

PATERSON FEDERAL ELECTORATE CONFERENCE  
ANNUAL DINNER AT MAITLAND TOWN HALL

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MAITLAND, N. S. W.

30 SEPTEMBER 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Chairman, Allen, Sir Alister, Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen:

When I first received a suggestion that I might come and talk to you tonight, I saw with a certain amount of horror that it was suggested that there should be no limit on my speech.

Before I come to talk to any gathering of this kind, my wife keeps reminding me of a quatrain which I think it would be a good thing for all politicians to remember all the time, and that quatrain is:-

"I love a finished speaker,  
I really, truly do,  
I don't mean one who's polished,  
I just mean one who's through."

And so it won't be without limitation of time before I am through.

I would like to say some few things to you. One is that speaking for my wife and myself, we have felt, on this visit to Maitland, both during the Civic Reception and during the time we have spent with you and during the time we have talked with the too few of you with whom we have been able to converse, that in a way we feel at home because we, too, come from country areas, country areas not quite so blessed as this,

After all, we have where we come from, an eleven-inch annual rainfall - when we get it, and we don't often get it - and you have an annual rainfall which apparently varies very considerably, but which by and large enables (except when you are sailing dinghies in the Town Hall here where I stand today) more production and more ease of production than occurs in the rather hot dry area we come from.

But the feeling has been the same, the feeling of people who are out, by and large, on the land, doing things on the land, coping with natural disasters, coping with the difficulties of price, of production, of season, and carrying on, as Australians have carried on for a couple of hundred years now. Carrying on against the flood and fire and famine which are a part of what is, basically, a rather hard land, and people who perhaps as a result of that, or perhaps because of some innate Australianism - I don't know - say, "All right. Well, it's tough this year, but it will be better next year. There is always going to be another season. Maybe the prices will go up. Maybe there will be better production," and who through it all have a kind of friendly relationship which extends throughout the areas of the country of Australia. We have felt at home with you, and I can only hope that during this brief visit you have begun to feel at home with us.

You have got, if I may say so, one of the best Federal representatives in Canberra of any electorate in Australia. Indeed, for myself, who tends to fly off a little at angles, who tends to get swept away with enthusiasm, it is of immense advantage to have somebody who says, "Yes, that's wonderful, but just a moment, let's look at the practicalities of this situation. Let's see whether it will work or not. Let's see whether this in fact is going to turn out the way you want it to turn out." It is of enormous advantage, and I am always prepared to recognise that there can be two points of view - mine, and one that is probably wrong. I am happy to say that on most occasions, mine and Allen's tend to coincide, and those who - as he explained to you happens in a Cabinet - those who have quite properly other questions to raise are, for the most part, probably wrong. When they are not wrong, I think both of us agree with the majority and we come out as he has said we do, with a Government policy backed by all of us, whom you have elected, to try and govern this country.

We both came in, Allen and I, and Sir Alister, in 1949, and this is now some twenty years ago - two decades. We only came in under the leadership at that time because people who are in this room today, or people who have taken the place and had the same ideals as people who were in a room like this in 1949, brought us in to office at that stage, and we took over a nation which then was comparatively small. I don't know the precise numbers - maybe seven million, maybe seven million and a half - but we took over a nation which our opponents at the time said was a nation which if it had seven per cent of unemployed, then had reached the best ratio of employment the nation could hope to have; took over a nation in which government interfered, greatly, in almost all aspects of individual endeavour; took over a nation in which development had hardly started. And because of what those who are now in this room did, and the ideals they had, and the ideals their successors are still propagating, we have in the course of two decades, we - and you, raised the nation from seven and a half to twelve million, stopped interference in too great detail with the individual initiative which alone can enable a country to progress. Given a climate which enables those who are prepared to take risks, to take risks, and to garner the fruits of the risks they take or accept the losses of the risks they take personally, and which because individuals are enabled to do this - to garner the fruits or to take the risks - have brought this nation to a point of international take-off which would have been unthought of two decades ago.

I don't mean that in that period of time there have not been some mistakes made by government. If there is anybody in this room today, whether he be an industrialist, a manager, somebody on a farm, who can look back for two decades and say at no stage did I make a mistake, then that man is a miracle man because almost always, over a long period of time when decisions have to be made, some of them will, in the light of future circumstances, be wrong. But I believe that I can say on behalf of the Government to which Allen and I and Sir Alister belong, that though there have been on occasions some decisions which might not stand up to examination afterwards, there have probably been fewer decisions of that kind than have been taken by any government I know of in any country in the world. And when I say this, this is no tribute to me, for I have just lately taken up this position. This is a tribute to the people you have elected to the national parliament and to the way they have worked together and to the vision they have had of what Australia ought to be. And this is something which in the future can only be continued and will be continued, I know, from this gathering tonight, by the support given by those who say, "I think these

people have the right idea. I think these people have an objective for our nation which is the objective which I in my heart have got. I will work for them. I will (as somebody said to me tonight) come hail, come snow, come rain, hand out how-to-vote cards for them. I will argue for them, because, in the main and on the whole, we have the same objectives." This is one of the great sustenances of a Prime Minister that there are, throughout Australia, so many people of the kind who are here tonight who will do this work, who will give this trust because they believe that what they want will eventually be achieved.

