

LIBERAL PARTY SPEAKERS' GROUP DINNER

Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne

27 FEBRUARY 1968

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON

Mr President of the Speakers' Group, Mr President of the State Division of the Liberal Party and Ladies and Gentlemen :

You know, Bob, when you spoke, you reminded me a little of "old forgotten far-off things and battles long ago". Remember when you were speaking of the time you were thrown out of the meeting and I was quite unable to give you any assistance; it brought back to my mind an occasion - I think it was the Communist Dissolution Bill or the Banning of Communists - whatever it was - way, way in the past - when much the same thing happened to me. But not quite the same because I remember vividly in the middle of an inspiring speech by the former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, somebody was interjecting rather annoyingly - and I was much younger than I am now and I remember approaching him and saying. I'm not going to say that I said this, but the newspapers next day said I said this : "Would you like to have it in here or outside, you yellow rat!" Whereupon I was grabbed by an enormously large policeman and frogmarched half-way to the door, and the Prime Minister interrupted his policy speech to say : "Hey, you can't throw him out. He's one of my lot". And he had much more effect than I had on you. But still I think the spirit was the same in both cases - in yours and in mine.

You did say something very pleasant indeed, too, about my wife, and she has one enormous advantage. Most of the speeches that she makes are made in Indonesian, and nobody five years later, or even five days later - because they don't understand them - is able to say, "Yes, but five days ago, you said this or you said that". At least, very few people can, and probably those who really do understand it would not be able in time to translate it and drift it back to Australia. This is something that most politicians must regard as a promised land, where you don't get things thrown back up at you. things which I remember being thrown up to me - the television interview with the ABC, that marvellous undertaking which we finance but do not control. 1968. somebody said to me, "Yes. In your maiden speech in 1950, didn't you say this?" Well, I did. It is quite right. As a matter of fact, he was a very nice man. He wasn't wrong. Anyway, what I said then wasn't much different from what I am saying now. But at least she is spared this risk, which is an occupational risk of most of the rest of us as politicians.

It is here on this night, in this room of this hotel, a most memorable experience for me to be able to talk to you on this occasion, My mind goes back, as the minds of many - but not all - of you will go back, because not all of you are old enough, to the time when this party which you have supported for so long was formed, and to the conditions which prevailed in Australia and which led to the formation of this party, and to the work which you and others have put into it for two decades. It is worthwhile at this point, to go back and remember, to go back and bring into our minds what it was then which so motivated so many people that they were prepared to leave the professions in which they were engaged, that

they were prepared to give up time which otherwise would be devoted to their own entertainment, that they were prepared to take the risks which at that time were real risks, in order to try to change the situation in which Australia then found itself, in order to try to direct it along a path which they thought, and I believe thought properly, would be a better path for the nation to which they belonged.

Just think what then was the situation. We had then in this country an approach by those who were charged with directing the affairs of this country, which was prepared to accept that it was reasonable that there should be from five to eight per cent of unemployment, and if we attained seven per cent that was pretty well full employment, as far as any country could achieve it.

We had then people who were prepared to maintain that there ought to be, not for any observed or reasoned process, but that there ought to be constraints and restrictions of various kinds just because those constraints and restrictions had once been imposed, and having once been imposed, ought to be maintained merely for their own sake.

And we had a government then which was prepared to suggest that in the name of planning, although it ought not to have been in the name of planning, in the name of social action, although it ought not to have been in the name of social action, governments ought to take action in order to see not that an individual was able to express himself for his own sake and for the sake of the nation to which he belonged; governments ought to take action not to see that exploitation was not carried out as sometimes it can be carried out by individuals, but which was prepared to go further and to say not we think social action is necessary to improve matters, but we think social action is necessary to prevent people from engaging in some particular field of activity, to stop people engaging, for example, in banking activities - not in competition with the State but to stop them altogether; to stop people from sowing wheat fields if they felt inclined to take the risk of sowing wheat fields; to prevent individual initiative. And that is what we then had.

I think because of the impact of this on those of you in this room who remember it and those of you in this room to whom the memory of those days has been passed down, you were ready then to take risks, you were ready then to give effort and to give work to change that approach, to throw out that kind of government, to put in something which fitted more in with the beliefs that you had as to what you wished to see.

