

24/18/75

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT TARCOOLA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA,  
FOR INAUGURATION CEREMONIES OF TARCOOLA/ALICE SPRINGS RAILWAY  
12.4.1975

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Everything we say on this platform is being recorded even if it is not being amplified. So even if you can't hear us today, I've no doubt you will play the record of the occasion for the rest of your lives. Maybe.

We were introduced today by our colleague Laurie Wallace, the M.P. for Grey, in which electorate Tarcoola forms the centre and it was like old times for him, because he lived in Tarcoola from 1949 to 1952 with Mrs. Wallace, I hasten to add, and his first political meetings were in Tarcoola and there were no amplifiers. He was the secretary of the Progress Association, and now, now that he has become the Member for the district and serving under a government of his colleagues he's been able to ensure the progress of Tarcoola.

Now I had the opportunity last night, in the presence of most of you, at a dinner at Port Augusta to recite the significance of this occasion. An immensely significant week, in the history of Australian railways, Australian transport, Australia's national development, unity and progress because earlier this week we made the agreement to acquire the South Australian Railways, and then we enacted the Australian National Railways Commission Bill, and then we introduced the Interstate Commission Bill, all in the one week.

But a year ago, Mr. Dunstan and I signed an agreement to build the Tarcoola/Alice Springs Railway. It is not possible for the Australian Government to build or acquire a railway in any state without the co-operation of the State Government. And the South Australian Government has been magnificently co-operative, because a year ago it signed the agreement for us to build the Tarcoola Railway up to the Northern Territory border. It signed the agreement for us to build a new standard gauge railway between Crystal Brook and Adelaide and of course it has now signed the agreement for us to acquire the non-metropolitan railways in South Australia. So it has been a most fruitful period.

And I suppose we have to concede that there were some supernatural forces at work, because had it not been for the fact that early last year there was the longest interruption in the old narrow gauge service between Maree and Alice Springs that there had been in the history of the service. For nine weeks, the service was out. Sam Calder, whose presence here I am very happy to see, the Member for the Northern Territory, gave us no rest at all and we thought - "Right! We can delay no longer in undertaking this new railway project" - an all weather, national and international standard railway between the East/West railway at Tarcoola and Alice Springs.

And today we are inaugurating, we are commencing this largest railway project in Australia since Prime Minister Andrew Fisher's government inaugurated the East/West railway in 1912. This is a big occasion. Not only to Tarcoola, not only for South Australia, and the Centre, but for the nation. A very big project. \$100 million. 830 kilometers. And first-rate road bed and rolling stock. Of course the rolling stock is something for which I will always remember this day.

I suppose every politician is supposed to be inordinately ambitious. And I suppose when I became a law student and thought everything would be terribly easy, I thought "Well, I suppose I'll be satisfied if I get on the High Court."

It was many years that I was in the House of Representatives before I thought I'd be able to do this job. I suppose it was only after for some years I'd been watching people on the other side. But I never dreamed that my ambition of having a locomotive named after me would be fulfilled.

In the early days of federation, the railway stations on the East/West line were called after Prime Ministers - Barton and Reid and Watson right up to Hughes and so on. But in more recent years, there have been locomotives called after Prime Ministers, and in fact, after Ministers of Transport. It started as so many things did with the Robert Menzies, and since then there's been the John Gorton, and the William McMahon. All very formal. Then they made a Ben Chifley, who I think was one of the greatest Prime Ministers and he did in fact know something about locomotives. Then there was the George McLeay, and the Hubert Opperman, and the Gordon Freeth, but now, the pride of the fleet - the Charlie Jones and the Gough Whitlam.

Of course, Jones' initials are C.K. But a lot of people knowing his addiction to railways think it ought to be the K.C. - Casey Jones - a great name in railway history. But be satisfied with it being called the Charlie Jones.

Now some people have said, unkindly I think, that also locomotives ought to be called after leaders on the other side. And in fact this has commended itself to the railways management because this would rapidly ensure the replenishment of the whole fleet. I'm not sure that some of them would be happy about it because they aren't always happy about people from the wrong side of the tracks. But Charlie, you needn't worry about my faith in you. Sure I'd like to be Minister for Transport. But you'd be my second choice. And you'd do better than some of your colleagues on the platform.

Senator Bishop has been Postmaster-General for quite some time and he hasn't got me on a postage stamp. But Charlie Jones has got me on a locomotive.

Now this is going to be a big occasion. I believe it is going to take several forms. I have to push a plunger which will, after some lapse of time, produce an explosion on a neighbouring hillside. Then, I have to fill a barrel and this gives me the greatest pleasure, next after naming the locomotive, because I've had to push one for so many years. All by myself. So I have to go through

that process. Then there is going to be the plaque on the tree. One of the few trees on the immediate neighbourhood. And then there is the naming of the locomotive. Now there will be some interval. Because I am told that after I bash the plunger, the magazines on the TV will have to be replenished so any delay will be due to entirely media compulsions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a very great pleasure to be here in the middle of Australia on this very great occasion, because a great number of people on the maps of Australia from now on will find Tarcoola writ large and they will remember April 1975 for a very great number of things. Symbolised, I think, I am sorry about the fact, that these locomotives so freshly painted will have to be repainted again next week to make it Australian National Railways. But all these things are happening at the one time: the biggest railway project in Australia since 1912; the creation of the Australian National Railways; the acquisition of the South Australian Railways; the introduction of the Interstate Commission Bill.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a lot of us have come a long way. But I believe this will be regarded as a voyage, a trip very much to be remembered. Thank you very much for coming here today. I believe the people of Australia will remember what we've all worked together to achieve today.

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