

# United Kingdom

Speech by the Prime Minister at the Mansion House, London, on 19 December 1974

I suppose I would be less than human if I did not feel some sense of awe—even some slight trepidation—at the prospect of addressing this august gathering in this historic hall. An Australian Prime Minister who comes to London is made very much aware of his country's British origins and its place in the scheme of things. He is subtly reminded of the actions and reputations of his predecessors, of the rich and intricate fabric of history, law and tradition that has shaped his country and the very nature of his office. For an Australian Prime Minister, London can never be just another city or Britain just another country—however much a proud and self-assertive people would like to think them so.

I must confess that by past standards my present visit to London has been somewhat brash and unorthodox. It is more than two years since a Labor Government was elected in Australia, yet this is the first time I have spoken to a British audience. My coming out in London has been unconscionably delayed. A generation ago no Australian Prime Minister would have engaged in talks with Robin Day and David Frost before talking to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. No Australian Prime Minister would have visited Brussels before visiting London. Very likely, no Australian Prime Minister would have visited Brussels at all. There was a time when Australia's main involvement with Europe was on the battlefield. The real decisions on Australia's trade, on her economic and financial policies, on her foreign policies, on the very borders of her States and Territories, were taken in London. We were the creation of a great trading empire at the height of its influence and

prestige. We were the last frontier of European colonial might. When Australia was settled there was literally nowhere further for the European to go. To me it is strikingly symbolic of the link between British political and mercantile power that the word 'corporation'—the very name of this ancient assembly—has come to denote both the municipal government of London and the great network of financial institutions that for so long influenced the destinies of the Australian people.

Mr Wilson, the British Prime Minister, welcomes Mr Whitlam.

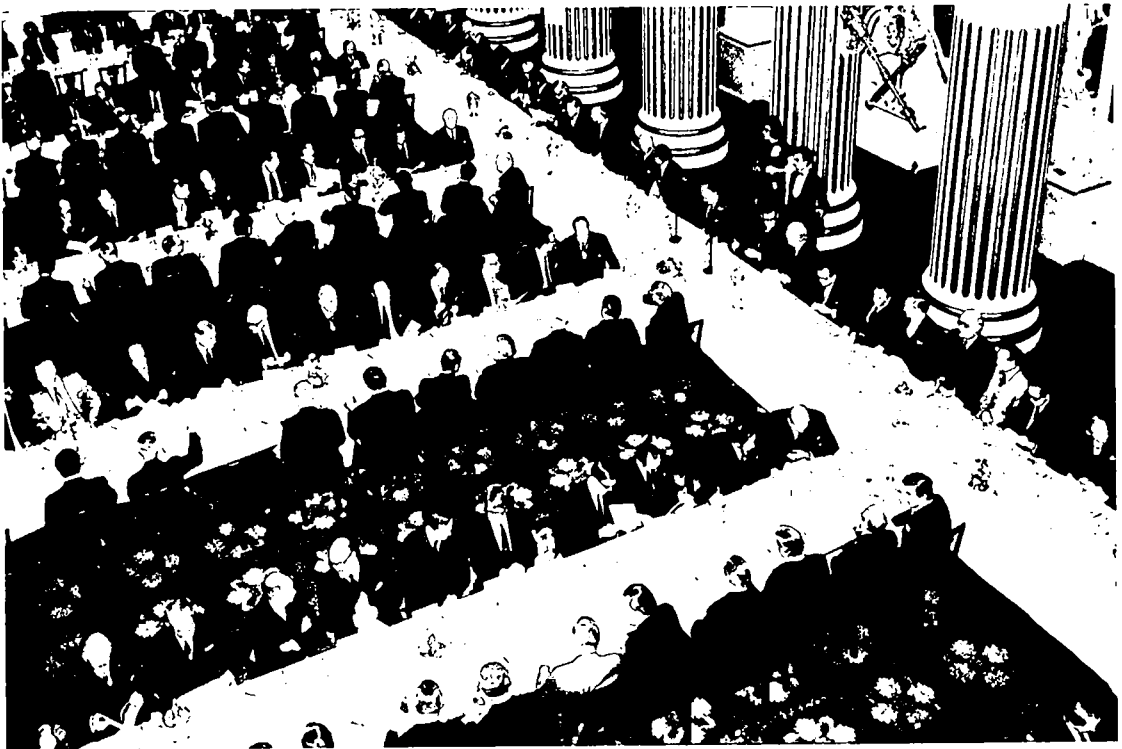


It is a commonplace to say that the world is rapidly changing. Yet never has the truth of that statement been more manifest than today. Little that we have taken for granted, little to which we are accustomed, little even that we hold dear, has remained unaffected by the events of the past thirty years, and especially by the pace and scope of change in the 1970's. I do not need to tell you of the difficulty and complexity of the economic problems that confront every western trading nation—Australia and Britain among them. In Australia's case, not only has it been necessary to accept changes in our thinking and national life: it has been necessary to welcome and promote changes. Since my Government was elected it has pursued a new course in its foreign affairs. We have sought a more distinctive and independent role for Australia, especially in our own region. We have established new friendships and contacts with other nations. While this has meant some reappraisal of our traditional arrangements, the changes we have made have not been at the expense of old and proven friends. I want to emphasise this; our policies were a response to

a growing spirit of self-confidence and self-reliance in Australian society. We have developed a keener sense of national independence. And I must say, in all frankness, it was high time we did.

