

Ireland

Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia at a luncheon given in his honour by the Taoiseach of Ireland, Mr Liam Cosgrave, in Dublin on 23 December 1974

I am no stranger to your extraordinary and beautiful country. This is my fourth visit to Ireland. Each time I return I take renewed pleasure from my contact with a country so close in history and spirit to my own, and whose valiant and poignant story has so stirred the imagination of the Australian people. I was last in Dublin as Leader of the Opposition in January 1972. I am the first Australian Prime Minister to visit Ireland since Sir Robert Menzies was here in 1941. Another visit was long overdue.

Before his sudden and untimely death I had anticipated a meeting with your late President, the distinguished Erskine Childers. With all Australians I regretted the passing of so notable an Irishman, whose appointment symbolised something of the breadth and magnanimity of the Irish character. I might say that the name Childers is well known in Australia. One of the late President's forbears, Hugh Childers, was the founder of the University of Melbourne and gave his name to the town of Childers in Queensland. I reiterate the condolences expressed by our Governor-General on behalf of the Australian Government and people to the late President's family and to the Government and people of Ireland.

The Irish contribution to the settlement and development of Australia is a familiar story. We were the last major area of European colonisation, and a distinctive Irish element is well represented in the first wave of settlers to Australia. Irish migrants helped to expand Australian settlement outwards and inland beyond the narrow limits of the eastern and central seaboard. The development of colonial self-

government produced an unmistakable Irish influence in Australia's emerging political tradition. The major debates of the late nineteenth century—debates which canvassed issues of land tenure, education, the relations between Church and State and the relationship with Britain—rehearsed issues well known to the Irish immigrant and enabled him to give Australian political life a distinctively Irish flavour.

Times have changed since the first Irish immigrants settled in Australia. Other European communities—Italians, Germans, Greeks, Yugoslavs—have made their contribution to Australian life. Modern Australia is a pluralist society. While we acknowledge our European origins, and remain in many ways the most Irish country outside Ireland, we are increasingly aware of our geographical and political destiny as part of the Asian and Pacific region.

Australia and Ireland are parliamentary democracies with governmental, judicial and social institutions derived largely from common political traditions. The Australian High Court has had many able judges of Irish extraction—O'Connor, Higgins, McTiernan, Gavan Duffy. There are still strong cultural affinities between us. Yet our political and diplomatic contacts have not always been as active or as comprehensive as traditional associations might have led us to expect. In large part this has reflected simple considerations of geopolitics and differences in our major international interests. It has reflected the absence of serious problems or conflicts between us. One of the ironies of history is that conflict between nations is often productive of greater mutual understanding in

Note: The Prime Minister spoke informally and on occasions may have departed from this text.

the longer term, while an established tradition of friendship yields all too easily to a comfortable and accepted pattern of relations which may be less adaptable to the challenges posed by changing times and fortunes.

In a period when Australia is seeking to play an independent and increasingly active role in its own region in Asia and the Pacific, at a time when Ireland has perceived that her economic and political interests lie in a united Europe, it becomes more important to identify clearly the real community of interest between us. We are vulnerable, like all countries, to the threat of economic and social dislocation posed by inflation, rising unemployment and the spectre of recession. We share similar commitments in a wide range of international issues including basic human rights, the problems of economic development among the poorer nations, the need for an accepted regime to ensure balanced and proper methods of international maritime law. We are both concerned with internal questions of economic and social reform. We share a common interest in formulating policies which will guarantee an equitable local share in the development of our national resources.

Perhaps most important, we realise that our relations will come to be increasingly defined in the context of the enlarged Europe of which Ireland is a member. Australia places considerable importance on its relations with the European Community. The new Community is Australia's largest export market after Japan and the largest source of our imports.

It is responsible for some 40 per cent of the world's trade. It is developing new relationships with the trading nations outside Europe and Australia is one of the most important of these nations. Our commercial interests in Europe, once centred on the British market through the former preferential trading arrangements, have changed to a new relationship with the Community as a whole. Our mutual interests extend further than a simple commercial relationship. They include areas of international relations, finance and questions of energy and resources.

It is against this background of common interests that we shall be holding periodic meetings between ourselves and the Commission of the Community to enable consul-

tations on the broad range of our mutual interests. These consultations will permit both the Community and Australia to co-ordinate the various strands of our relations, ensuring that proper recognition is given by each to the full range of our interests.

The new multi-lateral relationship which we see developing between ourselves and Europe should not usurp the tradition of bilateral relations between our two countries. It would be a pity if our historical association was overshadowed by the turn of events. With this in mind the Australian Government has decided to assist the University College, Dublin, to establish a Chair of Australian History. We will contribute \$ 70,000 over the next five years. We have already made considerable donations of books on Australian subjects to the college and we shall make further contributions in the future.

I am confident that Australia and Ireland will develop a new kind of relationship within the framework of Ireland's emerging multi-lateral interests. Our relationship will be as close, as special as before, but more relevant to contemporary needs. Ireland is one of the two English-speaking members of the Community with whom we share a common cultural and political heritage and powerful ties of sentiment and kinship. As such we hope Ireland may occupy a special position in the evolving relationship between Australia and the new Europe. I believe our relations will strengthen as we move closer to our natural destinies in our different regions of the world.