

SECOND TRIP TO THE U.S. 1969

WASHINGTON

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON,  
AT THE WHITE HOUSE DINNER

6 MAY 1969

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a speech, Sir, to which it is very difficult to reply. I think it is true that there is, between the people of the United States and the people of my own country, some particular bonds which are not of recent birth, but which have matured over the years.

True it is, that in our own country we reached self-government by means of evolution and you by revolution. But nevertheless, in some degree we think of you as being responsible for us. I know a lot of other countries do that, too. Because it was only after the Declaration of Independence and a certain amount of unpleasantness which culminated at Yorktown following that, that Great Britain looked to another outlet, if I may put it that way. But it gave us the first impetus to the growth of Australia and so perhaps in that indirect way, Sir, you have helped us in our youth.

But that was just at the beginning. Since then we have stood together in many struggles--the First World War, fought far and away from our shores and yours, but fought for the same reasons, our soldiers and yours--the Second World War, the Korean War where Australians were within the first week in action with the United States forces and the first country so to be in action. And now, the Vietnam War.

I don't know why it is--or perhaps I do--but I am not sure why it is that when countries talk, as you and I are talking, of the bonds which unite and have united them, so often one turns to wars and to struggles in which one has been together. Because, after all, a successful war does not gain anything new. What it does do, if it is successful, is prevent the imposition of something bad and obtain an opportunity for new building upon a proper basis and a proper foundation of freedom and participation.

Perhaps it is because men have for so long had to struggle, and probably always will have to struggle, against the idea of absolute and arbitrary power; against the idea of the secret police and the hangman; against the philosophy that in order to be free and live in peace one must subject one's self to the rule--without law--of dictatorship. Perhaps it is because the fainthearted all through the years have been

prepared to say, "If you wish to eat you must sell your immortal soul. If you wish peace you must submit to dictation." Perhaps it is because there is in the human spirit a refusal to accept this that one talks of nations standing together in war, not because it is in war, but because of the objectives sought by such struggles.

You, Sir, are bearing today a burden, greater, I think, than that borne by any other man in the world I know. And in a way, here, history is repeating itself because as I look up there and see a former Republican--I hope no Democrats will be upset--I see a former Republican looking down upon us, my mind goes back to those times and that burden and the turmoil in this country in that period.

Too often do we now look back at Lincoln and tend to think the speeches he made were well received and tend to think the ideals he professed were accepted by all the people of the United States. But not enough do we look back and think of the burden for five long years he bore during a period when the United States lost more dead than it has in the many wars since. And he bore this.

During a period when Copperheads were inciting riots in order to bring peace and not allow the war to continue; during the period when the Horace Greeleys and others of the press were attacking not only his ideas, but him personally; during the period when regiments from the army of the Potomac had to be brought back to quell draft riots in New York--that was a burden. But if it had not been carried by the man there would be no United States today. There would have been, at any rate, a slave autocracy of the South and what that, in junction with South America, could then have lead to in the world no-one can tell. But there would have been no United States.

And so the bearing of these burdens and the successful consummation of these struggles is something which is not for that time alone or for this time alone, but which, having been successful in that time, led to the United States being able to be what it is today, and which, if it is successful in this time, will lead to there being able to be throughout the world an opportunity for us, when we next speak, when we next meet, or at least communicate or whatever it may be, to talk not of war but of the other progress which is the other part of which you spoke, Sir, of which the United States and ourselves, you helping us economically, building us, helping us to build ourselves, the other part may be the real outcome of successful resistance to aggression. I think it will be.

I think that we will stand together in the future as we have in the past, the great, the small, the comparatively small, but fired by the same motives, inspired by the same ideas, resolute in the same way.

I hope that this will be true. It has been true and I believe it will be true. And for our part, speaking for Australians, wherever the United States is resisting aggression, wherever the United States or the United Kingdom or any other country is seeking to ensure that there will be a chance for the free expression of the spirit of man from himself and not from dictatorship; wherever there is a joint attempt to improve not only the material but the spiritual standards of life of the peoples of the world, then, Sir, we will go Waltzing Matilda with you.

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