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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.
AT THE OPENING OF BLAKENEY LODGE, TUMUT, 26 JULY 1975

IT GIVES ME VERY GREAT PLEASURE TO RETURN TO TUMUT WITH MY WIFE TO SHARE IN THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF BLAKENEY LODGE. WE HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO BE PRESENT AT THE OPENING OF A NUMBER OF OLD PEOPLE'S HOMES IN NEW SOUTH WALES IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. IN FACT, THIS IS OUR THIRD IN JUST TWO MONTHS - ST. BEDE'S AT HURSTVILLE WITH BISHOP CREMIN, OZANAM VILLA IN LISMORE WITH BISHOP SATTERTHWAITE AND NOW THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, AND THE EASIEST TO PRONOUNCE, BLAKENEY LODGE, TUMUT, WITH ARCHBISHOP CAHILL.

THE LAST TIME ARCHBISHOP CAHILL AND I SHARED SUCH AN OCCASION WAS ON ST. VALENTINE'S DAY LAST YEAR WHEN OZANAM HOUSE IN CANBERRA WAS OPENED. I BELIEVE IT IS A TRIBUTE TO HIS AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR SUCH ACCOMMODATION THAT TWO SUCH HOSTELS HAVE BEEN BUILT IN HIS DIOCESE IN LESS THAN 18 MONTHS. I REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT THE PARISH PRIEST OF TUMUT, FATHER TIERNAN, HAS HAD MORE THAN A LITTLE TO DO WITH GETTING BLAKENEY LODGE LITERALLY OFF THE GROUND: PARISH PRIESTS ARE EXPECTED TO DEVELOP SUCH TALENTS EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS. BUT FATHER TIERNAN WAS FOLLOWING IN ILLUSTRIOUS FOOTSTEPS, NONE OTHER THAN THOSE OF THE LATE MONSIGNOR BLAKENEY AFTER WHOM THE LODGE WAS NAMED.

I MUST SAY THAT, IN ITS SHORTENED FORM, THE LODGE, IT BEARS A REMARKABLE RESEMBLANCE TO MY OWN ADDRESS IN CANBERRA. AND IT'S SOBERING TO THINK THAT THAT ADDRESS COULD SO EASILY HAVE BEEN THE LODGE, TUMUT, HAD THAT FATEFUL VOTE ON THE SITING OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL GONE DIFFERENTLY BACK IN 1908.

BUT TO RETURN TO MONSIGNOR BLAKENEY - WHO WAS BORN IN TUMUT A YEAR BEFORE THAT VOTE WAS TAKEN, WHICH EXEMPTS HIM FROM ALL BLAME - IT WAS HE WHO REALISED THE NEED FOR ACCOMMODATION HERE IN HIS HOME TOWN, AND APPROACHED HIS ARCHBISHOP ON THE MATTER, OFFERING AT THE SAME TIME TO PROVIDE LAND NEXT TO HIS CHURCH, FREE OF CHARGE IN CASE HIS LORDSHIP REQUIRED ANY ADDITIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT.

THE BEST IS HISTORY, BUT VERY MUCH A COMMUNITY HISTORY, SINCE PROJECTS LIKE THIS, NATURALLY AND PROPERLY, BECOME THE CONCERN OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, A CONCERN THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS ANXIOUS TO SEE MAINTAINED. IT DOES NOT FOLLOW, AS OUR OPPONENTS ASSERT, THAT BECAUSE WE PROVIDE FUNDS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES LIKE HOUSING FOR THE AGED, THAT THEREFORE WE SEEK CONTROL OF SUCH PROGRAMS. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. IT IS IN FACT AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN ALL THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT THAT LOCAL COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED, PARTICULARLY IN THOSE PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE.

I BELIEVE THAT ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN CATHOLIC CARE FOR THE AGED, WHO HAVE HAD THE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES FOR CO-OPERATING WITH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN THE FIELD OF HOUSING FOR THE AGED, WOULD TESTIFY TO THIS.

