

CLOSING SESSION OF INTERNATIONAL UNION  
OF BUILDING SOCIETIES CONGRESS



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SYDNEY, N.S.W.

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Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of Overseas and Australian Governments and Delegates from many countries:-

For a week now, you have been devoting yourselves to discussing the questions of how to build houses, how to provide good and healthy accommodation and how to harness savings and use the thrifty instincts of individuals in order to see that these ends are attained. Your gathering here in such numbers, the roll calls of your distinguished delegations, the professional and technical nature of your discussions all bear great witness to your understanding and dedication to the issues before you. And yet in a sense perhaps, your work has only begun with these discussions.

Throughout history until very recent times, men have lived for the most part in small communities, in small towns or villages and what would now be regarded as small cities or indeed have wandered with their flocks and herds. It is in this modern age that we have been presented with a new situation, or at least with a situation which is accelerating in difficulty and in opportunity, because man has to a large extent now become a city dweller.

As public health measures have advanced and as technological progress has been used, it has become possible to manufacture more and more goods, world population has risen and is rising - it looks like doubling again within a single generation - and with this, the movement towards larger and larger communities will continue. Thus I think all of us are faced with a problem of modern times and modern society, and that is to make cities for men rather than to fit men into inadequate cities. This is an enormous problem, calling for very great resources and allied inextricably to your interests of providing housing, if we are to get a proper end result.

Let us examine the problem. I am a country man myself and I know the pleasure and the joys of open spaces. Somehow we have to preserve these, and yet at the same time, plan for those who will necessarily have to live in the more populous parts of the towns and cities.

You people who are building - seeking to build - the living areas in these cities have a particular interest, I think, in seeing that your efforts in housing are not nullified, that the people in your healthy new houses are not choked by smog, that the people living in your houses can move freely and quickly from place to place, that they are not deafened nor have their nerves set on edge by a cacophony of noise. These are as allied to your aims as are the provisions of houses or dwelling places of any kind themselves.

You will need to help with the housing of the needy, as well as considering the prosperous, and this may and probably will, involve special partnerships with governments. And there is beyond your immediate task of mobilising financial resources to permit families to purchase the homes they would like, the need for the planning and development of the new communities.

Here in Australia, Sir, the challenge of the future is strong, strong indeed, because we have a population growing steadily by natural increase and by continuing intake of migrants. We are twelve million strong now and if all goes well, we will by the turn of the century be twenty-eight million. The turn of the century is not long in the life of a nation. It is but the blinking of an eye before we will come to the turn of the century. Nor is it long for a planner to be able to study, foresee and seek to overcome, or at least seek to show how these problems can be overcome if the resources can be acquired, nor is it long for the planner to have to do this.

This means that the demand for adequate housing will be insistent, will continue to make calls on the resources of governments and of private enterprise, particularly in the fields where the organisations you represent are active, and particularly in the fields I have touched on, of seeking to create a proper environment.

I am sure, Sir, you have been told and the conference has been told that in Australia over seventy per cent of all householders own their own homes or are paying them off. We, the Government, encourage this, as you do. And it is also an encouragement, though much more remains to be done in our country in this field, towards slum reclamation in attempts to wipe out unhappy legacies of the past. And it encourages flat construction to serve the preferences of those who wish to live in that type of dwelling.

Here in Australia, by co-operation and State Governments, with private enterprise in this field of housing, we try and we aspire to house our people, to house them at reasonable costs in dwellings of their own choice and in the locality where they want to live. That is something of fundamental importance because the standard of a home environment could well be a critical factor in one's standard of life, and by that I don't mean that the best people live in the biggest houses. What I mean is that the householder who likes what he lives in is likely to make the best citizen, if he likes what he lives in and he likes what is around the house in which he lives.

Today, forty per cent of we Australians are under twenty-one, so in truth we are a young country, but we aim to be mature and to be forward-looking in the way we try to house our people. In this we regard it as important that old Australians and new Australians have here the same opportunities to acquire homes of their own or to live in other dwellings of their choice, and in this aim, Sir, your organisation plays a helpful and significant part.

I think our record is a creditable one, but it is not a record which means that by any means full solutions have been found. It does mean that advances have been made towards these solutions.

Now, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, your presence here today and the fact that you have honoured us by having your Congress in Australia is most pleasing to all Australians and most pleasing to myself as Prime Minister. I know the Australian delegates have found much of value in this conference. The opportunity to talk with their experienced colleagues from the older, industrialised countries has been valuable to them, and I am sure Australia will gain a lot as a result.

I think, too, that the delegates from Asia, Africa and South America have perhaps learnt much, have perhaps thought much as to the application of means towards the ends we all seek, and in particular towards the fostering of savings and loan movements in their own countries.

You have covered a great deal of important ground in your deliberations and in examining proposals for a world housing bank, a world personnel bank, among many other things.

By such assemblies as these, you help to expose the housing problems of a world society which is expanding rapidly under enormous population pressures. And more than that, you are contributing to the search for the solution to the problem of how man can happily, healthily and with a sense of satisfaction live in the new vast communities which must grow.

You have had much success. I extend my congratulations to you for what you have done, for what you aspire to do, and for the spirit which lies behind all of your activities.

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