You were prepared to reject entirely the idea, which was an idea inherent in a government of two decades ago, that you existed, and the rest of the Australian citizens existed to serve a state, and you were prepared to put in the place of that idea, an idea that a state existed to control, yes, but existed for the sake of the individuals that lived under it, and not for its own sake, demanding from individuals complete support.

This was a watershed, I think, in Australian development and Australian history, and because we were successful then, and because under two great Prime Ministers we have since then, with the application of the principles they then set out, so far advanced this country that those living twenty years ago could not have envisaged the situation which we are now in, so I believe you will support those approaches. If you do support those approaches, then in two decades from now, we will be as far ahead of our present imagination as today we are ahead of the imagination of two decades ago.

As the result of what you initially did, surely we have transformed this nation -- to take the examples I used before - transformed it where instead of five to eight per cent of unemployment, we believe and have brought into operation the belief that full employment is possible and if we have one or one and a half per cent unemployment, then this becomes a matter of comment. Surely over the last decades we have built up in this country industrial muscles which have enabled us to take in the immigration which in that period of time has taken place.

How often do I remember members of the Opposition saying, "What are you going to do next year when x thousand school-leavers come on to the market?" Year after year have I heard it said, and year after year have x thousand school-leavers been absorbed into the industries and the opportunities which have been created because of the climate which has been made by the government - not because of what the government has done but because of what the underlying philosophy which motivates the government has enabled you and the other citizens of Australia to do.

Surely we have transformed our whole approach from one which at one time said: "We don't want to encourage in this country home ownership because that creates little capitalists" into an approach which says we wish people to hold their own homes and to have other ownership and to have a stake in the development of the country in which they live, and which has been successfully, I think, translated into action so that here in this country in these two decades we have created a society in which more people own their homes and have a stake in their country and have other ownership of material things than has ever been dreamed of in this country before.

Here, surely, in these last two decades, we have grown from some small, relatively unconsidered nation, a nation shielded through its whole existence by the shield and buckler of the British Navy, into a nation which yet still needs shielding, but which has become not a great power in the world, because of course as yet we are not, but a power, the voice of which has some significance in the councils of Asia, thanks particularly to the late Prime Minister, Mr Holt; and to which so many of the peoples near us, and I think some of the peoples of the great powers further away, look not now as some significant world force, because we are not, but as some potential world force, because if we go on in the way in which we have been moving, we will be in two or three decades in the future some really significant world force, as long as the roots are not cut by a reversal to that kind of approach, which two decades behind us we left.

People say - and it is a proverb which has some significance - that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Now those of us who are in this room, and those of us who over the years have contributed in one way or another to the pudding which now is before the Australian people, will I think agree that so far if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the proof on the record is a good proof, even though there has been in these two decades behind us, as there will be in the two decades in the front of us, even amongst us in this room, even amongst us with a general political philosophy, and as there must always be amongst such people, differences of opinion as to particular facts, differences of interpretation as to particular approaches, arguments because it is of the very lifeblood of a political party that there should be arguments inside it, solved inside it, and agreed by all in that political party after they have been solved by it, even though that should be so as it has been in the past and as it undoubtedly will be in the future, yet that play and interplay has brilliantly justified itself under the two great men who

for the last two decades have led Australia.

And now you, and many others like you throughout Australia, have asked me for a while to try to continue to advance that work which has been so well begun. I know, as I have said before, I cannot do it without you and others like you throughout Australia, arguing, contesting, agreeing, if you don't agree, being told to go aloft in a particular way, to try and continue this. And believe me, indeed you know, we have before us in the next two decades problems to be overcome which are perhaps even more difficult, even more intransigent than the problems which already have been surmounted.

There is nothing wrong with this, because this is true of a man's life, any man's life, any woman's life, and any nation's life that you don't by removing a problem, remove all problems. You merely, by overcoming a problem and a challenge, provide yourself with a new problem and a new challenge, and if you overcome that in turn, another one after that. But each one that is overcome is a new step up the ladder to the destiny which I believe we can together bring to this country of ours.

I have made, in the election for which I have just stood, on behalf of the Government which will shortly be sworn in, no finite promises to you or to Australia, except that we will continue, as best in us lies, to follow the paths which have been blazed before.

And yet all of us can see the problems which do need to be overcome. We must - and this I put highly, not overwhelmingly but highly, because I regard it as the test of the success of any society, not just the material success of any society, but the success of a society as a group of people in which individuals are looked after and assisted - we must re-examine from top to bottom our social services system, if that is what you wish to call it, our welfare system.

