

OPENING OF JOHN McEWEN HOUSE

CANBERRA, A. C. T.

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

4 NOVEMBER 1968

Mr Chairman, Mr Moss, John McEwen and Ladies and Gentlemen present :

My task this afternoon is, I am told, to open the building officially, and I was told that I would be presented with a gold key when I arrived so that I could do it, but Mr Moss being a rather canny type of man, as I know from old, hasn't yet given it to me. I am putting him on warning that I will need it - I don't mean to keep; I just mean to open the building.

It is a compliment to me to be asked on this occasion to open this door, and it is a compliment for two reasons. Firstly, because this building is named after a man who has given to the national Parliament thirty-four years of service, a longer time than any sitting member except one has spent in the Federal Parliament.

During that time, he has filled many important posts, becoming Deputy Leader of the Country Party in, I think, 1943, and Leader in 1958, and who during the time he has filled those posts, has become known, I believe to all Australians of whatever political colour they may be, as one of the outstanding negotiators overseas for Australian products and the sale of Australian products and the arranging of agreements with other countries, all to the benefit of the producers of Australia.

He has been Prime Minister. I think perhaps the only significant post he hasn't filled is that of External Affairs, and I am not at all sure that at some stage he might not have acted there. (Mr McEwen - "I was Minister") You were Minister! All, right.... that's a full hand.

He also has, during that period of time, become known to those of us closer to him not only as a highly successful farmer and practical farmer, but as a first-class colleague and a man to be trusted as a colleague, and as a great Australian.

And so this house is named after him and in his honour. This is the first reason why I regard it as such a compliment to me to open it today.

But there are other reasons. For some eighteen years now, the Liberal - not Conservative - but Liberal and Country Party coalition has given to Australia, I believe, enlightened government and government which has enabled progress, such as has not been seen in this nation before, to take place, a government which has taken account of the needs and aspirations of the individual citizens who make up the country.

Now it is not to be supposed that in that period of eighteen years or in any other period of years there will not, from time to time, arise problems on which, in a coalition government, part of the government may have one view and part of the government may have another. This may inevitably occur in coalition governments, but given good will, given a discussion of these matters not on a caucus basis, but on a basis of individuals sitting around a table and expressing their judgments, then these difficulties can be overcome.

This is unusual, I think, and it is a tribute to John McEwen, to the previous leaders of the Country Party, to the previous leaders of the Liberal Party that this has operated in this way and that both leaders and both parties have put what they believed to be the good of their country before their immediate aims on such occasions as any disagreement might arise. This is a way a joint government works, must work and will continue to work, given such men as have led our party and as have led the Country Party.

After all, as I have just pointed out, there are a number of matters we have got in common. Mr Anthony said how the Country Party was dedicated to fighting for producers; not only producers of butter or wool or wheat, but also producers of machinery or oil or things from factories. Well that makes two parties dedicated to those ends, and with both of us on their side, they ought to get along all right! We have got that in common.

If the past is a prelude to the future, and I believe it is, then as a Liberal Prime Minister, it is good for me, and pleasing to me, to stand here to open this building, symbolising such a long and such a successful and such a progressive partnership and indicating that for the future what I believe will happen will happen . . . . . that that partnership will go on in the same way to the benefit of this nation of Australia. That does not mean that we both won't from time to time be contesting various seats against each other, but at least we will be contesting them with the same ultimate objective in mind and seeking to attain ultimately the same goal. That is the cement that has bound us together and will continue to bind us together while we have such men as Sir Arthur Fadden or John McEwen or Sir Robert Menzies or Mr Holt leading the sections of this coalition government which, starting as two sections, has become a whole, and I believe a whole for the good of this nation.

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