

MOORABBIN LIBERAL PARTY BRANCH DINNER

TOWN HALL, MOORABBIN, VIC.

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28 FEBRUARY 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Mr Chairman, Mr Mayor, Mr Chipp, Distinguished Parliamentary Colleagues, both Federal and State, and Ladies and Gentlemen :

That is rather a hard introduction for me to live up to, though at the beginning of this speech I would like to say that as long as I am entrusted with the Prime Ministership of this country, I shall try to live up to it, and I know I will be supported in that by such Members of the Federal Parliament as your Member from Higinbotham in the past and from Hotham in the future - Don Chipp.

I came along tonight to have the opportunity to meet you. I came along to have the opportunity to talk to you, most of you being Liberals; the rest of you, undoubtedly, when you put your minds to it, are going to become Liberals!

I am touched - and I think my wife is touched - that so many of you have come along tonight to see us, to hear us and to meet us. Perhaps I should try to put before you some ideas of my own as to what government is all about.

Every three years, one goes to the polls. Every three years the television stations have proponents for this side or for that, and the newspapers have people writing articles for this side or for that. The public meetings to which nobody goes have people standing on platforms, speaking for this side or for that, and occasionally when they do go to a public meeting - which is usually when a Prime Minister is there - people are trying to hit him on the head with a banner or to stop somebody hitting him on the head with a banner.

This is just the outward show of what it is all about. What really are the basic reasons for government? What do you really want to get from the governments that you elect? What kind of advances do you expect? What kind of Australia do you have in your minds - not only for yourselves, not mainly for yourselves, but for the children you have, and in some cases, odd as it may seem because everybody here looks so young - the grandchildren you may have?

I suppose - and I do not put these in any order of priority but just as they come to my mind - that you would want to have in the nation of Australia, a government which would try to see that every employable person in Australia was employed, that there was no waste manpower, that there was no person with skills and integrity and capacity who had to sit at home and who was unable to support his family because the economy could not offer him work to do to further the country in which he lived.

I say this with some feeling because I do remember when I was young there was a time when there were many many people in Australia who were willing to work hard, who had the skills to contribute to the building of a nation, who had to sit at home because it was said "There is no chance to employ you because we haven't got enough money to do it." I think one of the basic things a nation wants is to ensure that every man who can contribute to the advance of that nation is given the opportunity to contribute to it, and is paid according to his merits, according to his capacity and according to his contribution.

I believe you would want to see more than that, more than the mere chance of employment being offered. I believe that you would want to see - and if you wouldn't, you ought to want to see that not merely employment but the opportunity for advancement according to the talents of an individual is provided in a nation such as this. And I do suggest that this has been done.

I do suggest that in the period of time during which the Liberal Party has been in office - and during which great leaders of the Liberal Party have led this country, leaders in whose steps I follow but whose stature I do not yet pretend to attain to - during that period of time, people who are willing to work have had employment opportunities never offered before. They have had the opportunity to develop their talents and to move upwards in a way this nation had never offered previously. And this is one of the things that government is all about.

But there are other new problems crowding in upon us, because we are in a way an adolescent nation. We are half-way between the nation that we were in 1939, a junior nation - and certainly between 1900 and 1939 a junior nation, a child, as it were, of the Mother Country - and half-way between that and the mighty nation which we may be, if we properly judge, in fifty or one hundred years' time. In that sense we are, I say, adolescent - between the child stage and between the world leader stage.

One of the things that is going to decide how in - 50, 70, 80, 100 years' time this turns out, is what we do now concerning the investment and the ownership and the control of the industries of Australia and the development of Australia.

It is true that no developing nation such as ours can possibly attain, in the time in which it ought to attain, greatness unless there is from outside great capital investment. I look back to the United States of America, which grew as quickly as it did only because of a great flow of investment from outside. I wonder what the situation of the United States of America would be now if those investments, which developed so greatly, had not had to be sold off by Great Britain in the First World War, and in the Second World War, in order to enable her to play a leading part in protecting the freedom of the world. If this had not happened, the investments that were made in that country in the 1880's and the 1890's and the 1900's would have grown to what proportion now? How much of the proceeds of those investment, if they had not had to be sold off, would now be flowing to Great Britain?

