

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF ASSOCIATED  
CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

HOBART, TASMANIA



25 MARCH 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Your Excellency, Mr. Macklin, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is quite important to me to see gathered here in this theatre people from the four corners of this nation and from other countries who are concerning themselves with seeing that the needs of people in the nation are met, that the wheels of commerce go round, who are carrying on, really, the kind of trade on which civilisations were originally built.

It may perhaps seem a little far-fetched to you if I say this, but it is not really as far-fetched as it may sound, because going way back into the past of history, nations were brought together because some region or some country produced whatever it might be - let us say silk - which other regions and other countries did not produce but which they wished to have, and those other countries produced, let us say, some kind of beaten steel which the first countries did not have, and so the traders formed their caravans and they went to fetch from places where it was available, the goods which other countries wanted. They brought from those other countries the goods the first countries wanted, and in that way - by enriching themselves it is true - but by serving the needs of people in both places it is also true, they also managed to bring closer together gradually, through understanding, those two nations through whom, either in small ships across the sea, or in caravans across the desert, they carried on the lifeblood of trade.

Now, of course, things have changed since those far-off, romantic days, but it is still as necessary as ever it was that there should be those spending their lives engaged in disseminating that which is manufactured amongst the people, engaged, I would hope, more and more in trying to see that just as we are interdependent inside this country one on the other, just as you are dependent on good seasons for primary producers, on full employment, on good purchasing power, on other matters, so you would see that we were interdependent internationally, particularly with the countries in our region and would, as I know you are doing, turn your minds to that trade going back to what the caravanners used to do.

Together, governments and people build a country; neither the one or the other can do it alone. A government, of course, can help or hinder the building of a country and the improvement of the living standards of those living in it, but that is all it can do - help or hinder, create a climate or prevent a climate being created, and then it is up to individuals to take advantage or to fight against a bad climate, and in that context build together that which is sought.

This of course does pose some difficulties, because, I suppose, in an ideal world government would be so light and the requirements would be so small that the individual would be left almost completely without burdens placed upon him, able to retain that which his own industry and initiative was

able to achieve. But it is not an ideal world, and indeed not only does the individual engaged in farming, or in commerce or in manufacturing or working in a factory or teaching or whatever it may be, wish to retain as much as his industry and initiative will allow, but he also wishes many other things, and therefore requires that burdens should be placed upon him to provide those other things.

In the case of this country, I can enumerate some of them and at once you will agree with me, I know. It is required now, in a greater degree than it has ever been required before in our history, that burdens should be laid upon us so that we can provide towards our own defence. I think I hardly need to remind you that for something like 200 years, we have existed as a nation secure behind the shield of the British Navy and the British people and that that shield has been removed and that that changes the situation and the world in which we have grown up and that that requires that we should be able, as we have not in the past been able before, to provide sufficient defence forces to repel any initial shock upon our own shores should it ever come and to be a credible ally to those countries to whom we look should we ever require help. This in turn requires expenditures and burdens which even in the last few years - I speak of "few years" in the context of a nation's history - have risen from some general average of \$400 million to \$1200 million and will rise more. The people of a community want, and you want I know, that we should, if we are to hold up our head as a civilised nation, pay full attention to the requirements and the needs of the ill and the aged and the unfortunate amongst us, and this too requires that burdens should be laid upon and borne by the people and the nation.

You want, and I know that you want, that we should, particularly in the world as it is developing today, devote more and more of your resources to improving the facilities for education of our youth, and particularly perhaps to improving the facilities for advanced technological education of our youth, because in the years to come, the results of that education and that technological education will decide whether we are able in this nation, with the other nations of the world, with those in the forefront of the other nations of the world, to manufacture those new things which are being invented and which will be invented, and through that process of manufacture, see that commerce does not stagnate, but has new tools with which to work, has new things to trade. These too require that burdens should be laid upon a nation.

And you want - indeed I have seen your agenda and I know you want that we should continue to build up our nation by immigration at least as quickly as we have been doing it, and quite possibly, if possible, more quickly. But no longer can this be done or should this be done in the way in which, for example, the United States built up its population by immigration in the last century; no more can or should people just be brought to Australia from overseas and told "Here you are. You're on your own. Make your own way". Rather, it is necessary that they must be not just brought, but provided with the employment which you help to supply, provided with the facilities they expect to receive here as they have received them from the nations from which they came, provided with those other matters of which I spoke - an education for their children, health benefits and matters of that kind. This requires expenditure of capital to maintain each migrant. Though we get it back in years to come, yet at the time it does require a burden.

All of these things, I believe the people of Australia want, and you as members of the Chambers of Commerce want, yet all of these things do mean that there is more interference by government with, in some cases, the way in which matters are done, with in all cases the right of the individual to retain completely that which he has earned by his initiative, or sometimes by his luck. This I know you accept.

