

LIBERAL PARTY DINNER
ROBERTSON ELECTORATE

TERRIGAL, N. S. W.

18 OCTOBER 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. President, Mr. Bridges-Maxwell, other Members of Parliament and Members of this Federal Conference:-

It has been very pleasant for me today to come to this electorate. I was able to meet too few of the people because time was so short, but, nevertheless, it has been, insofar as I have been able to meet some people, quite delightful. It has been doubly delightful, in a way, because I am with a member of the Federal Parliament who I think perhaps more than most members, more than almost all members, is really concerned with social welfare questions in Australia.

He has given a great deal of time to this, a great deal of thought to this. He bombards me with memoranda about this, and much of what he has to say - not all - but a great deal of what he has to say has been extremely significant, and some of it has found its way into something that we are going to carry out. This is important to us, I think, as a country, as I will develop later.

What I really want to say to you all here tonight is that you are, some of you initially, some of you as spiritual successors, the same sort of people who, over two decades ago, decided that Australia was going in the wrong direction. Those people who came together in 1945, nearly twenty-five years ago, decided the type of government they had, the philosophy which that government was following, was one which would neither make our nation great nor give to the individuals in that nation the full chance to develop their own capacity. They therefore formed a new political party, and subsequently changed the government.

This has been significant, I believe, because if that change had not been brought about - by those who belonged to conferences such as this throughout all Australia - then we would not now be within cooe of the kind of nation that we are. It was because you and your predecessors did this that we were able to get away from a conception that the individual existed only to serve the state, and rather to accept the unalterable truth that a state ought to exist, and the only proper basis for a state to exist, is for that state to serve the interests of the individuals who make it up. So you got away from all the controls, you got away from all the dogma, you got away from all the old-fashioned thinking which, had it continued, would have prevented us from being what we are now.

And I believe that what you did then has already paid enormous dividends to the nation in which we live. At that time people were saying, if you have five or six per cent of unemployment, that is reasonable, that is the sort of thing that we can expect. At that time, people were saying, we ought to have profit control. It doesn't matter if somebody invents something new - a new patent, a new way of doing things, a better way. let me use this example in this electorate - a better way of growing oranges so that we get more cases per tree, more trees per acre - that doesn't matter.

And we moved away from that, and during the period between then and now, we have advanced because of the assistance you then gave and are still giving.

But there has been a change now. We are facing a period of change almost comparable with that period we faced two and a half decades ago, because there are new problems facing our nation, there are new courses we have to chart, there are new decisions we have to take.

Some two and a half decades ago, there was no question about who would defend Australia. Great Britain would defend it. When the time came that she was in danger, we would go to her assistance and we went to her assistance in 1914-18, in 1939-45 (even before that in the Boer War), and the flower of our manhood died in those two conflagrations. But in between times, we had no worry about defending ourselves because we were defended by the British Empire, as it then was, and the British Navy which ruled the seas and secured our independence. All that has changed.

Now Britain has withdrawn, or is withdrawing from this part of the world. Now those countries to our north, which for so long were ruled either by Britain or by Holland, or by France, or by some other European power, have become independent nations in their own right. Now there lies behind those independent nations the threat of - I won't say communism - but the threat of expansion on the Marxist-Leninist dogma that communism must be imposed by force over the whole world. We find ourselves contiguous to new nations and we find ourselves with this new threat, and we find ourselves without the shield on which, as long as we have been a nation, we have depended.

This is one of the great changes we must admit has happened. There are two things that flow from it.

First we must cement our relations with the United States under the ANZUS pact, for our own protection. Second, we must see what we can do to maintain the stability of those nations to our north, and thirdly we must contribute to our own capacity for our own defence more of our resources than we have ever had to contribute before.

So we find ourselves requiring - not \$400 million for our own defence, but in this year \$1,250 million, and we will find, as the years go by that the amount of money required for this will increase, though the amount of GNP for this, as far as I am concerned (the percentage of Gross National Product) will not. I do not like this. I doubt if you like this, because this kind of expenditure, those kind of resources could go into schools, roads and developments, and that area in which my opponent seems to be so engrossed - sewerage - and many other fields which are important and significant, but no so important and significant as this.

This is one great change which recently has come about and which we must face, and are facing.