I do not want to see - indeed I will not see - I do not want to think of seeing in 50 or 60 or 100 years' time too much of the proceeds of Australian raw materials, of Australian capacity, of Australian initiative, flowing out of this country instead of remaining in it.

And yet, feeling that as deeply as I do, and knowing its importance as I do, I also know that if we are to grow as quickly as the world situation may require, if we are to bring into this country the flow of migrants, the record flow of migrants this year, in order to build our population as quickly as our future safety may require, then we must have from overseas this capital investment.

So there is a balance, a steering of a course between Scylla and Charybdis - on one side, an absolute necessity, if we are to grow as we must, for overseas capital investment - - on the other side a requirement to see to the utmost of our capacity that such overseas investment is married to an opportunity for Australian equity so that our children shall participate in the growth that overseas investment brings. This is another thing that government is all about. This is another thing that people like Don Chipp and myself and the others that you have elected are working at. And before long, perhaps six weeks, perhaps eight weeks, perhaps ten weeks, but before long, I believe that we will have the chance to put before you a programme, a proposition which will steer this course between these two in a sense, opposed, desires. This is of ~~the~~ utmost importance for the future of this nation.

What else is government about? Well one thing, of course, and this is, I think, the keystone and always has been of the Liberal Party, is that we should seek to see that those who are old or ill or aged or in some other way disadvantaged, or the victims of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, should be helped by those who are more affluent.

I do not mean that those who are not prepared to work should be supported by those who are. I do not mean that there should not be a requirement for people to make effort in order to get some achievement or in order to be able to live and support their families. But I do mean that when there is some great misfortune that falls upon the people in our community, then the rest of the community should see that that misfortune is overcome, and that that man on whom misfortune falls, and his family, should be succoured by the rest of the community.

I think that during the period we have been in government - during the last twelve or fourteen months - some considerable steps have been taken in this direction. And I am certain that in the months to come before the end of the year, even greater steps will be made in this direction. I believe that in a year we will be able to make the steps

which will show that poverty which is not poverty because of the fault of an individual, will be able to be banished from our midst. Also that the fear of long illness, which has already been removed by what we have done and therefore is no longer a significant subject, but that the fear of the difficulty of family illness will be able to be removed from the consciousness of Australians.

These, with many other matters of this kind which I can't go into - but education is one - are what government is all about. But, basically, if these things are to develop in a nation, there is one other item which ought not to be a transcendent matter but which, in a way, I think is, to which government must direct its attention. That is defending the capacity to do those things of which I have in shorthand been speaking to you. Because it is of little use to have a policy on investment, and it is of little use to have a policy on trying to overcome illness and poverty, and it is of little use to have a policy to advance education or to make better roads unless one can be sure that in the years ahead the people of Australia will themselves be able to develop that policy freely and without some invading power telling them how to do it.

And so, although it should not be significant, and so although it takes so much of our production, yet if we are to be able, as independent people, to decide what we want to do in these other matters, then the capacity to defend our right to be able to do it without coercion is perhaps transcendent.

Here we are a little isolated, because here, as I said the other night in the House, an era has ended. Great Britain has gone from our part of the world. The United States may not - and I say no more than may not - be as interested as she was. So we, and the closest countries to us in the region of Asia in which we live, must co-operate and we, as the greatest technological power in the region, as the most advanced industrial power in the region, must try to help the region economically. We must try to help it in the way of trade, and must be prepared to put into defence hardware, and into the manpower for defence services, more than any of us would want to put, were it not that we have to do it in order to retain the right of free choice as to how we are to run our country.

