

LIBERAL WOMEN'S RALLY

BRISBANE, Qld.

30 JULY 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

I never have looked up the number of women on the rolls throughout the Commonwealth of Australia in the way your President has, but I did just happen to discover that on the Queensland rolls, as distinct from the Commonwealth rolls, there are 15,000 more women than men. So our minds must have been working in the same direction, Madam President. We were both looking to the strength. And indeed we were looking to the strength, at least as far as a political organisation is concerned. It is the strength that comes from the behind-the-scenes work of the Women's Section, from the running of the branches, from the posting out of literature, the contribution of ideas and from all the tasks that have to be done in a party or in a campaign.

Now, it will not be long - some months, not long - before we all find ourselves in an electoral campaign to discover whether the people of Australia wish us to continue to give the kind of government that has transformed Australia over the last two decades. And it has transformed Australia. It is a different nation from that of twenty years ago. You will remember - sometimes we tend to forget - but you will remember all the people from so many races in the world who have come to Australia in that time, been assimilated and brought to us their own cultures, their own ways of thinking, and infused into the bloodstream of Australia, giving us a new vigour and a new interest. They have certainly improved the variety of what we eat and drink. . . . twenty years ago steak and eggs was about the culinary end as far as Australians were concerned!

The population has been built up, the development of the country has grown in a way it has never done before and, at the same time, there has been removed from the minds of people generally that fear of unemployment which was always present two decades, or three decades ago. They find themselves living now in a country which has, I think, the lowest rate of unemployment of any nation in the world. . . . though from time to time particular parts may be stricken by particular problems.

And even in the last year or eighteen months, I think we have given an indication to Australia that we are not merely going to go ahead without seeking changes and new pastures. While providing that background of progress, we will seek out new areas to help, new avenues along which we can advance to the future.

And because these things tend sometimes to be overlooked in the rush of events, let me remind you of some of those new approaches which in the last year or eighteen months have taken place.

We have, for example, in the field of education, taken steps to see that every school in Australia is provided through Commonwealth Government funds - without matching requirements from the States - with libraries. So those secondary schools of which I speak may have not only science teaching facilities but facilities for teaching the humanities which alone can develop minds able to use science to the proper ends. We have developed an entirely new approach to the problem of communications through roads in Australia. And for the first time, by cost-benefit analysis of various proposals, and by the abandonment of the requirement that a particular amount of a given sum should be spent in some particular area.....by abandoning that, by taking cost-plus processes, by adding a half billion dollars to the sums of money for the next five-year period, by setting aside specific amounts of that to try and overcome the congestion which the urbanisation of Australia is imposing on its city dwellers, by setting sums aside for new freeways, for new communications in the city, we have, I think, taken a giant step in that particular field, and a new step.

We have entered the area of overseas shipping so that Australia will have a ship operating between Australia and Japan, between Australia and the United Kingdom and between Australia and the United States. This is not only to save the invisible costs which the operation of foreign ships imposes on us, but so that we can have proof that the products of the land - for they are what will mostly fill the ships - are carried at costs which we know to be fair costs and that our producers are not mulcted. And this again, I believe, is something a nation, an island nation like Australia should have done, something which I believe will grow, something which within this short space of time has been a new initiative.

We have taken decisions which were not easy in the international climate to our north, where the situation has changed so significantly. We have taken the decision that we will not be the sheriff in that region to which we belong, as England was the sheriff or was claimed to be the sheriff. We cannot fill the role of sheriff nor do we want to, but we are prepared to play our part in the defence of the region in which we stand as members of the sheriff's posse and as fairly strong, relatively strong members of the sheriff's posse. We have decided that we will have Australian troops visible in the area to our north as evidence of this approach. These were not easy decisions to take in the light of the enormously changed circumstances through Britain's withdrawal from our north, but we have taken them.

These are some indications of new approaches over the last eighteen months. And yet now we stand on the threshold of opportunities such as Australia has not known before and which will give us chances to take more and more new initiatives. We are on the threshold of the exciting seventies, those years when the overseas earnings of Australia will grow and grow as our farm produce grows, as our minerals finally come into their own and are exported and as I hope, will be fabricated and exported; on the threshold of years when, if things are properly run, there will be modernisation of the equipment in our manufacturing industries and more automation. One man will be able to do the work done now by two, yet there will be so much work to do, there will not be unemployment, but rather a chance of the greater production which is possible if one man does the work of two and of the greater reward which is possible for each such man. These are the opportunities that lie before us:

You would expect us, I believe, in these circumstances, to go in to these exciting seventies with the twin beliefs that we have work to do at home, development to do at home and we have also a part to play in the defence of the region in which we live; and that we must do both, or else there is a possibility we might fail to achieve either. And so you would, I think, expect us to devote to the development of our own capacity for defence not a greater percentage of gross national product but certainly greater sums of money as our gross national product grows. You would expect us, I think, to look to our alliances, and in particular our alliance with the United States for defensive purposes. And looking to those alliances, you would expect us to be prepared to contribute towards a joint defence and not merely to seek to take and give nothing back.

