

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. F.G. WHITLAM,
Q.C., M.P., AT A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE LATE
NORMAN ERIC KIRK, ST ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
CANBERRA, 10 SEPTEMBER 1974

NO ONE IN PUBLIC LIFE CAN JUDGE A FELLOW-POLITICIAN - LET ALONE A FELLOW-LEADER - WITH ABSOLUTE DETACHMENT. THE MAN IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE PRINCIPLES HE ESPOUSES AND THE CAUSES HE WORKS FOR; AS SUCH HE IS JUDGED AND REMEMBERED. MY OWN VIEW OF NORMAN KIRK MUST THEREFORE BE COLOURED BY THE REMARKABLE KINSHIP OF OUR POLITICAL IDEAS, BY THE IDENTITY OF OUR AIMS AND PURPOSES, AND EVEN BY THE EXTRAORDINARY ACCIDENT OF HISTORY THAT BROUGHT US BOTH TO THE LEADERSHIP OF OUR PARTIES AFTER THE ELECTIONS OF 1966 AND TO OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTERS WITHIN A WEEK OF EACH OTHER IN THE ELECTIONS IN 1972. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE WERE INEVITABLY COLLEAGUES. THAT IN ITSELF WOULD NOT HAVE MADE US FRIENDS; BUT FRIENDS WE WERE INDEED.

So I speak today with a true sense of personal grief. I share the sorrow we feel for the passing of a man; a man I knew well, a man I admired without reserve, a man whose human qualities matched the breadth and nobility of his public life. In no country save his own has his death been felt more keenly than here in Australia. He spoke not only for New Zealand but for his region. He spoke with a unique clarity and commitment for the emerging community of Pacific nations. He spoke for small and middle powers everywhere. He worked at home, and his voice was heard abroad, in defence of the rights of small nations and for the welfare and dignity of the common man.

HE FOUGHT FOR THOSE CAUSES WITH A RARE VIGOUR AND PASSION, WITH ATTITUDES SHAPED BY THE NATURE OF HIS COUNTRY AND BY THE CHARACTER OF HIS EARLY LIFE. AS THE LEADER OF A SMALL POWER, HE UNDERSTOOD THE ANXIETIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF SMALL, INDEPENDENT NATIONS. AND WITH HIS BACKGROUND HE UNDERSTOOD - AND CLEARLY FELT - THE NEEDS AND FEELINGS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE. FEW MEN I HAVE KNOWN BELIEVED MORE DEEPLY IN THE ESSENTIAL GOODNESS OF THE ORDINARY MAN. THAT BELIEF WAS INTUITIVE, NOT LEARNED; INSTINCTIVE, NOT REASONED; IT SPRANG FROM HIS OWN ESSENTIAL GOODNESS, FROM AN OPENNESS OF MIND AND A LARGENESS OF HEART, FROM AN INNATE DIGNITY AND A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF HARDSHIP THAT BROUGHT HIM CLOSE TO HIS PEOPLE AND IDENTIFIED HIM, IN RARE FASHION, WITH THE UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE OF HUMANITY.

HE HAD THE GREAT GOOD FORTUNE TO LEAD ONE OF THE FEW SECURE PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENTS IN THE WESTERN WORLD. INDEED, AS A UNITARY STATE WITH A UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE, A STRONG TWO-PARTY SYSTEM AND AN EQUAL FRANCHISE, NEW ZEALAND IS PERHAPS THE MODEL OF A PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY. NORMAN KIRK STAUNCHLY DEFENDED THOSE INSTITUTIONS. AND IN THESE TESTING AND UNCERTAIN TIMES FOR DEMOCRACY, THE WORLD CAN ILL AFFORD TO LOSE A MAN OF HIS STATURE, A LEADER WHO SPOKE WITH SUCH CONFIDENCE AND AUTHORITY FOR HIS COUNTRY AND ALL IT REPRESENTED, AND FOR THE CAUSES OF HUMANITY AND PEACE.

NOT SINCE THE DEATH OF HAROLD HOLT HAVE AUSTRALIANS FELT MORE KEENLY AND PERSONALLY THE PASSING OF A POLITICAL LEADER. NOT SINCE THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY HAVE WE SENSED MORE ACUTELY THE TRAGEDY OF A CAREER CUT SHORT. ONE COULD SAY JUSTLY OF KENNEDY THAT HE HAD TOO LITTLE TIME TO PROVE WHAT HE COULD DO. THAT CANNOT BE SAID OF NORMAN KIRK. CERTAINLY HE HAD TOO LITTLE TIME; BUT IN THE 21 MONTHS THAT HE LED HIS COUNTRY HE GAVE AMPLE PROOF OF HIS ACHIEVEMENTS. THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS, I BELIEVE, WILL PROVE TO BE GREAT AND ENDURING.

