

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF CHAMBERS OF
MANUFACTURES AND OF FEDERAL MANUFAC-
TURERS' ORGANISATIONS

A. C. M. A. Conference Centre, Canberra

2ND MAY 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Mr President and Gentlemen :

What I have to say to you, because of the time in which I can say it, will not be very deep, nor would you expect it to go very deeply into any of the many subjects which will be occupying your own minds during the course of the Conference. But you will, I know, be hearing from the Treasurer on matters financial, and I think the Minister for Defence will be talking about those aspects of defence which impinge upon the manufacturing industry inside Australia. You will get from the acting Minister for Trade and Industry comments in that field of activity which are of interest to you. So really, the object of my being here is, firstly, to show publicly the respect and regard which the Government, on behalf of the people of Australia has for the Associated Chambers of Manufactures and for what they are seeking in one way or another to do for the growth of our country. It is a tribute to come, and that I think, you realise is the main object of my presence with you.

I did notice that this was supposed to be a two-way flow of ideas - that is, a flow of ideas from the Chambers to the Government, and on other aspects, a flow back from the Government to the Chambers. It will, I think, be a three-way flow of ideas because I have no doubt that at the meeting here itself, there will be a flowing of ideas from some people with some ideas as to what should happen and they in turn will be the subject of discussion with others.

You can do, and have done - and can do more - to advance the possibilities of Australia's becoming more quickly than she otherwise would, a significant national power. I think it was Sir Robert Menzies, some time ago, who said he doubted whether any country had grown so quickly in so many fields in such a relatively short length of time as has Australia since the end of the Second World War. I don't think that anyone could deny that the building-up of our manufacturing industry, the provision of new fields of endeavour inside it, has given to this country industrial muscles which, for a variety of reasons, are essential in these days, and has given that employment which makes possible the continuation of immigration policies which in turn make possible the growth of the nation.

There will be arguments as to how this can best be done, as to what price should be paid for what is being contributed by you. Of course there will. But that there has been a contribution, I think nobody can doubt.

And so I hope you will take further advantage still of such export incentive schemes as have been or will be provided and take further advantage, too, of the ability to raise capital throughout the world in this comparatively safe haven of the world, in order further to expand

manufacturing activities.

I don't suppose that twenty or twenty-five years ago it would have been possible for this nation to have gone through the period of drought in its most productive areas, which it has but recently gone through, without having been most visibly affected, and badly affected in its economic life. I think it is the growth of alternative avenues of employment, the growth of manufacturing which has not wiped out, but minimised the economic effects of this drought which recently has hit us.

Well, how best to continue these matters is first going to be the subject of discussion amongst yourselves, and secondly the subject of submissions made on your behalf to us, some of which, as you have indicated, may be difficult; some of which, it is not impossible, might not be accepted, but all of which will be very carefully studied.

We have for our part - and I make this just a very brief thumbnail sketch - we for our part have to try, as managers in the way in which you are managers, to choose between what are in some respects contradictory requirements. I think we must see that those of our citizens in Australia who are, as a result of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, crippled by illness, unable to live a full life in their age, invalids during the course of their productive life, are looked after by the community to a degree which provides a respectable life for these people.

I know we have to supply for this country, more than ever before, a proportion of our production going towards defence greater than we have ever had to supply before except in time of war, but one which must be kept down and is not allowed to grow disproportionately. Indeed, although the expenditure on defence will inevitably grow because of commitments already entered into in this coming financial year and possibly the one after, any increase in proportion must in the future be checked against the other requirements we have got.

We have, at the same time as having to meet those requirements amongst many others, to endeavour to see that we leave in the hands of the individual citizen of Australia, and those who mobilise the individual citizen for work, such as yourselves, sufficient reward for what has been earned or what has been done to see that an incentive, a financial incentive for future advance still remains.

We have to provide, and there are some here who have been active in urging that this must be provided, and rightly so -- we have to provide for even better educational levels than is provided now, and particularly seek to build up technical education at all levels. I would think that at a gathering of significant people in Chambers of Manufactures, I do not need to underline the essentiality of technical and technological education, in which I include such matters as retraining, and such matters as managerial training at various levels.

All of these things, and of course many more are those between which governments as managers have to choose. On one occasion,

I said something of this kind to a Chamber of Commerce, and for some reason which I find it impossible to understand, was reported in the newspapers with a big headline saying : "More Taxation is Threatened". What I am really doing is putting before you all the different requirements which you want, and showing how, as managers, one must choose between them all, and that is all I am doing. In a way, it is trying to do what each of you in each of your industries do

Whatever choices we finally make, whatever area it is in which we finally decide to try first - because all of them cannot be all overcome at once - I can tell you this, and I believe that you will believe me. We will, in this managerial role, make choices which we arrive at on a completely honest assessment, right or wrong, but completely honest assessment of what we think to be the best for the present and future growth of this nation, and I would think that you gentlemen would do the same.

If through your efforts, and if through the efforts of governments throughout Australia, we can infuse into the Australian people a belief that each one of them as an individual, in whatever it is that he is called upon to do by way of employment, that each one of them should follow the rule : "Whatsoever thy right hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might" in production, on the land, wherever it may be; if we can infuse into them the belief that in doing this they are contributing as much to the growth of a great nation, and a nation in which it is good to live, as is a soldier on the battlefield protecting Australia in Viet Nam, and that if they are doing this, they are doing it not merely for their own material advancement but also for the provision of a better material and spiritual milieu for their children, then really, Sir, we will have done a great deal to make this a greater country than it is.

I hope that out of this conference which I now declare open may come steps in that direction.