Some people—more in Australia than in Britain—have regarded Australia's foreign policies in recent years as some sort of affront to Britain; an insult to the Mother Country. Let me be personal for a moment. I don't suppose there is anyone in Australia, certainly no one else who is still in public life, who has a greater love for Britain than I have. Against very strong advice, from friend and foe alike, I insisted on coming here for Christmas. What better proof could there be of my British sympathies. Not many of my countrymen have a greater respect for Britain's institutions and traditions than I do—a greater knowledge of your history, a greater affection for your language, your laws, your literature, your unique intellectual traditions of moderation, detachment, tolerance and liberty. In saying this I don't want to sound boastful or ingratiating. I want to dispel the impression that

A luncheon at the Mansion House given by the Lord Mayor of London in honour of the Prime Minister.



Australia's attitude to Britain has been churlish or nit-picking. What we seek is a more mature and contemporary relationship with Britain—a relationship based on a growing sense of national pride and purpose.

For more than twenty years successive Australian Governments saw our continent as a small and insignificant country, an outpost of European civilisation, exposed to the tides of communism which threatened to engulf the region, and prey to the covetous attentions of our neighbours. These feelings were heightened by a sense of geographical isolation, racial and cultural, which established the main directions of Australia's foreign relations from 1950 onwards. They ultimately led us to commit Australian forces to the Viet-Nam War. They led us to tolerate the increasing overseas ownership and control of our industries and resources. By December 1972 the external environment and Australia's Government had changed. Our perceptions of Australia's place and role in international affairs had changed. We never were small and insignificant. Our economy is a good deal larger than the economies of many European nations. We have ended our military involvement in Viet-Nam. We have recognised and established diplomatic relations with all the countries in Asia and with many other countries which were formerly ignored by Australia. We have been a helpful and co-operative neighbour in our region. In the United Nations we have given steadfast support to the causes of self-determination, disarmament and anti-colonialism.

To a great extent the new directions in our foreign policy have been influenced by Britain's example. In 1972 we established formal relations with the People's Republic of China: Britain had done so in 1949. We withdrew our forces from Indo-China: Britain had never committed such forces. I doubt if anyone in this country would take it amiss if I declared that Australia's involvement in Viet-Nam had been a mistake. It was a mistake, and only now are we repairing the damage. Britain herself was in the forefront of the great post-war movement which brought self-determination and independence to a host of former colonial states. Once when Australians travelled to Europe, every port and stop-over was ruled from London—Singapore, Colombo, Aden, Suez, Malta,

Port Said, Gibraltar. One of the triumphs of British foreign policy has been the peaceful and orderly transfer of power to the new self-governing nations.

In the light of these changes, it was inevitable and natural that Britain's relationship with Australia would change too. The impetus for change did not come from Australia alone. Britain's historic move towards Europe meant a change in her attitude to her Commonwealth partners. Australia did not oppose or resent Britain's involvement in Europe. Enlightened opinion in my country welcomed and encouraged it, just as the great financial institutions of this city welcomed and encouraged it. True enough, Britain's entry into Europe meant some adjustment, a difficult adjustment, in Australia's pattern of trade, but this process of adjustment had begun with Britain's first attempt to join the European Community in the early 1960's. Since that time Australia has sought to diversify its trade in an effort to reduce our dependence on the British market. In 1961-62, some 20 per cent of our exports were directed to Britain. Britain was our principal export market. Now, nearly two years after Britain's entry into the European Community, we sell only 6.5 per cent of our exports to Britain.

Many of our new markets are among the nations of the Commonwealth, the great majority of the members of the Commonwealth now lie in and around the Indian and South Pacific Oceans. In a geographical sense, Australia is much closer to the new Commonwealth than Britain herself. Far from being on the periphery we are much nearer the centre. It is Britain, if I may say so, that has become the outpost of European civilisation in an organisation essentially oriented toward Asian, Pacific, Indian Ocean and Caribbean States. You hear a lot of disparagement of the Commonwealth but you will never hear it from Australia. The Commonwealth today provides the world's largest regular forum for meetings of Heads of Government. In this respect it has no parallel, and Australia has given the Commonwealth its fullest and most active support.

It is against this background of economic and political change that Australia has looked afresh at her traditional relationship with Britain. There are some things we have changed. Many of the

things we have changed have been essentially symbolic, but no less important for that. Many of the changes would have been made whichever government was in power in Australia; indeed some of them had their origins in decisions taken by my predecessors. One of our first acts as a government was to amend Her Majesty's Royal Style and Titles in Australia. That change had the warm personal approval of the Queen and the overwhelming endorsement of the Australian people. The result is that Queen Elizabeth II is now properly, proudly and officially designated 'Queen of Australia'. She has always been Queen of Australia; now she bears the title, I am proud of it. It is an entirely contemporary and appropriate title. It takes account of popular feeling. It makes the monarchy a closer and more relevant institution for Australians.