Yet there is a point where governments and peoples must reach a balance in this. There is a point where, while seeing what needs to be provided for you at your wishes by a government, while seeing the goals to which we want to attain, a judgment must be made as to whether should we seek to do too much in the fields of which I have spoken to you, we would impose such burdens on the individual that we would perhaps damage or destroy the incentive to work, the requirement to devote oneself to the business in which one is engaged. That, of course, is self-destructive because in the long run all those things I have spoken to you about that you require and governments provide are only provided if there is incentive to grow in the individual, if there is requirement to devotion to one's business in the individual, because that is the basis. So there is a balance required between those things a nation wants and between the necessity not to take so much from an individual's earnings that insufficient is left to him.

There is another balance that is required because it is not only from things that are taken from money or resources that are taken from you that a government provides those things of which I have spoken, a government also, at any rate a central government, also has the capacity in fact, as you know, to print its own money, to provide through bank credit, or however it may be, for some resources, and yet there, too, there is though theoretically no limit, actually and practically a very real limit because if that path should be followed too far, then we destroy that other requirement that you have and that a nation has and that wage-earners have, that pensioners have, and that is, that there should be relative stability in the cost-price structures of a nation, relative stability in the cost of living. I don't mean the stagnation, I don't mean the lack of any general slight inflation but that there should be sufficient stability to enable plans to be made by commerce and to enable individual pensioners and wage-earners not to be destroyed by inflation. So there too is another mark which can't be overstepped.

And it is in the selection of priorities, and it is in the judgment of what should be laid upon a people that the people will judge a government. A government will, if it is wise, if it takes the right decisions, provide to a people those opportunities which, if seized, will make that people great, and these are the tasks as I see them, on the one hand for a government, on the other for an Australian people.

I want, before I declare the conference open, to mention perhaps one more thing, and that is this. I suggest to you that over the last two decades, if we look back on them, we can take pride because we have seen this country grow from a relatively small, relatively insignificant nation to one which is still not great and which still cannot throw its weight around in the councils of the world, but one which is much greater than it was, one which is I think respected in the world for its attitudes and its approaches, and one which has within it the seeds of greatness which, if they are nurtured, will lead, and if the paths followed in the last two decades are followed, will lead to what I think you would have in your minds as a picture of the nation you would like Australia to be.

If we follow those paths, we must follow them not just within this country. I know again that I am echoing what is in the minds of many of you and of those who are officials of your organisation when I say let us particularly, let commerce particularly pay attention, forge links, make trade with those countries in our region closest to us, with as much devotion as you can. We believe that it is necessary to try by all means to build up the economies of those closest to us, and by building up those economies to try to see that the living standards of the peoples in those communities rise. This is humanitarian, but it is more than that. It is, if it becomes successful, of self-interest to us and to you and to them.

As an example of what I mean, let me draw your minds to what has happened in our trade, in our nation's trade with the country of Japan. Only a mere decade ago, about 1955/56, we exported \$173 million worth of goods from Australia to Japan, and now that scant time later, we export \$591 million worth of goods from Australia to Japan. Ten years ago, we imported some \$45 million from Japan, and now we import close to \$300 million. This is an example of how trade can expand if there is a country such as Japan with rising living standards, with rising requirements, with the capacity to buy and the capacity to sell.

As one more example - in that country which has become a country to us of the most significance in trading terms, there has been a revolution caused in the everyday living of the Japanese in that as the standard of living has risen, so the requirements which were always there but were not able to be satisfied have been able to be met, and the wool which is sold in such large quantities to Japan has become a fabric that the Japanese wear, whereas previously they could not afford it and they could not wear it.

Well, that is Japan, but there is closer to us Thailand and Indonesia and Malaysia and the Philippines. In all those areas, as the standard of living rises, so will the opportunity for them to sell to us and for us to sell to them increase. As that increases, so will people be coming from there to sell to us or perhaps forming joint ventures with us in one way and another and so will we, I hope, be going there to sell to them, so will you and the manufacturers be going there, I hope, to sell to them, because as the markets arise there, there will be no substitute for the old-fashioned kind of salesmanship which we used to know in Australia - door-knocking, visiting, talking to the buyer. There will be no substitute for this. And if this happens and you go there, then inevitably, just as in the past nations were drawn together and learnt about each other and had mutual benefit because of those who drove the caravans across the desert or the small ships across the sea, so will nations the better understand each other, the better know each other's problems, the better be able to provide technological assistance, whatever may come back in return for it, and there will be not only dividends in terms of firms' balance sheets, but there will be dividends in human relations which will be more enduring for the future and which because I think you can and will help in this, is one reason why I came to declare this conference open this morning and why I now do so.

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