

STATE ZIONIST COUNCIL OF N. S. W.
ISRAEL'S NATIONAL DAY
TOWN HALL, SYDNEY, N. S. W.

28 April 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Speaker, Rabbi Porush,
Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Three days ago in Israel, near Gaza, there was dedicated a memorial to men from Australia and New Zealand - and you may be sure that among them were many of the Jewish faith - who rode and fought in that storied land a little more than fifty years ago, and who are still remembered by the people and the Government of Israel. They left behind them for some reason, in the country which is now Israel, feelings of friendship which have grown and flourished in the years since then as the eucalypts they planted there have grown and flourished and increased in those years.

And it is possible, it can be argued, that the events of those days so long ago began not to lead to the seed of the State of Israel, because that seed had been nurtured in dreams for centuries, but perhaps with some first faltering steps to the germination of that seed, which thirty years later, and twenty years ago burst into life as the infant Jewish homeland began to grow. Now twenty years later you, as fellow Australians, have done me the honour to ask me to come and participate in your rejoicing, not at the establishment but at the re-establishment of the Jewish State. And so here in this city, this capital, where our own nation some 200 years ago began, we all tonight, as I think it is fitting that we should, in this place where we began, celebrate the new beginning of Israel some twenty years ago.

This, Mr. Chairman, is a night to remember a nation that faith made real. A dream, that being cherished in hearts through centuries, ultimately became a concrete fact. And this is a night, too, to remember that these kinds of developments come only through brains, devotion, dedication, unremitting effort and hard work and the willingness to sacrifice and fight to keep the reality a growing, pulsing entity. And that's been done.

Sir, what a story is here - what a story comes to mind, not just of that culmination of twenty years ago but of all the years and hundreds of years before that. A people conquered. . . . when? 2,000 years ago - a people which in spite of conquest adhered to their spiritual faith and their religious beliefs and which, because they adhered to their spiritual faith and their religious beliefs in that time, had their holy places defiled and their cities destroyed and their nation dispersed to the corners of the earth. A people which can look back in those days on such epic stories, which can draw strength from reflecting on that human greatness which led to such actions as that thousand strong garrison of the fortress of Masada who fled, after the destruction of Jerusalem, to a high plateau and there were besieged by the Romans for two and a half to three years and held out against them all that time and then when the situation was quite hopeless, and the night before an inevitable conquest came about, killed their women and their children and themselves because they preferred to be dead than to be slaves. A people who can look back in sorrow to victimisation, persecution, massacre, injustice, in many of the lands

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will be strengthened. So this is no time for me to talk for long. I have mentioned things, I have spoken of things which I believe must be deep in the consciousness of all people of the Jewish faith but which are as true and as valid in the consciousness of people of any faith. And if in the course of speaking to you, as may be possible, I've touched on sentiments which I can feel but dimly, compared to the way they must be felt in the blood and bone and hearts of many here, and if I have thereby trespassed perhaps, I ask your pardon. But I have done this for two reasons.

Firstly because, however imperfectly, I think I have enough imagination, I think I have enough sentiment to begin to understand the pride and joy which you, as Jewish people, must be feeling today. And I want you to know this. And secondly, because I talk to you as Australian citizen to Australian citizen, as part of my nation - yours and mine - as I would talk to Australians of Scottish, or Irish, or Scandinavian, or whatever-it-may-be descent because in this we are one and I feel some right to rejoice with you.

We have much to do here, you and I, in this country of ours just as there is much to do in Israel, and as in Israel our far tomorrows may see greatness, if we have the passion to live and create, joined with a willingness to sacrifice and if need be die to preserve.

In one sense, the creation of Israel might be regarded as a miracle, but as a great Jewish writer many years ago pointed out: "A miracle cannot prove that which is impossible. It is useful only of a confirmation of that which is possible". Perhaps everything is possible for Israel and Australia, given the spirit, given the endurance, given the willingness, given the sacrifice, and I hope that, both here and in Israel, things now thought to be impossible will be shown to be possible even if people may regard that as a miracle. One thing is sure - and having said this I'll sit down - one thing is sure, that the values of a human individual, the rights of a man to live his own life without fear of those eternal allies of totalitarianism, the secret police, the torture chamber and the hangman, are rights which must be defended to the death, are rights which if they are defended will lead to that full, peaceful, happy life which yet eludes us, but for which you, as people of Jewish faith, have striven and will strive, and for which you, as Australians in Australia, will strive with me.

I thank you.
