



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ADDRESS TO COMMEMORATE THE
30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

Thirty years ago Robert Menzies led the Liberal forces in this country to a memorable victory. But we sometimes forget the manner in which this victory was achieved and the odds against which it was fought. The forties were difficult times for those of our political faith. There was bitterness; there was division; there was inevitable defeat in 1941 and 1943.

Menzies said of this period, "We were destined for continued defeat. The Labor Party was in a powerful position to divide and conquer".

Those election defeats came at a critical time in Australia's history. The constant lesson of Australian politics had to be learnt; that political division equals political death. The dangers confronting Menzies were great; his task formidable.

Labor had acquired massive power in war time; the temptations for them to use it to achieve Socialist objectives in peacetime were now at hand. Menzies sensed that the values for which those in our party stood were under severe threat. He knew that if he wanted a free and vigorous Australia he would have to marshal forces and fight for it.

In 1944, at a meeting in Canberra, Menzies brought 14 organisations under the one banner with one body of ideas. He gave them a united, national perspective. He turned his attention to policies designed to free the spirit of Australian men and women. But above all he sought for the new Party, a national organisation - and he achieved it.

Yet, by 1946 the memory of division was still too close in the public's mind. The victory could not be expected until the Party unified its direction and convinced Australians of its commitment to serve the nation.

After the defeat of 1946, Menzies proclaimed, "I see the individual and his encouragement and recognition as the prime motive force for the building of a better world".

He made the triumph of individualism his goal; Socialism was his enemy. In opening his campaign for the right to lead the anti-Socialist forces into Government, Menzies' call to the Australian people in 1949, was unyielding;

"This is our year of great decision", he said.

"Are we for the Socialist state, with its subordination of the individual to the universal officialdom of government; or are we for the British faith that governments are the servants of the people?"

Menzies took the strength of his convictions to the people. He argued that if Liberals believe strongly enough in themselves, Australia will believe in Liberalism. His faith in Australians was not misplaced. Thirty years ago this day he led the Liberal Country Party to the government of this nation. This was a great honour. But the challenges and the responsibilities ahead were even greater. It was a victory which gave new life and meaning to enterprise and freedom in Australia. It released all Australians from the restrictions of war time control. Labor had shown that it could not match the peace time aspirations of all Australians. It offered opportunities for ingenuity, inventiveness, and innovation, which helped carve out periods of great prosperity.

These Liberal values carried Australia forward until the end of the sixties. We had by then been four years without Menzies. Yet in that short space of time, something had happened to the Liberal Party. Had we begun to take our electoral success for granted? Had we lost our nerve? Had our creative drive expired? Was there a public perception of division in the coalition? Had we continued to believe in our principles but failed to fight for them?

Whatever the cause, other values intruded and we allowed them to dominate the political stage. We lacked conviction, we lost direction and Labor won. People had been persuaded that Mr Whitlam was not a real Socialist, that in government he would be mild, moderate, responsible, reliable and concerned, that he would hold to the conventions of our constitution and the principles of democracy.

That the truth was otherwise was a grave reflection on us; on our lack of perception; our apathy; our absence of strength in holding to our own principles. Australians had been persuaded that it was time.

Time for what? The question was soon to be answered, but not as the nation had expected. Was it time for oppressive increases in taxation, massive escalation in government expenditure, crippling acceleration in wages? Was it time for government growth to strangle the private sector, for the economy to stagnate? Was it time for us to be shown that Labor could not afford all its grandiose plans; that Labor's big spending could not be financed from an economy crippled by Labor policies? Was it time for traditional

values to be threatened by the intrusion of government? Whether it was time or not, it happened.

In 1974, we were presented with another opportunity to prevent the damage being done by Labor. But we had forgotten earlier lessons. After the defeat of 1972 we went into opposition as two parties not as a coalition. As in 1946, we needed to persuade the people that we could manage our own affairs before we could persuade them we could manage the affairs of the nation. By 1975 there was a new urgency to arrest the drift to Socialism; to reassert our values and our willingness to fight for them. It was a struggle, in many ways, of greater dimension, than that of the forties.

People who had come to build their homes in a free nation; away from repression; those people spoke with a very real fear of what was happening. By this time, the forces of Socialism had reached the point of concentrated corrosion.