HERE IN TUMUT, FOR INSTANCE, FOLLOWING THE FORMATION OF A MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, A PUBLIC MEETING WAS CALLED SO THAT ANYONE IN TUMUT WHO WANTED TO GET INVOLVED IN THE BLAKENEY LODGE PROJECT COULD DO JUST THAT. AND THAT HIGH LEVEL OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WILL CONTINUE BECAUSE ITS NOT ALL OVER YET. SURE, MY GOVERNMENT HAS GLADLY PROVIDED \$312,000 FOR BLAKENEY LODGE UNDER THE AGED PERSONS HOSTELS ACT - WE INCREASED THE SUBSIDY FROM \$2 TO \$1 UP TO \$4 FOR SE LATE LAST YEAR - BUT THE PEOPLE OF TUMUT HAVE RAISED SOME \$10,000 THROUGH SHEER HARDWORK AND GOODWILL. ALL THE OLD SERVICE ORGANISATIONS, APEX, ROTARY, LIONS, AND NEW ONES, AND MANY INDIVIDUALS HAVE MADE IT THEIR BUSINESS TO CONTRIBUTE. I EVEN NOTICED WEIGHT WATCHERS COMING TO THE PARTY ON THE FRONT PAGE OF LAST WEEK'S NEWSPAPER. AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THIS LEVEL OF COMMUNITY CARING SHOULD CONTINUE LONG AFTER THE BALANCE SHEETS ARE ACCEPTABLE TO FATHER TIERNAN AND BISHOP CAHILL. I KNOW THEY WILL AGREE THAT IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT THAT PLACES LIKE BLAKENEY LODGE SHOULD TAKE ROOT IN THE COMMUNITY AND BECOME ACCEPTED AS ANOTHER COMPONENT OF THE TOTAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY, NOT IN ANY WAY CUT OFF OR REMOTE.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE PEOPLE WHO COME TO LIVE HERE IN BLAKENEY LODGE SHOULD RECOGNISE THIS TOO, BECAUSE THAT FACT MAY HELP THEM TO REALISE THAT ALTHOUGH IT REPRESENTS A NEW BEGINNING FOR THEM, AND FOR THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, IT'S REALLY JUST AN EXTENSION OF THE LIFE THEY HAVE BEEN LEADING, ALBEIT IN NEW SURROUNDINGS. BUT THOSE SURROUNDINGS ARE SO WELCOMING AND COMFORTABLE THAT THE TRANSITION SHOULDN'T BE TOO DIFFICULT.

OBVIOUSLY MOST RESIDENTS WILL BE COMING TO BLAKENEY LODGE FROM AROUND TUMUT, BUT I EXPECT THAT OTHERS WHO MAY HAVE DRIFTED AWAY OVER THE YEARS WILL HAVE A YEARNING TO COME BACK, TO COME HOME TO TUMUT AS THEY GET OLDER AND TIRE OF THE RAT RACE AWAY FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY BEAUTY OF TUMUT. I HAVE A FEELING THAT MANY OLD FRIENDSHIPS WILL BE RENEWED HERE, AND THAT MANY PEOPLE WHO COME HERE WILL LITERALLY TAKE ON A NEW LEASE OF LIFE IN THEIR NEW INDEPENDENT COMFORT, THEIR NEW COMFORTABLE INDEPENDENCE.

I AM LOOKING FORWARD VERY MUCH INDEED TO MEETING A NUMBER OF THE FIRST RESIDENTS - TO - BE OF BLAKENEY LODGE, ALL BORN BEFORE THAT FEDERAL CAPITAL VOTE WAS TAKEN, ALL BORN BEFORE FEDERATION, FOR THAT MATTER. THERE'S MISS CHRISTINE MCGREGOR AND MR TED CURLL, WHOSE AGES ADD UP TO ABOUT 168 - I CAN'T BE MORE SPECIFIC WITHOUT BEING ACCUSED OF LACKING IN GALLANTRY - AND WHO WERE EACH CONNECTED WITH OLD PIONEERING FAMILIES. AND THERE IS MRS ELSIE WILLIAMS WHO, BY VIRTUE OF HER LONG SERVICE, IS DOUBTLESS VERY MUCH MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S RESIDENCE, YARRALUMLA, THAN I AM.

I EXPECT YOU ALL KNOW MY FASCINATION FOR AUSTRALIAN HISTORY. I AM QUITE SURE THAT A LITTLE LATER ON I WILL LEARN A GREAT DEAL OF HISTORY THAT HASN'T YET FOUND ITS WAY INTO THE TEXTBOOKS.

I AM ONLY SAD THAT MONSIGNOR BLAKENEY HIMSELF CAN'T BE WITH US TO SHARE THE REMINISCENCES ON THIS GREAT OCCASION. AS THE TUMUT AND ADELONG TIMES NOTED IN JANUARY LAST YEAR: "HE WAS A GREAT SON OF TUMUT, A PRODUCT OF THE LOCAL CONVENT SCHOOL AND THE TOWN AND PROVED A WORTHY SON OF HIS LOCALLY BORN MOTHER AND FATHER. HIS VERY PRESENCE DIGNIFIED ANY GATHERING AND HIS PERSONALITY LENT GRACE TO ALL PUBLIC FUNCTIONS HE ATTENDED IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY. HE WON THE ADMIRATION AND RESPECT OF ALL THOSE WHO SAW HIM GROW FROM BOYHOOD TO THE HIGH OFFICE OF MONSIGNOR."

IT IS FITTING THAT HIS NAME SHOULD BE REMEMBERED HERE IN THE TUMUT HE LOVED AND THROUGH THE PROJECT THAT WAS SO DEAR TO HIS HEART. I HAVE MUCH PLEASURE IN DECLARING OPEN BLAKENEY LODGE.
