



LIBERAL PARTY RALLY

Town Hall, Sydney, NSW

5TH FEBRUARY, 1967

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Mr President, Mr Osborne, Mr Premier, all those gathered behind me and all those in this hall :

I begin to make the first speech that I have made as Prime Minister, dealing with political affairs. The speech that I am going to make to you is the first of many because there seem to be elections coming thick and fast in the immediate future. Firstly we have the election to choose once again Mr Askin as the Premier of New South Wales, then on the same day we have an election which, I sincerely hope, will choose me as the Member for Higgins. Early in March, there is an election in South Australia, and soon after that one in Western Australia.

It is my hope and my belief that you here will see that on February 24, this State sets an example for the rest of Australia to follow by choosing once again that man, whom I think you will agree, has led this State since 1965 with distinction, with vitality and with success. Certainly it is an honour and a pleasure for me to stand here with him on this platform today supporting him at the time of his election, not only because of what he has done in this State, but also because of the meetings I have had with him in the last month or so, meetings where it became perfectly clear that what he had done he had done against difficulties, in that he had to take over the running of this State at a time when one of the greatest droughts Australia has known hit the capacity of this State to look after itself as it has hit the capacity of other Eastern States, and that in spite of that handicap, he has been able to do what he has done.

I can assure you of this, ladies and gentlemen, that he has proved himself to me to be a most persuasive and a most dedicated advocate for the State which he represents and has provided all the arguments concerning drought and other disabilities which could be put on behalf of this part of Australia. Therefore it is a happy augury and a pleasure for me to be with him, beginning what I hope will be a continuing partnership with ourselves in the Federal sphere and Mr Askin in the State sphere and other Liberals in other State spheres, so that together we can, each according to our fashion, each according to the Constitution, see that Australia is developed as a whole, and that each part of it is run by those nearest to the people in that part of it.

I don't mean by this, ladies and gentlemen, that in such a partnership - and it will be, I know, a close partnership - there will not be from time to time differences of opinion as to priorities, differences of opinion as to proposals. This is inevitable in any partnership if it is to run properly, it is inevitable in any Federal system, and particularly inevitable in a Federal system in which one or two States have much greater development, much greater population resources than have the other States of a nation. But while these matters in the future can be the subject of discussion, can be the subject of initial disagreement and then of resolution, I would go on to say this - that if those discussions are family discussions, as they would be between us in the Commonwealth and Mr Askin in New South Wales, if they are discussions

between governments having the same general complexion and the same general approach as to the place of the individual in society, then those matters will be more susceptible of resolution, more susceptible of amicable arrangement than could be possible were there to be a different complexion of government in this State, or indeed in others.

I have spoken of possible differences of opinion not to emphasise it but as a lead-in to problems which face both a Commonwealth Government and a State Government in the years ahead, for this much is certain. Neither a Commonwealth Government nor a State Government in the years immediately ahead will have the resources to do all that they would like to do, or to do it as quickly as they would like to do it, because consider what it is that people in Australia really want.

Imagine yourself on the top of some high hill, looking out over a populated valley where the lights twinkle below you at night, and thinking each one of those lights is a light in the home of an Australian family. What is it they seek to build their country into; what is it they wish for themselves, and how best can we try to achieve what they wish for themselves and what they wish for their nation. You can imagine yourself in that position. You would answer your question in what is perhaps a contradictory way.

You would say, I think, or I would say for you: What Australians want is to see that the aged needy, the ill needy, those really suffering from unfortunate circumstances through no fault of their own, should be adequately provided for by the nation, but that this should be done without destroying the incentive to save, and without destroying the incentive to self-reliance. This, in itself, requires I think, some rethinking of our policies in these matters, and requires some significant effort from Governments and from the people from whom Governments gain their revenue.

And they would say, we want in this nation the capacity for every individual to be able to develop to the utmost his own inherent capacities through education, whether it be conventional, or technical, or whatever it may be. And that requires enormous resources.