I called for a return to timeless Liberal values. I urged all Australians to recall what they had seemingly forgotten: that we must regard personal initiative, encourage investment and mobilise the imagination and resources of the Australian people.

For the last four years, Australians have shared in that conviction. We are now enjoying the hard-won successes. The Fraser/Anthony government is well-placed to take Australia through the next decade of opportunity and challenge.

Amongst the advanced nations, our economy has won genuine respect; our inflation rate is below that of many of our major trading partners; exports are increasing and massive investment projects are coming on line, or are in prospect.

Our energy reserves enable us to adjust better to the threats posed by the energy crisis.

We have created the economic environment for a great programme of national development which will be the springboard for Australia's economic growth in the '80s.

Without economic growth, Australia can never become the kind of nation that we all want. Without economic growth, we cannot as a nation create more jobs; we cannot as a nation meet our welfare responsibilities; we cannot as a nation support generously the arts and cultural activities; we cannot as a nation provide the life which maximises freedom, opportunity and achievement.

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And so, we stand at the doorway of the '80s with a significant inheritance. I am not suggesting there have not been difficulties along the way; of course there have. The '70s have been a difficult and turbulent decade. But through it all, the essential strength and conviction of the Australian people has prevailed. The durability and adaptability of our institutions has been reasserted.

Now, a new balance has developed in society between the need to conserve and the need to change. What we must conserve is what Menzies called, "the divine and valuable variations of the minds of all Australians".

This, I believe, is our richest asset. If we add to this, the spirit of enterprise that makes freedom worthwhile, then we can have every confidence that great achievements are at hand. The lesson of the '40s, and indeed the '70s, is that once we unite in vision and in purpose, significant victories are achieved.

Sometimes, in the midst of celebration, with the second largest majority since Federation, it is very difficult to remember the discipline and self-restraint which are essential to victory.

These qualities have special meaning for us. The Liberal Party is not something designed to advance our individual interests. It is not just something designed to advance our Party's interests or even those of the coalition. Its justification for existence is that its policies are designed for all Australians.

Yet these policies are an empty shell if they remain unsupported by our capacity to put them into effect. Our Party was born out of a commitment by one person, working with many other dedicated Australians, to advance the cause of freedom and individualism in Australia. This is a continuing and demanding task. It will always meet with resistance. There are those of no faith who want political power in order to use it for themselves.

There are those who believe that Canberra should dominate Australian politics; that the States should be abolished; that the powers of the Senate should be dramatically reduced. This highlights the essential difference between Liberalism and Socialism.

We want people to decide for themselves; others believe that big and powerful centralist government knows best what is right for you and me. This view is repugnant to the individuality of all Australians. The threat to our values and principles is always present. The excesses of the Whitlam years are well documented. They have been decisively rejected.

Yet, against the judgment of the Australian people, Labor only recently protested confidently that, "There was nothing revolutionary or particularly radical about the Whitlam years". So that while we celebrate an anniversary this evening, this is not the time for self-congratulation. Rather it is time for commitment and determination.

Let us not dwell on the successes of the past. That is done and finished. It is tomorrow, next week, next year and beyond where the new challenges lie. The spirit of Liberalism demands that we look forward to meet these challenges. The fight to free the spirit of men and women is constant and unending. The battlefield must never be vacated. What we can do now is to win that freedom for our time; to hand on to our children conditions in society which allow them full expression of their individualism and creative spirit.

It is through our own example that the challenges of tomorrow will be met. The spending of effort in a great cause gives life its fulfilment. Our lives have no meaning if we live just for ourselves; if we are always seeking reward for what we do; or counting the cost of our efforts.

By this attitude we diminish ourselves and our objectives. This is not the spirit of our Party or Australia's greatness. The rich endowment of our people is embodied in countless thousands of Australians, in all walks of life, who, each day, do something unselfishly with determination and courage. There is an obligation on us to demonstrate that this is our purpose.

Menzies captured this spirit in 1944. He brought with it opportunities and experiences; and the possibility of service to our nation. These we must not lightly accept or unthinkingly put aside.

We are all heirs apparent to the '80s. But this requires more than waiting in the wings; it requires an assertion of our pride in individualism, personal freedom and self-advancement. It asks from us service to Australia. Let us dedicate ourselves to these principles. For in doing this, we honour the men and women who created this Party and built a great and prosperous nation.