Then I believe - I do not necessarily put these in order of priority, but they are all important - that we must adopt, as a nation in the situation in which we find ourselves today, a new concept for looking after those who are old or ill or handicapped or in some other way the subject of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Up until very recently, the Party which I lead and which you support accepted the philosophy that what we had to do in the field of social welfare was to make a contribution, that we gave something, but that we didn't expect that something which we gave to be enough to meet all the needs of the human individual who was in need. We expected that the family, as it used to do, should be able to look after, to some extent, people who were in need. We thought the charities from outside should contribute too. I don't think, in the nation in which we find ourselves today, we can any longer accept this. For myself, and for the Party which I lead, and I hope and believe for you, I am of the opinion that we must accept the philosophy that we need to be sure that the contribution the community makes to people in this position is enough to enable them to live in frugal comfort without any assistance from outside - though if that assistance from family or charity comes, well that is so much the better. But there should be nobody who, in need, in illness, perhaps without a family, perhaps without access to a charity, does not have enough to eat, does not have enough to heat their home, does not have sufficient blankets to keep them warm at night. This we must stop, and this we will stop because that is another new approach that we must make.

It is not easy to make it because the requirements of people of this kind vary so enormously. Some who live in aged persons' homes can save on what the community gives them. Others who live by themselves in small back streets and pay high rents cannot, but these are problems we are now examining. These are problems the Welfare Committee of the Government is trying to work out, and I believe will work out. These are problems to which your member in particular is turning his attention. These are problems which present again a change in the attitude which we must take as a nation to those who have served the nation well in their time, and who deserve, in my view, at least a decent, respectable self-respecting chance to live in their old age or in their invalidism.

Then we have, here now in this nation, a sort of excitement, an opportunity for development which has never been known in it before. For a long time we grew gradually. Yes, there were gold rushes. People suddenly came here. They built ghost towns. They mined the gold. They went away, and the population increased as they came and decreased as they left. Apart from that, there was just a gradual development of industry, a gradual development of agriculture, a gradual increase in the size of towns and cities.

All of a sudden, we are finding all throughout Australia new things - iron ore, which will bring us in enormous overseas income - oil in Bass Strait. . . . maybe oil in this electorate, who knows? We hope so. Maybe oil offshore from this electorate. It doesn't matter. . . . oil for Australia. Iron ore for Australia. Nickel for Australia. New townships being built, new ports being dredged, new railways being constructed, the whole face of the north of Australia being changed. Along with it, we have the great development in our own industrial capacity inside Australia, the great requirement for people with new technological skills, the desire for people who will work and who have knowledge. This requires billions - not millions but billions of dollars of private investment and millions, perhaps hundreds of millions of Government investment. But the point is that instead of the gradual progress which for so long continued, we are now progressing geometrically. The sky is the limit now, as long as we can get the capital from outside, or from inside, and the manpower from outside, and the technological skills from inside to take advantage of all the opportunities which suddenly have opened up to us.

This is a thing that has only happened in the last few years and this is a thing we must reach out and grasp because in grasping it and in using the opportunity so grasped properly lies the decision of what we will be in two or three or four decades ahead as a nation. We will be by the turn of the century, twenty-eight million people - not the twelve we are now, and the turn of the century is only some thirty years ahead which, in the life of a nation, is but the blinking of an eye. Yet what we do now to seize that opportunity will decide whether, at that time, we have achieved all that it is possible for us to do or whether those living then will say "Thirty years ago people didn't have vision. They didn't see what was possible. They didn't take the measures that were necessary. They fell short, and we would have been a greater nation had they not fallen short."

There are some other things that are changing too. I did see, Sir, on my way here, as you pointed out, the great roadworks which were taking place in order to enable people from here to get to Sydney quickly, and people from Sydney to get here quickly. These I have seen in quite a number of places in New South Wales and indeed in other States, and it made me think about whether in fact it was quite so impossible for a State Government to run its requirements, as has sometimes been suggested to me! But I put that aside and what I say quite seriously to you all is that you are all Liberals, you are all people who, in the long run, will make a considered opinion felt - not accepted by direction but felt, considered, and if reasonable, accepted. When this party was formed two and a half decades ago, there were certain dogmas accepted concerning the relations between an Australian Government and the State Governments which made up the divisions of this nation. They may have been right - I think they were then; they may have been wrong, but surely you cannot ossify, surely something which has been accepted two and a half decades ago, it is reasonable to say ought to be taken out and looked at and examined again to see what a nation twenty-five years later now needs if it is properly to be a nation.