We must seek to isolate - to examine and isolate those cases in which real need exists and in which real poverty prevails, and seek to see that this is not something which crushes the human spirit of those under real poverty or under real need. But this is not enough of its own because we must seek to make at the same time - after all, we are all going to contribute to this - to make more efficient the methods we adopt in order to try to eliminate this poverty and this need, and to see that there is no waste in the way in which we attack that particular requirement of a really advanced community.

In doing this we must seek to try and not destroy the incentive of people during their working life to save and to provide for themselves, not to squander their savings in order to get more assistance from the community at the end of their lives. All these in this one matter - a matter of great importance to us if we are to hold up our heads and say this is a country which is not only materially but spiritually great - all these are the bread and butter which must be looked at, which must be closely examined, which must be analysed, on which work must be put in to see that we attain the goal which I have briefly outlined to you.

And in doing it, as we must and will do it, we have got to steer between Scylla and Charybdis. We must avoid the approach so prevalent in England under, I think, the thinking of a socialist government that all is provided without cost in a relatively shoddy way to everybody

at in fact a final cost which prevents in our case, or would, a growth to greatness which has in its application, as I believe, in the United Kingdom led to some decline from greatness, not because of the United Kingdom people whom I believe to be as great in themselves as ever they were, but because of this imposition which two decades ago, thank God, we got rid of in Australia.

These things - and I have presented one problem to you alone - are not done over-night. There have been propositions easily thrown around: "Let's integrate things. Let's have a Minister of Social Welfare and an Assistant Minister for Social Services and an Assistant Minister for Health and an Assistant Minister for Housing, who all come in to the point of the Minister for Social Welfare". Indeed, this has an attraction, but it is also an attraction which has a very difficult objection, because you can't have Assistant Ministers under the Constitution under which we live. Well you can, but you can't pay them anything or else they lose their seat in Parliament. So these easy approaches, and they are easy approaches, are not necessarily to be accepted at face value. But what is to be accepted is that there does need to be an overall look at the whole of this field and somebody, whatever they are called, to correlate these to see that waste does not occur, that duplication does not occur, that the areas in which assistance is required are the areas to which assistance goes, and that we do not destroy that self-reliance on which, really, Australia's future depends.

This, I promise you, we will try to do. It is not done overnight, but if it takes months to do, what of it, because if it is done properly, then it will for decades after it has been done, justify the expenditure of those months and help our children and our grandchildren in this country.

That is - and I have expanded on it more than I meant to do - an indication of one of the problems which now lies before us. It is one of many because we must, in these decades ahead as well, continue to bring into this country the immigrants which Mr Snerden has been bringing in and must continue to bring in, in order to see that we become - not in terms of numbers because in terms of number, no matter what our immigration policy is, we will never catch up in terms of numbers with the countries nearest to us, but to bring in sufficient to see that the technological advantages we now have, and the technological advances we will make, which we call into the balance to redress our lack of numbers, will have sufficient numbers to ensure that those advances will keep us in the forefront as we have been in the forefront in our region of the world.

Bringing these people in is not easy, is not a matter of waving a wand, and is not inexpensive. We need, and we must do our best to ensure that in meeting these two problems I have already mentioned, in meeting the need for providing defence for this country which relatively, for the first time in its history, finds itself, of itself, relatively defenceless, so to try to direct our efforts, that while we realise that we ourselves, by ourselves, cannot stand against some great world power, yet we can and have a responsibility to provide sufficient in the way of defence, to contribute to the stability of our neighbouring countries and to be able to take, ourselves, the first shock of any attack upon ourselves should it in the future come. - I am not saying it will, but should it in the future come as in the past it has come, and as in the past it might have come much more seriously - to take the first shock of that. And to believe, being able to do that, and having contributed

to the alliances to which we are contributing that we could depend that having taking that first shock, we would be able to require, not as of right, but as of decency that those powers with more significant capacity than ourselves would then come in, should it be necessary, to help us. This is not cheap, this is not inexpensive, this is not easy.

We have a requirement, of course, in our industrial areas to try to see that we remove ourselves from the dependence that we have had in the past almost completely, and still for four-fifths completely, on primary produce to provide our overseas exchange; and so to foster - not to denigrate primary produce - but to foster alternative methods of exporting manufactured goods from this country to such countries as will take them. This is not inexpensive and this is not easy and this requires effort.