And they would say we want defence for this country, we want defence sufficient to make sure that we are true allies of those whom in the ultimate our future may depend, our future existence may depend, that we can help those countries nearest to us towards stability, that we can have in our own country sufficient in the future to take the first shock of any attack that might ever be made upon us in the future, until such time as the allies whom we have supported and helped could come to our help, as I am sure they would. And that requires enormous resources from the people.

And they would say we want development of this nation. We want to see resources which now lie unused be utilised so that throughout the whole of this country we will have not only employment opportunities, not only new industries, but the new industrial muscles which they will bring to us, and which in their turn will build us into a great material nation, and help, in their turn, the development of ourselves towards the future which is possible if we reach out to grasp it with sufficient effort. And this requires enormous resources.

And they would say, and rightly say, while we want these things, we also wish that the burden of taxation upon individuals in this nation should not be raised to such heights that the incentive to produce, that the incentive to strive, that the incentive to save is removed from those individuals in the private sector, upon whom, in the last resource, the final growth of this nation

must depend.

And they would say, we wish to see not only that these national objectives I have outlined are met but in the various parts of Australia those Governments more directly in touch with the people should have resources to carry out the responsibilities directly laid upon them by the Constitution.

I could go on, I could go on expanding this list of that which you require, of that which our nation requires, but I think I have said enough, have I not to indicate that all these things cannot at once be done, that they are to some extent contradictory, and that therefore there must be a choosing of priorities, a decision as to which of these programmes it is that will most advance this nation and most provide a happy existence for the inhabitants of it. And so if there is to be a choosing of priorities in these fields, as there must be, then that will be a choosing of priorities taken, I hope and believe, by a Commonwealth Government which is a Liberal/Country Party Government, by a State Government which is a Liberal/Country Party Government, and while there may be discussions as to the relative importance of particular priorities, at least it will be as I have said before, a family discussion, and one between people with the same ultimate objectives.

And these objectives, apart from those goals which I sketched, and sketched so briefly to you this afternoon, are objectives which we feel that we must reach within a certain framework. We do not think that we can attain those aims I have set before you by handing everything over to a government and to officials and say: "You attain this. We will bow out as individuals". We feel, and it is undoubtedly true, that a government must create the climate for the achievement by individuals of which I have spoken, that in many fields the government must take social action for the good of the community as a whole.

Let me expand a little on that social action because we hear a lot, and sometimes an unthought lot, I think, about socialism and how bad socialism is, but we have got to define what we mean by this before we come to any meaningful conclusion. After all, it is not so long ago since the participation of government in any field was classified as socialism, and yet who here would object to the Government entering into the field of providing railways or roads or electricity or water supply for irrigation, or water supply for a city, or many of these other public utilities. So while governments must enter these fields, it must always be the aim of a Liberal Government to see that they enter only those fields where it is necessary, that they leave within the framework they lay down the greatest amount of possible area for individual achievement, unhampered by bureaucratic intervention. And that having done that, having created that climate, they can then look with confidence, as I believe they can, to the men and women of Australia, to make use of the opportunities provided by the Government according to their own bent, according to their own intelligence, according to their own effort, according to their own will, and that if men and women do that, they deserve any reward they get as a result of what they have done. This is a common approach, and this is an approach upon which, I think, will be built a great nation.

We have got facing us at the moment grievous and heavy burdens in overseas affairs. You will have seen some thing that I have said in relation to Viet Nam, perhaps the most grievous burden we now have to bear. You will perhaps have noticed that I said we feel that we as a nation of 12 million, a small nation, a nation with a population of Greater London or Greater New York, and with enormous calls upon us in these other fields I have mentioned, are doing all that can reasonably be required from us. I want to

elaborate on that. I want to make this clear. You will forgive me, I hope, if at this point I read a little, so that what I say to you will be what I have written to say to you and to others outside this hall.

On this problem, one which is the heaviest facing Australia, our own policy is clear. We believe that the late President Kennedy sent United States troops to South Viet Nam to help the Government of that country to resist armed attacks upon it and that those attacks were instigated, controlled, supplied and maintained by the North Vietnamese Government which supplied regular troops to assist and command the insurgents.

