



HRH THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S THIRD
COMMONWEALTH STUDY CONFERENCE
CANBERRA THEATRE, CANBERRA

Welcoming Address
by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. J.G. Gorton

16 MAY 1968

I don't really think that what I am proposing to do this morning is to give a lecture. What I thought I was doing was to give a welcome, and indeed, that is what I do with great warmth on behalf of the Government of Australia and the people of Australia to all of you who are gathered together here in what is our National Capital.

We haven't had a national capital for very long. It is only, I suppose ... 67, 68 years ... I'm not very good at precise mathematics of that kind, but early in this century that what were previously six completely separate and sovereign states federated in this nation of Australia and chose Canberra as the capital of the nation. I think it has probably only been in the last fifteen years that the people of this country as a whole, whether they come from Perth, or Darwin, or the north of Queensland, or wherever it may be, have come to look upon this city as a national symbol - not as one which they would like to see their tax money spent in, in preference to the particular region from which they come, but as one in which they would like to see tax money spent in preference to most other regions from which they don't come. As a consequence, it has grown, and grown in a planned way.

I think, Sir, that when you visited this city first it had some 28,000 people. It now has 100,000, and we expect that early in the 1980's it will be a quarter of a million. It was the idea of a young man, that is to say, the planning of it was the idea of a young man - 34 years old at the time when he first drew the circuits, the streets, the general way of getting around Canberra which has resulted in almost every tourist who comes here getting lost at least twice. But which, nevertheless, has given a feeling of space, a feeling of ownership, a feeling of pride, I think, to most of those who live in the capital.

It is more than merely a capital city. It is the place in which those leading members of the public service who, I understand, are to speak to you at a later hour this day, live and work, and for the most part, have their being. Of course, some of them have still not yet been brought to the capital.

It is the seat of government - at any rate of Commonwealth Government which, in a Federal system as any of you who come from federated countries know, is a government which bears all the odium of anything which has to be done in order to raise taxation and gets none of the credit for any of the benefits which flow from it. Nevertheless, it is here that great government decisions are made, and it is on the advice of those who will be speaking to you that those government decisions are - at any rate sometimes - based. Now that I will leave for them to talk about. They will say how it is that a government service

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in Australia operates. They will explain, better than I could explain, the duties and responsibilities which lie upon them and they will, no doubt, very carefully point out that while they are responsible for advice, they are not responsible for policy, and indeed, they are responsible for carrying out policies decided by governments, governments being elected by the people of Australia because we are, as I think you have been told, a country which is wedded to democracy.

The theme of the conference is, as I understand it, how to make a machine work for the good of man, rather than to have men existing to serve machines, how to harness the industrial development and invention which takes place so that that industrial development and invention, causing as it nearly always does, disruption initially, will nevertheless eventually provide a better life than was possible before the invention took place.

This question is one which has bedevilled man for far back in history. In Great Britain, the country from which my father came, I remember reading of Luddite riots which took place when, for the first time, the cottage industries which had employed people in weaving and other methods of making their living were threatened by the incipient factories which at that time were brought in because it was found that things could be made cheaper, and in many cases better. But although things could be made cheaper, and in many cases better, nevertheless a pattern of life was disrupted and a pattern of home employment was put in jeopardy, and so there were riots.

Yet, the eventual results of the invention, of course, advanced immensely the material standard of living of those in that country. In the case of the industrial revolution which swept the world - I suppose, if I may oversimplify - beginning with the invention of steam, in that time also we had the same problem repeated, with great industrial capacity created, with infinitely more efficiency brought to bear on the production of the needs of individual people, but with individual people indiscriminately being herded into those "dark Satanic mills", about which words were written at the time.

Well, we have moved from those days, We have moved to understand, as this conference will discuss, how we can use the new inventions which come pouring in upon us, which must in many cases disrupt existing patterns of employment - how we can use them so that we avoid human distress, so that we avoid human displacement, so that we achieve the benefits that the new inventions will bring to us.

In order to do this, we need more than a mere understanding of the inventions themselves, than a mere understanding of the application of new principles, important though this may be, for these new scientific achievements, these new technological achievements are bringing to us as human beings a capacity for good which I think has not been known in the world before to the extent to which it is, and a capacity for evil, which I think has not been known in the world before to the extent to which it is. Just as the invention of fire was the invention of something which could be used on the hearth of a home to warm

a family during a winter's night, or to provide a meal which was not raw and half-burnt, so the invention of fire could be used, and has been used, to destroy cities and irreplaceable libraries. Just as the understanding of the atom has enabled immense advantage in medical techniques and in industrial techniques, and I think and hope for the future, provided a chance for dry continents such as our own to take water from the sea and turn that water into the fresh water that we need, so the understanding of the atom has also given an opportunity for cities and regions to be laid waste.

Therefore, it is more than merely understanding the scientific changes, more than merely understanding the technological changes which are required. It is an understanding of human hearts. It is a call to educate human beings to see that these great powers now being released are used for good and are not used for evil.

Beyond that, and I think below that, but nevertheless of immense importance, is this requirement to understand what human needs are. I know they vary; of course they must from individual to individual. But there probably must be, I think, some common human requirement if an individual is to feel himself fulfilled, if he is to feel that he is living a not merely materially successful, but a satisfactory life.

These things, I think, we do not yet know, but because one of the by-products of the scientific revolution is that there is going to be more and more leisure, more and more capacity for an individual to move away from the hourly requirement to earn and leave him more time to develop - I did not say "enjoy", but to develop oneself must be regarded as enjoyment - we need to know more about what it is that people wish to do in this way, and to provide that along with the harnessing of the scientific and technical advances made.

That I think, Your Royal Highness, is one of the basic ideas underlying the whole of this conference, and indeed, the other conferences you have held. Because these are problems which are not confined to one country but problems which in varying degrees already encompass the countries of the world and will in the future encompass in greater degree more countries, it is time and more than time that people gathered, as you have gathered, to discuss these matters. And it may be that if from your discussions come some ideas which, as ideas are inclined to do, filter slowly, but filter through a community and then to a government, then it may be that you will be providing for your children or your grandchildren a world in which the great advances which have been made will be understood, will be used in a proper way in the world, and - which I think we all seek more than anything else - the individual can feel he is contributing to the community in which he lives, can get satisfaction from that, can feel that whatever it is inside him which is able to be developed, whether it be musical talent, artistic talent, literary talent, or any other talent, is being given full opportunity to burgeon and develop. If this happens, then a great service will have been done to mankind.

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And so I wish you well in your deliberations. I have great pleasure in welcoming you again, if I may, to the National Capital, and I hope when you disperse to the cities of this Commonwealth that you will see for yourselves the problems still remaining and perhaps suggest some solution. If in your discussions you disagree as to the precise solutions or even as to the precise problems, well, Sir, that will be not at all surprising because it is not unknown for us to disagree amongst ourselves.

I thank you.