I do not tonight wish to argue philosophical cases, merely to ask you to think about them. But I don't believe that in a nation of the size we are and in a nation with the destiny we have, it is possible for any other government than an Australian Government to have the overall control of the economy, to say whether a deficit should be large or small, to let credit run free if that is necessary or to constrict credit if that is necessary, to control taxation, to see indeed that the economic management of all our nation is run in one way.

I think there is growing in our population as I think there ought to be growing in our population, a requirement that the educational facilities available to a child should be of roughly comparable standard, whether that child is born in Western Australia or New South Wales or Queensland or wherever it may be. I think that there is growing in our population a requirement that if somebody becomes ill and is in need of care, then they should be able to get roughly comparable care, no matter in what division of this nation they may become ill. If I am wrong in this, then I am wrong, but these are things you should think about because they are things that I am thinking about, because they are things the Liberal Party will have to think about if it is to move with the times.



I give only those examples - there are many others - but in giving them, I do not want to be accused, as I have been accused, of being a centralist. I am not. I think the administration of all these matters should remain in governments closer to the people than any government in Canberra can be. But think about whether the goals that I have suggested, the provision of finances that I have suggested for special purposes in education or in roads or in transport or in health ought not really to be something in which an Australian Government has a leading part and in which a state government has the administration and the disbursement of the funds.

This is heresy if it is to be compared to the 1945 Constitution of the Liberal Party. What I am asking you to do is to put your minds on it and see whether you think it is a reasonable sort of heresy or not. I think it is. But in the long run, it is conferences here and in all the other electorates in Australia who will have a great voice in deciding just what ought to be done. Certainly I am sure of this. The whole matter needs examination and discussion because this is another of the great changes facing us as a nation today.

The rest - what is it that a political party such as ours should seek to hold out to the people of Australia? Full employment? Yes, we have done that. A chance for material benefit? Yes, we have done that. The opportunity to take a risk and lose if the risk was not wisely chosen, an opportunity to take a risk and win and keep one's winnings if the risk was wisely chosen, an opportunity for material benefit, for harder work and greater rewards for that harder work? Of course these things we need to hold out, and I believe these things are now available.

We need to give to people more than that because this is not enough. This material benefit, this material advantage, these material advances are not for individuals. People want something more. They want a chance not only to get but to give, not only to accumulate but to contribute, a feeling that in what they are doing they are not only improving the farm on which they live, expanding the factory which they manage, getting a better business, but a feeling that in doing that and in the other community work in which they may be involved, they are enabling their children to inherit a country which is a better one than the one they inherited themselves. They want a country with better opportunities for those who are willing to take them, with a requirement, and indeed a demand for sacrifice and contribution as well as material benefit from what they may do in their daily lives.

I think that people want this. I am sure they ought to want it. I believe it is at the basis of Liberal philosophy. I think this kind of feeling in one way or another, with whatever nuances there may be about it is what has drawn you to support the kind of political philosophy which we apply and which has brought you to this dinner tonight. And if I am right in this, then I think that at the turn of the century we will be not only twenty-eight million people but that we will be twenty-eight million people who are materially great, who are becoming a power in the world, who are able to defend themselves, who see the horizons towards which they are going and who are in themselves fulfilled individuals.

If this is the end result of what we are trying for, then it is an end result which I think has not yet been attained by any other nation I can think of in the world. So it is not only these material matters. It is the chance to provide along with material advancement self-satisfaction - that is the wrong word - self-fulfilment and at that time a horizon which is quite unlimited. If you and others like you believe in this and help us in this and see that we have a chance to do this, then while you will not see the results any more than I will, you can, I think, have faith that those results will be great in the annals of the world.

I believe that you are contributing to some thing which will be greater than anything we have seen before. You know, it was said, "A man's reach must exceed his grasp or what's a Heaven for." I'd translate that as saying, "A nation's reach must exceed its grasp or what's a future for?", and a great deal depends on you to see whether our nation's reach does exceed its grasp and the future that is possible is attained.

I will do my best; those with me will do their best, but we depend in the ultimate on you, and I hope you will give us your support.