WHEN I FIRST WENT TO NEW ZEALAND TO MEET HIM AT THE BEGINNING OF LAST YEAR HE HAD BEEN IN OFFICE FOR BARELY TWO MONTHS. HE HAD BEGUN THE GREAT TASK OF FRAMING A NEW AND INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY FOR HIS COUNTRY AND STRENGTHENING THE WELFARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY OF A PEOPLE ALREADY RENOWNED FOR THEIR TRADITIONS OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY. HIS BELIEFS WERE CHARACTERISTICALLY SIMPLE AND UNCOMPROMISING. HE HAD A SINGULAR ABHORRENCE OF ANY FORM OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION. HE LOATHED MILITARISM. HE LOVED JUSTICE. HE LOVED HIS COUNTRY. HE WANTED NEW ZEALAND'S FOREIGN POLICY TO EXPRESS HER NATIONAL IDEALS AS WELL AS TO REFLECT HER NATIONAL INTERESTS. HE WITHDREW NEW ZEALAND'S FORCES FROM VIETNAM, HE RECOGNISED CHINA, HE REALIGNED HIS COUNTRY'S VOICE BEHIND THE UNITED NATIONS IN MATTERS OF RACE AND ANTI-COLONIALISM. INDEED SO MANY OF HIS EARLY ACTIONS AND DECISIONS HAD THEIR PARALLELS IN AUSTRALIA THAT I FEAR I MAY BE MISCONSTRUED IF I RECOUNT THEM NOW. I SIMPLY SAY THAT IN EVERYTHING HE DID HE HAD AUSTRALIA'S FULL SUPPORT AND MY OWN UNSTINTING ADMIRATION.

HIS APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY WAS BASED ON A PRINCIPLE WHICH HE PROCLAIMED IN THESE WORDS SOON AFTER HIS GOVERNMENT WAS ELECTED:

"WE BELIEVE IN THE INDIVIDUAL HUMAN WORTH AND DIGNITY OF EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR COLOUR... EVERY ACTION A PEOPLE TAKES IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE KIND OF PEOPLE THEY REALLY ARE. WE KNOW THAT IN THEIR DAILY LIVES NEW ZEALANDERS ARE DECENT, HUMANE PEOPLE. MY AIM WILL BE TO ENSURE THAT NEW ZEALAND'S ACTIONS ABROAD ARE IN CHARACTER."

HIS OWN ACTIONS, HIS WHOLE PERSONALITY, WERE EQUALLY IN CHARACTER. AND NOWHERE WAS THAT PERSONALITY - BLUNT, FORTHRIGHT, COURAGEOUS, HUMANE - DISPLAYED MORE STRIKINGLY THAN IN HIS OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR TESTS IN THE PACIFIC. HIS OPPOSITION TO THOSE TESTS WAS AN EXAMPLE TO THE WORLD AND AN INSPIRATION TO ALL WHO SUPPORTED HIM. IT MADE HIM THE NATURAL AND RESPECTED SPOKESMAN FOR THE PACIFIC ISLAND STATES, ALL OF THEM SMALL, SOME OF THEM FORMER DEPENDANCIES OF NEW ZEALAND. IN APRIL LAST YEAR WE WERE BOTH IN WESTERN SAMOA FOR A MEETING OF THE PACIFIC FORUM. HE ENJOYED IMMENSE AND DESERVED STATURE AMONG THE PACIFIC LEADERS. AT TIMES DURING BREAKS IN THE PROCEEDINGS I TALKED WITH HIM ON THE BREACH AT APIA, AND WAS NEVER MORE CONSCIOUS OF THE KINSHIP HE FELT WITH THE PACIFIC ITSELF, WITH THAT VAST AND BEAUTIFUL ENVIRONMENT HE SOUGHT TO PROTECT, AND WITH THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE WHO INHABIT ITS SHORES AND LOVELY ISLANDS.

WE MET ON THREE OTHER OCCASIONS DURING HIS TERM OF OFFICE - IN CHRISTCHURCH, IN OTTAWA, IN CANBERRA. HE LASTED VISITED THIS COUNTRY IN NOVEMBER TO OPEN THE CHANCERY OF THE NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSION, WHICH RANKS AMONG THE MOST ELEGANT NEW BUILDINGS IN THIS CITY. ON EACH OCCASION I SENSED A DEEPENING AND STRENGTHENING OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES, A GREATER AWARENESS OF OUR SHARED PURPOSE AND UNDERSTANDING. IT IS A COMMONPLACE - BUT NO LESS TRUE FOR BEING SO - THAT NO TWO NATIONS IN THE WORLD HAVE A RELATIONSHIP OF SUCH TRUST AND INTIMACY AS AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. OUR NAMES ARE LINKED IN TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS. OUR HISTORIES AND ORIGINS HAVE MUCH IN COMMON. THERE HAS OFTEN BEEN A STRIKING SYNCHRONISATION IN THE POLITICAL CHARACTER OF OUR GOVERNMENTS. THOSE OF US WHO BELIEVE IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM, WHO HAVE WORKED AND FOUGHT FOR IT, AND WHO REJOICED AT NORMAN KIRK'S VICTORY IN 1972, SAW IN THE EVENTS OF THAT YEAR THE BEGINNINGS OF AN EVEN DEEPER AND MORE LASTING PARTNERSHIP. IT WAS, AFTER ALL - AND I HOPE I WILL BE FORGIVEN A NOTE OF PARTISANSHIP - UNDER LABOR GOVERNMENTS IN BOTH OUR COUNTRIES THAT THE AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND AGREEMENT - THE ANZAC PACT - WAS SIGNED IN 1944. NORMAN KIRK WORKED TIRELESSLY TO PROMOTE THE SPIRIT OF THAT AGREEMENT. HE SAW IN IT AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP IN PEACE A RELATIONSHIP BORN AND TESTED IN WAR.