We decided it was time Australia had a distinctive national anthem and abandoned knight-hoods and other awards conferred in the name of the British Empire. Other nations like Canada had taken this course and public opinion in Australia was fully in sympathy with such changes. We no longer confer knighthoods in the name of an empire that has ceased to exist. We retain *God Save The Queen* on occasions when Her Majesty is present or when it is especially important to emphasise our links with the Crown, but our official anthem, the only anthem recognised by the Australian Government, is *Advance Australia Fair*. All the evidence suggests that Australians want an anthem of their own. There is nothing particularly surprising about this; it would be more surprising if they didn't. Yet there are Australians who see the choice of an anthem and the rejection of Imperial Titles as an insult to the Crown. I regard our preference for an Australian anthem as a perfectly natural reflection of Australian maturity and I am convinced that the British people do likewise.

I give you another example. Six years ago an earlier Australian Government—a conservative government—abolished appeals to the Privy Council in London from judgments of the Australian High Court. That decision was accepted in Australia without dissent. In the same way, for the same reasons, my Government has sought to abolish appeals to the Privy Council from the Supreme Courts of the States. Our

proposal has been resisted by the States. I merely say this: no people with an ounce of self-respect would allow decisions made by their own judges, appointed by their own governments and sitting in their own courts, to be overruled by judges sitting in another country and appointed by the Government of another country. We still retain procedures by which the Governors of the States are commissioned by the Queen—not as Queen of Australia but as Queen of the United Kingdom. The commissions are countersigned not by the Premier of the State but by the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I do not think it unduly chauvinistic of Australians to object to such a procedure. I do not think I am alone in seeing something absurd in the proposal to have a Queen of Queensland. Is there to be a Queen of Alberta and a Queen of Prince Edward Island? These are matters affecting Australia's standing and reputation as a contemporary independent nation.

Two of the great things we have inherited from Britain are our tradition of judicial independence and our parliamentary democracy. For a variety of reasons, including the present strains on the world economy, our democratic system has come under challenge and in many countries is afflicted by instability and frequent changes of government. It is imperative that countries like Australia and Britain ensure the survival of robust democracy and individual liberty. I look forward to discussions with your Prime Minister on how the fabric of our democratic society can be strengthened during the present economic crisis. In saying this I do not want to adopt the mantle of a prophet of doom. In Australia, as in Britain, governments face serious problems of inflation, a slowing down of growth and, for us, a high level of unemployment. But these temporary factors, unfortunate as they are, should not obscure the fundamental long-term strength of our economies. Must we admit that only the Soviet Union among industrial and trading nations can avoid unemployment and inflation?

There has never been a time when the institutions of government, the parliaments, the courts—not only in Australia but in all democracies—were more in need of strengthening. There has never been a time when the problems of society posed a greater challenge to

the ingenuity and skill of governments. There has never been a time when democratic institutions have been so sternly challenged. In my own country this year we saw the Upper House in the national Parliament for the first time refuse Supply to the elected government and force a general election. It was a gross breach of a hitherto unchallenged convention. Moreover, so complex and cumbersome are Australia's electoral laws that the new Parliament could not convene for three months. Where else could a Parliamentary democracy be without a Parliament for so long?

Many in Britain may be aware that some of Australia's State Governments have resented some of the initiatives of my Government. Indeed, after my visit in April last year Premiers and State Attorneys-General flocked to London to beseech the British Government to save them from the Australian Government. The point in issue can be solved within the Australian judicial system established by the Australian Constitution. There is no possible advantage to Britain in embroiling the Queen, the Government or the Courts of Britain in such Australian domestic disputes. I shall not go into such matters here, except to say this: The great lesson of the Australian federal system, as in the American, Canadian and West German federal systems since the War, has been the need for greater involvement, greater responsibility, on the part of the national government. I give two illustrations. In the two Australian States with the largest populations it had become obvious for a decade that only through the involvement of the national government could the people in new areas secure access to essential public services such as health, higher education and public transport. In the two States with the largest areas, it had become obvious that only the national government could safeguard Australian control of the vast new natural resources discovered in the past ten years. I believe the federal system can be made to work, as it has worked in other democracies, if the States accept that Australians are one people, with national interests and legitimate national aspirations, and that there are some government services and responsibilities that can only be adequately provided and exercised if the Federal Government is involved.

Those who see in some of our recent actions

concerning Britain a manifestation of some strident new nationalism or anti-British feeling have completely misread our intentions and mistaken the mood of our people. What Australia is trying to do is establish an independent identity in the world and especially in our own region. We have grown up. Our actions are in no way anti-British. They are simply pro-Australian. I speak to you frankly because I know there can never be any questions about the enduring strength of Australia's ties with Britain and the British people. The vast majority of our people are of British stock. We wish to build on British institutions. I believe that our understanding and affection will deepen, rather than diminish, as Australia assumes her rightful place as a proud and independent nation, with a distinctive role and a distinctive voice in her region and in the world at large.



The Prime Minister speaks to the press in Dublin.