

France

Speech by the Prime Minister of France, M. Jacques Chirac, at a dinner in honour of the Prime Minister of Australia in Paris on 6 January 1975

Through one of those unexpected incidents such as are often met in the lives of individuals and peoples, the circumstances of these recent days make your presence amongst us specially significant. Indeed how could I fail to mention, at the time when we have the honour and the pleasure of welcoming you, the ordeal which has just struck Australia? You were already in Europe when you had to return to your country and face the consequences of the Darwin disaster. That you should have wanted against all other considerations to keep to our joint plans, that you should be in Paris today as previously agreed, gives us an even better appreciation of the importance of your visit to France and must have consequences for our two nations and our two States.

Our awareness that Australia and France have, despite space and distance, very real common interests—in many regards fundamentally so—is further reinforced by a coincidence of dates which is of symbolic value. We are in January 1975: So it is exactly 60 years since the first volunteers from the southern continent first took part in the battles of the great conflict which then divided the world. In the hardest struggles at Vimy, as on the steep slopes of Gallipoli, the Australian soldiers, with their heroism which was to become legendary, bore witness that to defend human liberty and the independence of peoples, solidarity between old Europe and their new country remained essential.

You may be sure, Mr Prime Minister, that the French people have not forgotten. Sixty years have gone by since those days in 1915 when men of our two people discovered what a ter-

rible price they had to pay for the right to retain their identity. Another war tore our universe, and your country, even more than in 1914-1918, experienced its dramas, bore its effects and played its tragic part. Thirty years ago, almost to the day, one of your predecessors declared, so close was the threat: 'Australia belongs to the Australians and it must remain so.'

Neither you, nor we, have forgotten the lessons of those years of anxiety. We know that peoples must remain independent for men to be free. We know that to remain independent peoples must be capable of assuring their defence and be determined to assure it. But we also know that the will to remain independent and free requires that men should also experience, in their daily life, the value of independence and the meaning of freedom. In modern industrial societies this necessarily means that everything must be done to provide everyone, whatever his social or economic status, with a full share in decisions, in choice and thus in responsibility.

We know, Mr Prime Minister, how well you have perceived this. We know with what determination you have laboured for Australia's further evolution and to develop new forms of economic action and social innovation.

Frenchmen are all the more attentive to your efforts because for their part and in accordance with conditions deriving from their own history, they are pursuing with perseverance an undertaking which is in many ways comparable to yours, for French society to transform itself without chaos and modernise itself without breach. Tomorrow is not the contrary of today, rather it is its development.

The growth of your country is a fine example of this. For nearly two centuries men from Europe have established themselves on its soil, have organised themselves there into a new society which is neither a copy nor the reverse of the old world which they had left. Australia has known how not to be an antipodean Europe without at the same time forgetting or neglecting anything essential from the European heritage.

On that immense continent at the far end of the Asian world, on the Indian ocean and the Pacific, a new people has taken shape. Australia has seen the development of a distinctive culture and civilisation and become an industrial power; its very geographic position as well as its resources of raw materials confer on it a situation of first importance in the world of today. Europe, which is now in the process of constituting itself, intends for its part to maintain in the world affairs the position assigned to it by its history and economic weight; to say this is to say how much it is in the interest of our two countries to draw closer together and to understand each other better.

You could have with France a close dialogue an even a special relationship. This is why to receive you in Paris, Mr Prime Minister, is not only an honour for us, it is also a responsibility, for we must now determine what Australia and France can henceforth do together.

It seems to me that there is between our two peoples, despite distance, a manifest propensity to co-operate with each other and there are elements within our two economies which are so complementary that to fail to draw them together would be to fly in the face of both logic and the mutual interest of our countries. In the industrial and scientific sectors vast fields could be opened for close co-operation between our firms, our scientists, our engineers; for a pooling of our techniques and resources, our ambitions and our capabilities. This can contribute to meet the economic challenges of the last few years of the millennium and to bring our two peoples closer together. Our national interests command us to place no limits on our imagination and to defer no decisions.

I want you to know, Mr Prime Minister, that there is on our side the political will, if you so wish, to go a long way together. France wants to be, before long, amongst Australia's principal associates. Your stay in France is thus not only the occasion to note that, despite all hazards, our countries are close to one another in their view of international life, of democracy and social progress. It will enable us to give new bases to our joint actions so as to reinforce between Australia and France, between Australia and Europe, ties which are not only those of memory but those of a concerted effort for growth, independence and peace.

Mr Whitlam talks to Madame Chirac, wife of the Prime Minister of France, at an official dinner in Paris.



Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia at a dinner given in his honour by the Prime Minister of France in Paris on 6 January 1975

My wife and I are honoured by the welcome you have given us. It typifies the cordiality and graciousness we have come to expect from your country and her people. No one who visits the capitals of Europe—certainly no politician—can escape the feeling that Paris is the high point of his mission, that all his expectations, all his energies, indeed all his anxieties, reach their keenest pitch in the capital of France. In Paris we renew our contacts with one of the great cities of the world, with the capital of the French Republic, with the city that uniquely symbolises the spirit of Europe itself. Nowhere are the history and culture of Western Europe so closely and visibly identified with her present economic and industrial power and her future political aspirations.

I declare Australia's firm support for the ideals of the European Community and the promise it holds for the peace of the world and the happiness of mankind. Many nations have had a part in shaping the European experiment, but France is rightly seen, and will rightly be judged by history, as the founding spirit and guiding force in the movement for European unity. For all her national pride and for all the intensity of her national ambitions, France has put Europe first. There have been times when Australia, in pursuit of her own interests or in defence of her traditional trading links and partnerships, may sometimes have seemed reluctant to give her full support to Europe. We have no such reservations today. The Common Market is Australia's second largest single trading partner. We cannot ignore it; still less do we under-estimate its importance as a force for enlightenment, for universal prosperity and for the general progress of humanity. The prosperity of France and the prosperity of Europe are indivisible. Equally, the prosperity of Europe and the prosperity of the western world are indivisible. Without the friendship and goodwill of France, the friendship and goodwill of Europe are an illusion.

I would be less than frank, Prime Minister, if I failed to acknowledge that Australia's relations with France have been strained in recent years. I would be equally lacking in sincerity and candour if I apologised for the actions on Australia's part which contributed to the difficulties between us. You know the record of our differences. I stress that the course we took was not motivated by any hostility from our people towards the people of France. Nor was it inspired by any narrow political ideology: it was in fact supported by all political parties in Australia. It is sufficient to say now that the main cause of our differences has been largely removed, and I am bold enough to believe that whatever France may have said of our attitudes at the time, our policy would have won some respect in a nation renowned for the vigilant defence of her own national rights and interests. I believe there are no longer any outstanding or lasting problems between us. Here in your capital, as the guest of your Government, as a long standing friend and admirer of your country, I proclaim Australia's desire and Australia's readiness to strengthen and enlarge her relations with France. We want to build on the great traditions of friendship and co-operation that have guided our relations in the past. I am confident that we can do so. I believe, Prime Minister, that you share my confidence.

It is a happy precedent, a happy omen, that the traditional contacts between our countries—the basis on which we must now build together—go back to the very foundations of Australia. I hope the French people will come to know more of Australia's standing as a modern and highly industrialised nation; a nation that has made, like France, important contributions to art, to industry, to science, to social organisation and other fields of endeavour; a nation sharing with France the historic Western values of liberty, law and parliamentary democracy. Australians are well aware of their historical and cultural affinities with France. They are well aware of the

vast reservoir of goodwill and shared experience that exists between us, as former allies in war and as great trading partners in peace.

I give two examples of the range of contacts between us. An exhibition of Australian art has lately been seen in Paris. Only four weeks ago, in Canberra, I opened a French language school and a new local headquarters of the Alliance Francaise. These are small and recent things. I mention others more important—for example, the many discussions which Australians have had with French officials of DATAR, from which we have learnt much of value from French experience in urban and regional planning. Or again, the record of business contacts—on both a corporate and personal level—between Australia and France. On such foundations a great structure of trade and economic investment has been built. France buys annually more than a billion francs worth of Australian exports. French aircraft are the backbone of the Royal Australian Air Force. The French construction company, Citra, is responsible for many works and projects in our cities. Renault assembles cars in Australia. Yet even these links, substantial as they are, fall short of what our countries can achieve together.

France has much to offer to our region, as she has to the world at large. Australia has much to offer France. We share, like every other country in the Western world, difficult economic and social problems. Your President, a statesman fully seized of the gravity and complexity of the problems of the modern world, stated his views of few weeks ago in these sombre terms: 'The world is unhappy. It is unhappy because it doesn't know where it is going and because it guesses that, if it knew, it would discover that it was heading for disaster. It is an unhappy world that statesmen have to lead and that the men of the media have to enlighten'. I believe the co-operation we seek between France and Australia will make some contribution, perhaps a useful contribution, to the easing of our problems. May I say, Prime Minister, how much I have valued the opportunity to talk with you. We have renewed and strengthened the friendship between France and Australia. I express my firm hope, my unwavering confidence, that our countries will move forward together in a renewed spirit of trust into a new era of friendship and accord.

The Prime Minister laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