And you would expect us to see that we kept the rate of employment as high as it is, that we continued to bring in the record number of migrants which we are now attracting and that we developed all parts of this nation as quickly as the manpower resources and the capital resources would permit. I say "would permit" for there are many things throughout Australia which today can be pointed to and people can say "This should be done. It should be done now. It will be economical. It will return money for the investment that is put into it. It will add to growth". All these things are true of all these projects. And yet with the work force fully employed, a great accretion of new projects is not immediately possible. Yet you would expect us to see these things happen, subject to the limitations of an expanding work force and expanding capital.

I think, and I have been criticised for thinking this, but I still think it and still propose to express it, that we will need for the development of this country and the speed at which it should be developed, great amounts of overseas capital. We cannot generate from within our own savings enough to do all that lies before us. Yet I also believe that we can and should require an offer of participation to Australians in these

new developments at the beginning - and the key word is "offer". There should be a chance to participate. There should be a chance for Australians to see their investments grow as their country grows, to be part owners. This we will make clear - I think we have made it clear - to the world, and to those who have money to invest. And I do not believe for one moment that it will prevent the flow of that overseas capital which we must have. For Australian participation is not a condition, but the offer to Australians to participate is a goal which I think we will attain.

I am sure, too, that you would wish us to use some of the material benefits which will flow from the economic circumstances I see before us, to ensure that in a way that has not happened before, those who are at the end of life's race, those who are widowed or ill or handicapped in some other way, are helped by the community. And you would want us, I think, to see that those who help themselves during their life are not thereby entirely cut off from any additional assistance from the State.

I hope nobody will imagine when I say that that I am talking about the possibility of abolishing the means test. I am not and it should not be abolished. There is no reason in the world - as far as I see it - why \$450 million should eventually be spent to provide a pension, for example, to my wife who will have one anyway, or to other wealthy citizens of Australia. That money can far better be used in relieving real need. But there is a need to see that those who have in some way or other given some provision to themselves are not entirely cut out at the lower levels from some assistance from the State as well.

These are the things, I think, you would want a government to do. I would add one other thing. There is a need, I think, to improve not only the material circumstances of life so that one has two cars, bigger houses, more refrigerators or better machinery or whatever it might be. There is also a need to improve the quality of life, a need that will grow as the leisure time for the population of Australia grows, an opportunity to do a number of things. An opportunity first to choose the course in life which most appeals to an individual; to choose and be properly trained, and to be excited by the chance of being properly trained; to be - whatever - an actor, a film producer, a television producer, a plumber, a carpenter, a scientist, a technologist.

And what I would say improved the quality of life would be if people, young and not so young, were given the opportunity to advance their minds and exercise their minds. There must be many of you here today who found, as my own wife found, that you had been married, there had been a family, the family had grown up and got married, and all those years that you had put in to raising that family had gone and the family had gone. And if the quality of life is to be improved, there should be opportunities for courses of various kinds for those who wish to take them so that that great reservoir of intelligence, ability and capacity which I

believe lies in the female population should be given a chance for Australia's sake to be used, ~~should be~~ given a chance for the individual's sake to be used.

I could go on for some time - but there is not time - speaking of the improvements in the quality of life that are possible and will be increasingly possible as the material benefits of our work and development continue to flow in to us. I hope and I believe that as we step across the threshold of these exciting seventies, the people of Australia will say they would like to see a continuation of the kind of government that has transformed Australia. For it is not old, it is not tired; it is young and vital and seeking new approaches and, in the next twenty years, it will seize opportunities to make that transformation greater still.

I think and believe that this will happen. If it does, then on behalf of the team I lead in Canberra, I can pledge to you that we will seek to our utmost to do that which I have tried to outline to you this afternoon, and we will go into the fight to do it, fortified by two things - fortified by the knowledge that in all things that matter, we are a united team and a united party. There are no ideological cleavages anywhere, though there are and there should be discussions and arguments as to how a particular goal should be achieved. And that is different from the bitterly divided Opposition. We stand for achievement whereas people riven with ideological factions, riven with hatreds, cannot achieve its pledges. The second thing fortifying us is gatherings such as this which I have had the honour to attend in so many places in Australia. They show that there are behind us sharing our aspirations, great masses of intelligent Australians, willing to give of their own time and effort to build the Australia we believe in.