Well, we in the Government have indicated how we propose to do this. We have indicated the means of co-operation with our neighbours. We have indicated that Australians, should there be difficulty in the regions to our North, should there be an incursion of communism there which may eventually threaten us, we have indicated that in that case Australians will be there. This is one of the things that government is all about.

I grew up in a time, you know, when Hitler was rising to power in Europe, and in a time when there were many voices raised saying "Do not oppose this man. His ideas may be wrong. His racial desire to exterminate all Jews may be wrong. He may say he is going to

conquer other countries, but that is just rodomontade for internal consumption. Do not let us worry about this." And so country after country fell under the control of a ruthless and authoritative power. This made, perhaps, some impression on me. Not the imminent, but the possible future threat, is in our part of the world. And as long as we are in government, we are going to do our best to see that this threat will be able to be resisted by Australians should it become imminent.

These are some of the matters with which you are concerned and with which I am concerned. Others are to ensure that there is a chance for personal choice, that there is no direction as to what a man should or should not do or where he should or should not work or where he should or should not invest his savings.

Last week in the Parliament, quite clearly, there came out some basic significant difference between the Government, which I lead, and the Opposition which seeks to become the Government. Because there is black and white was spelt out what in 1949 so many of us came in to fight against. There it was stated - by the Opposition - should we become a government, we will tell insurance companies, which are the depositaries of the savings of the people; we will tell banks which are the depositaries of the savings of the people, where they must and where they must not invest those savings. And if they wish to invest them in some development which will bring them in 6 per cent, and we, a Labor Government, think they should invest them in something else which will bring them in 2 per cent, then we will make them invest where we want them to invest.

We do not say that. We say there must be a personal choice by a man as to the job he will take, and a personal choice by the man as to the investments he will make, and a personal choice by companies as to where they will invest for the benefit of the shareholders in those companies. This perhaps has more significance for the development of a country than may at first appear.

I suppose in a way it is unusual - it must be unusual - that one party which has been in government in this country for the last twenty years, which is about a third of the time that Australia has been a nation. It started in 1901. It is now 1969 - all right 70 years. For the last 20 years out of 70, one government has been running this country. I doubt if this could be matched in any other country in the world. One would have thought that in this period of time, tiredness would have crept in, that there would have been a clinging to shibboleths of the past, that something new would not have been developed by a party which had been so long in power. This isn't so.

We are looking now to examine - and we have been publicly examining - the sacred cows which since 1901 have for so long been unquestioned. Dare I mention things like Commonwealth/

State relations, for example, and a number of other less controversial subjects, all of which need to be looked at, and about none of which I propose to enter into controversial discussion tonight.

This is not an indication of decadence; surely this is an indication of a new approach. And may I suggest to you that it being true that for 20 out of 70 years there has been this kind of government in Australia, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Look at what has happened in those 20 years. Look at the development that has taken place. Look at the increase in population that has taken place. Look at the increase in employment that has taken place. Look at the future that has opened up for this nation in that period of time. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the pudding that has been baked in the last 20 years is good for the nation, and if it is good for this nation, it is good for the world.

Sir, I have only one other thing to say, because I have been speaking to a great degree, of the past. We really haven't started yet. We are 12 million people now. We will be 28 million people by the turn of the century, some 31 years, and that in the life of a nation is just the blinking of an eye.

(Tape changeover - brief section missing)

These are the goals which are attainable before us. On the progress which has been made towards them, on your judgment of the progress which has been made, I believe that the philosophy which has made possible that progress is the philosophy which will make possible the attainment of those goals. That will be done, but it will only be done if the people of Australia, of whom you are a cross section, agree with us that the ways in which we seek to attain these goals are the right ways, and believe that we are genuine in seeking to attain them. If you did not believe both these things, I do not think that you would be here tonight. The fact that you are here tonight is of immense encouragement to me, to Don Chipp and to those who stand with me.

I thank you for coming. We draw encouragement from your coming, and I believe that the work which so many of you do will be to the great benefit of this rising nation of the world.