Since that time more and more North Vietnamese regular army troops have been deployed in the South and the fighting has assumed the character of an invasion of South Viet Nam by the Government of North Viet Nam.

We believe the United States, under President Kennedy, was right to take, and is right to persist in its resistance to this aggression - not because it is communist aggression but because it is aggression, and such aggression, whatever the reason for it anywhere in the world, is a threat to the ultimate peace of the world. If it is successful, it is likely to be repeated again and again until, as we have seen in our own lifetime, it eventually must be stopped at a cost of pain and blood and treasure infinitely greater than if it were stopped at the beginning.

Because of that belief, and because of our adherence to and reliance on the United States alliance, we are playing our full part in assisting the military resistance to that aggression - not only by providing ground troops, tanks, aircraft and naval vessels, but by bearing the full cost of arming, maintaining, munitioning, supplying and provisioning all those forces which we send to assist the alliance.

We shall continue to do this for as long as is necessary to attain our objective of preventing aggression's success. At the same time, we have always realised that the military effort in Viet Nam is, although absolutely necessary, only one of the components required to win this kind of war.

The other component is the raising of standards of everyday living in the areas where military forces provide a shield for the civilian population. And so, from the beginning, one of the tasks of our Army has been to provide civil aid in the area in which they serve - to provide not only money and materials but man power to assist in the villages in providing grass roots assistance - medical aservices of a medic kind, schoolrooms, wells, small bridges and culverts, and matters of that nature.

To sum up, our objective is to prevent, or to make increasingly difficult and costly, the operation of enemy troops whether regular or guerrilla and steadily to improve the living conditions of the villagers and townspeople in the area. Whether this is successful or not will depend on the will of those engaged. But it can be successful, and our will to play our part towards this objective is firm, continuing and will not be changed. But with such a mighty choice before our country, with that being what your Government seeks to do, I believe the time has come when an alternative policy ought to be advanced, if it is going to be advanced, by an Opposition.

What the Opposition's alternative policy is I do not know, and I doubt if anybody knows. The governing body of the Labor Party has laid down a policy which requires specifically -

That all bombing of supply routes from the North should immediately and unconditionally be stopped.

That allied troops in Viet Nam should remain in their present positions and cease fighting except to repel attacks upon themselves - and this was described as a holding operation; and

That if the United States or the South Vietnamese will not agree to these conditions, then we must immediately abandon the United States alliance and withdraw Australian troops from Viet Nam.

That is the official policy of the Opposition, and one I believe they are bound at present to carry out. But it is one which the Leader of the Opposition has sought to blur, and to conceal from Australians so that we hear vague talk and unspecific suggestions from the Leader which appear to slither away from the policy by which he is constrained.

Ladies and gentlemen, don't you think the time has come when Australians have the right to know exactly what the Opposition policy on Viet Nam is, and the Opposition have a clear duty to explain specifically what it is, that there should be no more attempts to deny or conceal or misrepresent it, nor further examples of different spokesmen advancing different policies. We have a right to know what the alternative choice is, and we have a right to know now, and I ask that we should be told now on this matter of such great importance.

Lord knows, ladies and gentlemen, the one thing that I find grievous is that we should, at this point of time, according to our own judgment of what is right, be required to expend so much upon an insurance policy, upon defence, when there is so much required to be done for our own people and in our own country. Don't think because I have spent some time on this matter that I regard it as of more importance than our own growth and our own development, and the care of our own citizens. I do it because it is a matter which strikes to the root of Australia's survival, and we ought to know what alternate parties think. Having thought that, then we hope that having achieved peace there, we can turn to an examination of these other matters I have raised with you, and that having made this examination, not we, the Federal Government, not Mr Askin the State Government, but our Governments with you. We, in that sense, can attack and overcome our internal problems, and together build that nation which I know it is in our capacity to build and which I know it is in our destiny to achieve.

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