

CIVIC RECEPTION ON THE OCCASION OF THE
LINKING OF THE EAST-WEST STANDARD GAUGE

Broken Hill, N. S. W.

29 NOVEMBER 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Premiers, Distinguished Colleagues, both Federal and State and Gentlemen:

For some reason or other during the past three-quarters of an hour or so, I recalled two sayings which I think, perhaps, might be known to you.

One is something to do with an orphan called Oliver Twist whom you may remember had a particular request to make after a heavy meal. And the other - I hope nobody, including me, will take this personally - the other was that description of Australia as a land where there were fewer people to the square mile and more speeches to the square meal than in any other civilised country! At any rate, this addition, I promise you, is not going to be for long.

I suppose there is no city in Australia whose name is as well known internationally as is the name of this city of Broken Hill. I don't know whether it is the city itself which has become a household word in the markets of the world where people in some esoteric fashion deal in stocks and shares and futures and all these other things, or whether it is because of the giant Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd. which started here. But in any case it is a name known throughout the world.

I don't suppose, either, that any of us here have lived long enough to know what this area was like before this city was built. I understand, from what I have read, that it was a bleak featureless landscape, except of course for "The Barrier" and "The Hill", populated by almost nobody, an area to which one could come only by stage-coach or in the course of boundary-riding. And there is a story told - and I think a true one - of a visiting preacher coming to this area and running across a young man digging a fence post hole, and stopping to talk to him. The young man, not having any other human company for so long, bubbled over with conversation and couldn't be stopped talking, because he was so happy to see a fellow human being. Finally the preacher stopped him and said: "Listen my son, have you been to Communion?" and he said: "Well, I don't think I have, but I was at Menindee last week!". Another instance, I think, of the isolation of this area!

But look at what it has turned into. And can't we take it, perhaps, as a symbol of what Australia has done in wresting a living from a harsh and arid land under bad conditions, without the help of the smiling landscapes or the heavy rainfalls of Europe or countries where the land is not so forbidding. We have come into this interior - our fathers and our grandfathers - and have turned it into what it is, and what we have turned it into is merely a challenge to what we must turn it into in the next generation. And here again today in Broken Hill was a new step forward in Australia's history.

We have spanned the continent before the hard way - by land, the overlanders further north, driving their cattle across; we have spanned it the easy way in recent years by air. We can now span it, without being impeded, by rail - one more step in the continuing progress of this country.

It was a great honour for me to drive (in a way which I wouldn't consider to be extremely expert) that spike into the railway today, but I would like, in reply to what Mr. Fitzpatrick has said, to say that if I am going to be charged any dues by the Union for this, then I want to have a union ticket and I would be perfectly happy to pay the dues, or one-365th of them, if I could get a union ticket! You see, I ran into this once before. I came from country much like this - rainfall of eleven inches if we were lucky and the country looked much the same. We were growing oranges and we had a packing shed and I used to work eight or nine hours a day in the packing shed and so did my wife and so did three other people. We were approached at one time by the Storemen and Packers Union who said we should all take out union tickets. I was delighted because I would have made more money paying myself than I was able to make out of growing and selling oranges. But unfortunately they wouldn't let me join. They said: "No, you are the boss. You can't have a union ticket." I hope this won't apply on this occasion, but if there is any suggestion of dues, at least I'll get the ticket!

I said this wasn't going to be long, and it isn't. It has been a pleasure to have been with you. It has been an honour to have been associated with the greatness of accomplishment of all those who over the years have planned and constructed this great work. Before I sit down, as I said at the station, Wentworth is a name that must be associated with this work. I echo the Town Clerk in again saying this. But it wasn't only because of all the work over all the years that he put into it that I asked him here today. It was because I was quite sure if I didn't, we would have his wife parading up and down in front of us with a huge placard saying, "Where's Wentworth?" as she did when the Melbourne/Sydney line was opened! So for both those reasons, Bill, we are happy to have you with us, and I congratulate all concerned on this work.