We, as is common with all nations at all times, have great problems before us at the moment. It is probably true that in Australia we have reached a watershed, a time of decision in many, many fields, and that those tenets on which previously we built our policy are not any longer to be accepted without question.

In the field in which your Member is particularly interested, that of Defence, we find ourselves in Australia in a completely changed world situation. For almost two hundred years we lived under the protection of the British Navy and England, and we did little or nothing to help ourselves in between the crises that occurred in the world. We left it to others to protect us, except, of course, that when the Boer War broke out, or the First World War broke out, or the Second World War broke out, or the Malayan emergency broke out, or the Korean war broke out, then we came in as a people, wholeheartedly and completely. And though in between times we did not pay much attention to it, I still think, looking back on that history that "if blood be the price of admiralty, Lord God we have paid in full". But that has changed. We do not have and will not have this protection from abroad any more. We ourselves must protect ourselves, and this calls for resources which I do not myself wish or like to give - resources that must be diverted to ships and soldiers and aircraft and guns and ammunition - resources I would prefer to devote to development and to social progress. But these resources must be diverted, according to the judgment of your Government if we are, in the changed situation of the world, to be able to take the first brunt of any attack which in the future may fall upon us and to help in maintaining stability in the area to our north - a situation which has never faced this nation before - but which now faces us in all stark reality.

And as that occurs, we have before us the challenge of developing the nation itself, a challenge which holds before us a vision that previously was never known to the people of this country. Gradually we have grown since the first settlement was made at Port Phillip, gradually the tempo of our growth has increased, but latterly the tempo of our growth has almost got out of control. We are growing in geometric progression. The things that we need to do and can do, and the opportunities before us are flowering in a way they have never flowered before.

And so we find that in Bass Strait we strike oil which gives us defence capacity, which gives us a saving of overseas exchange, which gives us a control of our own capacity, which people once thought we would never have.

And so we have in Western Australia, in the Northern Territory, in Queensland, great new mineral prospects opening up which will require billions of dollars of private capital to bring to fruition, which will require not only the tearing from the earth of the ore and the resources which are there but the fabrication of the ore and resources through the various

processes to the finished product. This will make us, God willing, one of the great industrial nations of the world, but requiring billions of private capital, hundreds of millions of governmental capital. . . . something which two decades - one decade previously - was unthought of in this nation.

And we have, I think, a public conscience which has woken, and which says, yes, in the years past we have said a government ought to take note of those who are ill and those who are aged and those who are handicapped; a government ought to contribute towards the maintenance of these people, but it should only contribute, and it should take the stand that families and charities should provide and a government should only add the topping to what is provided; a public conscience which says this is no longer good enough - we ought to see if we are an affluent society, that there is no-one in this land who does not have the capacity for a frugal living when they are old or when they are ill or when they are in some other way suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

For myself, I have left the concept of a contribution towards the living costs of people of this kind and accepted on behalf of the Government and of the Liberal Party that what is required is to see that nobody starves, that nobody has to have blankets bought for them, that people of that kind can live in reasonable dignity and with frugality and are provided with enough for that. And this is something which is different from that which previously was accepted.

I have sketched in only a few of the challenges which face us now. With these before us as a people, it is necessary to look again at some of the dogmas which two decades ago were uncritically accepted, because perhaps two decades ago, they were valid, they were reasonable, and this is something which we as a party have got to do. I speak as a party now, not so much as I have been in the past few minutes, as a people.

When we formed the Liberal Party in 1945, when we came to Government in 1949, two decades ago, all of us accepted and all of us believed that the sole task of an Australian Government was to act in a sense as an honest broker, and that the governments of the various divisions of Australia ought to take the full responsibility for the educational requirements of a State, for the hospital requirements of a State, for the road requirements, for all the other matters which were then, and still are, for a large part, their responsibility.

But in that period of two decades, there has grown up in the minds of the Australian people, as I believe - I may be wrong, but as I believe - a requirement that an Australian Government should see that no matter in what part of this nation a child may be born, it should have the same facilities provided for its education as are provided in any other part of this nation. There has grown up - as I believe - a requirement that if a person gets ill in any part of this nation, then an Australian Government should see that the opportunities for treatment of that illness are the same in any part of this nation. There has grown up a requirement for an Australian Government to take a responsibility, a financial responsibility to see that these things happen.

