base, then what do you want to see?

Of course, and this is simple, you would wish to see the material capacities of this country, the material rewards to those who are living in it, growing. This is obvious, this is simple, this is easy, this is not, ultimately, important. But you would wish to see that happen, I am sure, and you would seek to see that it did happen. But that alone, that alone couldn't make this a great country, couldn't allow us to take the chance, the unique chance that we have here to build and show that a democracy can provide in the world a country better than any other system can provide. I say "unique" because they must follow their own talents to the top of their bent, whether they lie in the field of painting, whether they lie in the field of music, whether they lie in the field of business administration. wherever it may be, there is inside each human being, in this and all other countries, a desire to express themselves, and the way they can express themselves is by taking the talents that are inside them and using them and they can only do this if the opportunity is provided, if the education is provided, if the material well-being is provided.

There is, I think, some quite meretricious cynicism in this country today, at least some meretricious cynicism reported in the papers of this country today about the youth of Australia, that they have thrown away the values of the past, that they question the values of their parents. Of course, they should question the values of their parents and I think they do. I don't think they throw them away. I don't believe, and I think you are some living examples to justify my lack of belief, that there is in the youth of Australia a cynicism. I believe there is in the youth of Australia a desire to build. I believe there is in the youth of Australia a desire to give, I believe that the youth of Australia would respond to other words of President Kennedy's, "You ask what your country can do for you. Ask rather what you can do for your country". And it is to a man like me, standing in a place like this tonight, of such enormous importance that there should be in this room from all over Queensland so many young people who are taking an interest in how their country should be governed, in the paths their country should follow, who are prepared to give themselves to see these paths are followed, their country outside of themselves is made great. It is of such importance to a man like me standing here, it is of such importance to our country, it is such a refutation of this cheap charge of cynicism so often levelled against the youth of Australia.

It will not be long, in the way in which the lives of nations are mentioned, it will be little less than the blinking of an eye before some of you here in this room are called to do the same kind of work that my colleagues and myself do now. You are preparing yourselves for it, and I only hope, and I believe that this will be true, that when that time comes you will be buttressed, you will be supported, you will be given the spiritual courage which we are given now by having you here with us.

I haven't much more to say to you. I don't propose to talk on details of politics or details of policies - some other time. This is the first speech that I have made since becoming Prime Minister, and I wanted to make it to young people. I wanted to make it not on what the rate of taxation should be, or what the rate of excise should be or what there should be given to this or to that, but rather on the motivating forces, on the real wellsprings of a nation which alone will keep a party great, which alone will keep a country great, and I believe that I see here before me living examples that that spring is in this party and is in Australia.

I will finish as I began, that I will do my utmost to be worthy of the support of people such as you, and together we may see, we may attain more than Henry Lawson thought of, not only "the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended and at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars", but in those sunlit plains are people, happy, arguing, working, building, and by effort, because by effort alone these things can be attained, making a country great materially and great spiritually for the people who live in it.

This conference is open.

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