

LAUNCHING OF NEW FIVE-YEAR APPEAL
BY GEELONG GRAMMAR SCHOOL

GEELONG, VICTORIA

24 FEBRUARY 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Southey, Mr. Headmaster, Ladies and Gentlemen:-

It is not a sacrifice, Sir, but a pleasure for my wife and I to have been asked tonight to attend such a cheerful and, in a way, such a nostalgic gathering. Indeed, it is such a cheerful gathering that I am touched with a little wand of doubt as to whether everybody here knows precisely why it is they have been asked! But fortunately - speaking of course politically - it is not for me to tell you, but for those who are to speak later.

I think the function that has been assigned to me, which I notice has been said to be going to take twenty minutes, but which in fact is going to take very much less, is to take your minds for a moment off what those who follow me will say and - to use an American football term - run interference.

I said "a cheerful and a nostalgic gathering", and it is nostalgic for me to stand here again in this vaulted hall which seems to have changed very little, except for being elongated a little bit, since the time when I sat here as a very small boy and was very lucky if I got a slice of toast at breakfast as a mark of favour from one of those handmaidens who used to wait upon us. If you got one, you knew you were right, that she rather liked you that day. Otherwise you didn't get toast at all.

But not only does the nostalgia come from the hall itself or from the portraits that one sees hanging opposite one here. I have seen three headmasters of this school. Admittedly I had a brief acquaintance with the first. But I remember him well, for it was he who did his best to have me expelled at an early stage from this school. It was for what I still believe was the relatively mild misdemeanour of having brought down from my home a 25/50 Browning automatic with a full clip of cartridges, which I was accustomed to use in the bucolic glades of Mystic Park, and which I had no intention of using upon him or upon any master or any boy! But it appeared to him, coming as he did from England, that the discovery of such a lethal weapon in a locked cupboard - to which, incidentally, he should not have had a key - was something which deserved

the gravest condemnation. However, he was argued out of his intentions and subsequently left, with no bullet holes anywhere around him, and was superseded by the headmaster whom I suppose most of us here know, Mr. J. R. Darling. That was the second headmaster that I knew. Mr. Garnett is the third.

Education

It is my hope, and my belief, that in the years which lie ahead of this school there will be portrait after portrait around the walls of this great hall. And perhaps in another hundred years there will be an indication, through those portraits, of the progress which this school has made, just as there is an indication for those who knew the school in the time of Dr. Brown, in the time of Dr. Darling, and now in the time of Dr. Garnett, of the progress which has been made in the last twenty-five or thirty years.

I believe it is essential that such progress should be made by independent schools in Australia. There are three main reasons why I say this.

We have always, I think, believed that there was a democratic right for parents, if they were prepared to make some sacrifice themselves, to choose the type of school to which they would send their children. They should not be denied by any act or any law or any economic action of those in power the opportunity - always provided they would help to pay for it themselves - to choose that form of education for their children which they believed would suit their children best.

Independent Schools

This exercise of a democratic right is so wound up with our educational system and should continue to be so wound up with it that I myself regard it as one of the most important facets of education in this nation of Australia.

Secondly, Sir, there is an educational advantage in this. By that I do not mean that this or any other school of this type is at any specific time better fitted to educate the young than is a school run by the state. I do not mean that at all. It may be - it may not be. It depends on the headmaster. It depends on the staff. It depends, in the case of a state school, equally on the headmaster and the staff.

Nor do I mean that all new educational advances come from schools such as this, because they don't. But what I do mean is that when there are two educational systems side by side, when there are schools that are run by the state and when there are schools that are run as this school is run, then there is more room for experiments in educational attitudes, in educational methods, and there is less likelihood of bureaucratic control of all curricula and education. Indeed it is this competition, if that is the word, and I think perhaps it is, not in the sense of competition in the market place, but in the sense of competition for excellence which spurs both the state and the private school to the benefit of both.

Independent
Schools ✓

Were there but one system of education, were we to have a system such as I am told exists in France where a Minister for Education can, at a given moment, say, "In every school in France at this hour of eleven o'clock in the morning, the third form is being read to from page 649 of the second volume of Proust" - then we would indeed be in danger of having a monolithic system. A monolithic system can be moribund. One in competition cannot. And these are the educational advantages that schools such as this bring to the community.

Thirdly, of course, though having been a parent I know it is difficult for parents to understand, there is an economic advantage - not of course to those who have children going through the school at a particular time, but to the community at large. Because if all those who attend this and other schools such as this throughout Australia were tomorrow to have the doors shut to them, and be required to go to state schools, then this would be impossible. The bill to be paid would be so great that school fees would seem as nothing in comparison to the taxes which would be placed upon you. Thirdly, therefore, there is this economic advantage.

Sir, this school is one with a long and distinguished record. It has been a beneficiary in certain ways from Commonwealth Government schemes and State Government schemes, but what it has also done is something which the Chairman mentioned. It has sent out from its portals graduates, not only to one state of this country but to Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia - to the whole of the nation of Australia - and they have come back here tonight from all corners of the land to the one part of the nation which gave them education.

Perhaps this happens in other schools too. I believe it does. I believe it will happen more and more, but it is another great advantage. I believe that, through this medium, there should be a national outlook able the more easily to be disseminated than would be the case perhaps in some other schools.

Now, it is not for me to talk any longer. It is for those who are to follow me now to speak to you, but I do conclude by saying this. Those of you who know the young of today, the young at any school, the young perhaps at this school and those of you who know them well would probably not, most of you, describe them by the word "meek". Certainly, the ones I have run across could not be so described. But, Sir, meek or not, they will inherit Australia, and they will do the better for this nation, and for the children they will bear to you as grandchildren, if they are given every possible facility for education which this nation or this school or you yourselves can provide.

It is as true today as it was true when Disraeli said in the 19th century of England that "upon the education of this country the fate of this country depends", and it is upon the contributions that schools such as this make to education, that the education of this country depends. That is why tonight, with some nostalgia and great affection, I am so honoured to have been asked to speak to you for a short time. I thank you.