And what we need to question now are the dogmas of twenty years ago and to see how, if a change is necessary - and I think it is - how such a change can be worked out, to see that the facilities for education, that the facilities for health, that the facilities for roads, that the facilities in other directions are the same, while avoiding centralist administrative control from Canberra. This is going to be one of the significant questions to be decided in this nation of ours in the future. This

is one of the questions that those who support the Liberal Party should consider and to which they should direct their minds, not with adherence to dogma, but with questioning of everything, with questioning of what a State Government puts forward or a Commonwealth Government puts forward, but with an attempt to arrive at a solution which will in the end be best for the nation as a whole.

For if there is one thing of which I am convinced, it is this, that we have reached a stage in our national history when there is in the hearts of Australians in Western Australia, in Queensland in Tasmania or wherever it may be, a burgeoning belief in our nationalism, a burgeoning faith in ourselves as Australians first. There is a knowledge that what happens in great development in any part of this continent benefits all parts of this continent, and a feeling - I believe a justified feeling - that we should, as nationals of a country which has much to be proud of, hold up our heads, be proud of what we have done in the past, look forward with faith and hope to the future, not as New South Welshmen, not as Victorians, not as West Australians, but as people who belong to the nation of Australia first.

If I can spread throughout the confines of this continent that belief which I think is held in the hearts of the people who live in it, if you can help me spread throughout the confines of this continent that belief, then I think we will have made the greatest step forward since this nation was first founded so short a time ago.

I remember - and for light relief I tell you this story - something which was told to me when I was at Mt. Tom Price not long ago, when Mr. Heath, the Leader of the Opposition in the United Kingdom, was out here. He was being taken around Mt. Tom Price by Mr. Court, the Minister for Industrial Development in Western Australia. Mr. Heath particularly wanted to meet an Australian working at Mt. Tom Price. Mr. Court took him to a group of men who were working there, and he went to one and said "Are you an Australian?" and he said, "No, I come from London." He went to another and said, "Are you an Australian?" and he said, "No, I come from Poland. I only came out here a short time ago." He went to another one and he said, "No, I'm not an Australian. I come from Czechoslovakia." Finally, they came to somebody who clearly was an Australian. I don't know how to describe it, but you know what an Australian is. . . . he talked like an Australian, he looked like an Australian, he rolled a cigarette like an Australian, he leant against things like an Australian. . . . Finally Charles Court thought he had got Heath to meet an Australian. He said, "Well, here you are. Surely you're an Australian." The bloke said, "No, I'm a Victorian." So he gave up. But I haven't given up. You haven't given up. Because the real future of this country, the achievement of what is possible for us is if we all first say we are Australian, and then we are New South Welshmen, and then we are people from Maitland - but first, we are the members of a nation destined to be great.

This is what, I think, the Liberal Party as such should seek to achieve, and in achieving it - because, perhaps, I have spoken in generalities - must keep in mind what was one of the first tenets of this party when it was formed, and that was that it was dedicated to individual freedom and the greatest possible amount of individual initiative, that people could take risks and reap rewards, or that people could take risks and if they made bad judgments, reap the consequences.

But what do people want? What do those Australians of whom you are representative want? What should a political party seek to give them? Well we know some of the answers. We know the material answers.

We know they want more development. We know they want better hospitals. We know they want better education. We know they want better town-planning. We know they want more sewerage - or at least I am told so by the Leader of the Opposition. . . . well, it may turn out that we have an argument as to whether we want an affluent or an affluent society! But I think that over and above these things on which we can argue, and discuss and argue properly, that people want more than that.

They want, I think, a feeling that in what they are doing in their daily life they are not only seeking their own material advancement, they are not only wanting to improve the farm on which they live or expand the business in which they are employed - though these are important both for themselves and for the nation - but they want a feeling, I think, that the efforts that they put in are for an end which is above and beyond their own particular material advancement. They want a feeling that what they are doing is not only helping themselves but contributing to the community in which they live, that they are helping the advancement of the community, that they are bringing into existence, perhaps, a nation which can be great materially, which can be great in terms of strength of defence, which can be great in compassion, which can be one step forward along the road towards which nations throughout history have striven - but so far have striven in various degrees in vain - but which I think we here have the greatest opportunity of any nation in history, ultimately, to achieve.

This is what I think people want - to be called on for sacrifice as well as to be given the opportunity for individual betterment, and this is what, with your support and the support of my colleagues, this Government will seek to bring about and will seek to evoke in the hearts of the Australian people.

A long time ago somebody - it may have been Banjo Paterson - I think it was - wrote these lines about Australia:-

"We see the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended  
And at night, the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars."

We can and are getting into our hearts and minds the vision splendid of what this nation can be, and if we do not reach the stars, at least we can aspire towards them, and strive towards them, and according to the degree of our competence, of our efforts, according to the degree to which we reach them, so we will have contributed not only to this nation but to the evolution of mankind towards the kind of world we all want to live in.

You have helped in this. You have helped me tonight by coming here. I look to you to continue this help in the future.

Thank you.

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