FOR ALL HIS ATTAINMENTS HE WAS A MAN SINGULARLY WITHOUT CONCEIT, WITHOUT PRETENCE, ABOVE ALL WITHOUT BITTERNESS OR RECRIMINATION. A SHREWD JUDGE, CERTAINLY; AN ABLE AND GIFTED POLITICIAN WITH THE ESSENTIAL TOUGHNESS REQUIRED OF HIM; YET IN HIS TRUE SELF A MAN OF VISION, GUIDED BY GENUINE IDEALS AND A YEARNING FOR A BETTER WORLD. I NEVER KNEW HIM TO BE PETTY OR CYNICAL. HE HAD A CLARITY OF MIND, A SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE, AND BEHIND HIS BLUFF AND CANDID Demeanour, A NATURAL WARMTH AND CHARM. HE SERVED HIS PARTY FOR 25 YEARS AND DESPITE INDIFFERENT HEALTH AND THE LACK OF A FORMAL EDUCATION SUCCEEDED IN TRANSFORMING AND MODERNISING ITS ELECTORAL APPEAL. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT HIS TOTAL DEDICATION TO THE TASKS IN HAND AND HIS RELENTLESS CAPACITY FOR WORK HELPED SHORTEN HIS LIFE. HE DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS PEOPLE; AND THEIR SYMPATHY AND THAT OF HIS FRIENDS WILL GO OUT TO HIS FAMILY, AS THEIR GOODWILL WILL FLOW TO HIS SUCCESSOR. HE LEAVES A COUNTRY RICHER AND PROUDER FOR HIS LEADERSHIP.

POLITICIANS ARE NOT THE BEST JUDGES OF THEIR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS. A MAN OF NORMAN KIRK'S ESSENTIAL HUMILITY WAS NOT ONE TO DWELL AT INORDINATE LENGTH ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS WORK OR HIS PLACE IN HIS COUNTRY'S HISTORY. HE LEFT US, HOWEVER, IN NO DOUBT ABOUT HIS AIMS OR PHILOSOPHY. THEY WERE EXPRESSED WITH UNMISTAKABLE CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY IN HIS SPEECHES AND WRITINGS.

"I LEAVE YOU WITH TWO EXAMPLES. "THE WELFARE STATE", HE ONCE WROTE, "IS THE THOUSANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR HIGH SCHOOLS, THE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN IN TECHNICAL INSTITUTES AND UNIVERSITIES... FOR THE FAMILY IT HAS MEANT BETTER HOMES, BETTER HEALTH, BETTER AND MORE SECURE JOBS, GREATER SECURITY. FOR THOSE WHO, DUE TO FRAILTY, AGE, ILLNESS OR DISABILITY, ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO WORK, IT SHOULD MEAN ADEQUATE PROVISION AND FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY." AND AGAIN, IN A SPEECH HE GAVE SOON AFTER HIS PARTY'S VICTORY IN 1972, HE SAID: "NEW ZEALANDERS HAVE BUILT UP A SOCIETY AND A WAY OF LIFE THAT IS UNSURPASSED FOR DECENCY AND HUMANITY. IT COULD BE EVEN BETTER, AND WE HOPE TO SECURE CO-OPERATION IN POLICIES THAT WILL MAKE IT SO. ON SUCH A BASIS WE ARE JUSTIFIED IN STANDING UP IN THE WORLD FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE, WITHOUT EXCESSIVE PRIDE OR UNDUE MODESTY."

NORMAN KIRK HAD NEITHER EXCESSIVE PRIDE
NOR UNDUE MODESTY. HE STOOD UP FOR WHAT HE
BELIEVED. HE SPOKE HIS MIND. HE NEVER FLINCHED
FROM HIS PRINCIPLES OR FROM THE SELF-IMPOSED
STANDARDS WHICH BOUND HIM TO A PUBLIC LIFE OF
RIGOROUS HONOUR AND EXEMPLARY SERVICE.
HE WAS A GREAT LEADER. HE WAS A GOOD MAN.