I would if I had time, but I would weary you if I did, expand that list to indicate the other things in the public sector which we need to do - to expand the areas of education which today are such that if someone two decades ago had looked into the future, they would have thought completely unattainable; to endeavour to see that the research already encouraged in Australia is encouraged more so that we, and not some other country, get the benefits of inventions and of patents which come from within our own community; to try to endeavour to see that scientific activity generally in this country is directed towards an end which will quickly and immediately solve some of the problems in any field in which you care to look. This is not cheap and this is not inexpensive.

These are just some - just a random grab-bag I put before you of the problems which now lie ahead of us, but problems which in great part have been created because of the advances we have made, you have made, and therefore not matters for despair, but rather matters for exhilaration because it is a growing nation which has these problems, not a stagnant nation, The fact that we have them indicates we are not stagnant, we are growing, we are moving into a future which, if we approach it in the way we approached it twenty years ago will, I believe bring benefits not just in arithmetical progression but in geometrical progression over what we knew and what we grew up with .

You may think, and if you do so, you are wrong that in presenting to you these problems which are before us, I present them in some spirit of worry. I do not. I merely put them before you because I believe it is possible, though I do not think it is so, but I believe it is possible after two decades of government, people may look back only to the problems which have been overcome, to the advances which have been made, and may lose their enthusiasm for attack on those which now exist and those which are still to be overcome. You would not be here, there would not have been, I think, so much support for the Liberal Party as there is now in Australia if it were not true that most Australians are looking to the same approach as they have had - I don't mean exactly the same approach - the same principles as they have had applied. Perhaps some of them are looking for them to be applied in a new and imaginative way to overcome the new and different problems which lie before us. It has been most encouraging I believe, certainly to myself, and I think to nearly all of us in the Federal Parliament to see this resurgence of Liberalism which will continue to have arguments, as an underscoring of the fact that the Australian people still want to advance and still want to advance with the same dynamo, with the same avoidance of the other side which has led to advances so far.

Let me conclude in this way: Just as we attacked problems and overcame them before, so we will attack and overcome them in the next twenty years - not as a reactionary party, not as a conservative party, but as a pragmatist party which examines problems and sees the best way to overcome them, and applies those approaches, and if those approaches don't work, then applies some other approach in order to reach the required objective.

We are not - and in spite of what has sometimes been said - never have been a party which, using the word in its proper sense, has been opposed to socialism, because socialism, using the word in its proper sense, means social action for the benefit of the community as a whole. We have been prepared, of course, to apply social action for the benefit of the community as a whole, and you only need to look at the hospitals which are provided by social action, at the irrigation systems which are provided, the roads which are provided, the railways, the post office, all those areas through social action, that is through a government taking money from you and using it for social purposes that are applied for the benefit of the community as a whole. There are none of us, I think, who would object to this.

What we do object to, what I believe we will fight to the death against is that conception of socialism which brought this party to its first great success, the conception which said unequivocally : The State does not exist to serve the individual; the State does not exist to try to provide a climate in which the individual is able to expand himself in any way in which he sees fit, provided he doesn't exploit his fellow-beings. No. The individual exists to serve the State, which was the underlying concept of what was previously overthrown.

We object to that concept of socialism which says not : "Yes, we will use social action for the benefit of the community," but "We will use social action to deny and prohibit and prevent an individual engaging in some particular form of activity in which we think he should not be allowed to engage. So we will stop him engaging in banking activities." We are prepared to compete with him in banking activities, but they say, "No. We will stop him engaging in it. We will stop him sowing wheat. We will stop him doing anything which our planners say he shouldn't do." This we oppose, and this would be the kiss of death for this country if ever it were accepted again.

To me the great encouragement, and to my colleagues the great encouragement is that all of you here have come tonight as I believe, with the same general approach as the one I have sought to put before you, with the same willingness to work and sacrifice for that same general approach, and that you are multiplied outside this room, as I believe by a majority of Australians with that same general approach and with that same willingness to work for that general approach. Because if this impression of mine is true, as I think it is, then I have no doubt whatever that we will - in how many decades I don't know - but we will become the Queen Continent of this Hemisphere, that we will have the material strength of the United States and the spiritual strength of Europe, and will be able to be a shining example of people who came to a harsh country and by effort conquered it, because only by effort can things be attained, and that we will in time not only see 'the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended', but attain 'the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended' together.
