



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

THURSDAY, 22 JULY 1982

FAREWELL DINNER FOR SIR ZELMAN COWEN

This is a small dinner Your Excellencies to say thank you very much for what you have done for Australia over the last four to five years. Your record Sir Zelman, is Australian (inaudible). It is one in which we can all take pride.

In academic areas you were twice Vice-Chancellor, as a lawyer your writings and your publications, your biography of Sir Isaac Isaacs, the numerous papers that you have published on the law and education and national affairs stand high by any standards. There was one work that you wrote entitled "The Trial of Lady Chatterly, the Trial of Oz". I am not quite sure what it was about and I don't intend to go into it on this occasion. Well His Excellency says that he will. I sit down and this floor and forum is yours for as long as you like.

You have served Australia with great distinction in many areas, many offices and more particularly for the last four to five years as the Governor-General. Your past history and your own training has made it possible for you to take that office with a great knowledge of what is required, with a very keen understanding of the importance of the office to the central position of Australia's constitutional affairs. You have been the Queen's representative here and in many ways Sir Zelman you have followed her example. She has been through all history a unifying factor of British affairs in the Commonwealth. You have sought to be so in Australian affairs. I believe you have achieved that with very great distinction and with remarkable success.

I thank you Sir very much for what you and Lady Cowen have achieved. You have been far above the debate which takes place in the Federal Parliament, which seeks not to unify so often, but to divide and whatever you have done has been to unify Australia as one nation. You have earned the respect of everyone throughout this country. You have earned the respect of all members of Parliament. In particular I believe you have earned the respect of all the people in this room tonight because whether it is in law, the courts, Parliament, the Public Service or in the military, you have in this room the people who are the very core, of the fabric of Australian Government.

I don't know if the Earth opened up and everyone in this room fell into a great bottomless pit, there would be a few good jobs going. On the pay that you all get, I don't know that there would be too many cases, but I certainly know that the Government of Australia would be much worse off if that happened. The fact that so many people who are vastly important to the Government or the Commonwealth are here tonight is a small example of the respect that all Australians hold for you and Lady Cowen.

I was interested to know in your Press Club speech yesterday or the day before that you don't regard your officers as fat and I am delighted to know it because I never have. In many ways the constitution, the Office of the Governor-General is much more important than many Australians think or many Australians understand. That was not by some accident of history, it is not because of some powers that come from the monarch in ancient times. It comes from the deliberate act of Australia's founding fathers, the kind of constitution that they wrote and the powers of that constitution gave to the Office of the Governor-General. That imposes many important obligations upon the Office of the Governor-General, upon the person holding that office and Sir, you have fulfilled all those responsibilities with the very highest distinction.

In many ways the Governor-General is the custodian of the rights, the basic rights of all Australian people. As President of the Executive Council it is possible by what is said, but what is done by the manner of holding that office, it is good for Ministers and it will have an affect on their thinking and there is nothing wrong with that and much good in it.

The speeches you have made from one end of this country to the other you have exercised that intellectual influence on the Australian community. You have put many things into a national perspective. You have had more public engagements over a period of 4 to 5 years than any of your predecessors. You very actively sought to take the office of the Governor-General and the personality of yourself and Lady Cowen out to every corner of Australia. I know that there are many tens of thousands of Australians who are very grateful to you for that. They have had a chance to meet with you, to talk with you, to hear what you have to say and they have appreciated it greatly indeed.

You have travelled very, very widely, whether it is the Cocos Islands or the Christmas Islands or Norfolk Island or every part of Australia. I think one of your main achievements has been to bring Australians together. You I think in a very real sense undermined the parochialism, the ideological rifts that so often appear whether it is in Parliament or somewhere else. You have emphasised the real interests Australians do hold in common.

In your Australia Day Address in 1978 I think you indicated that you regard the office and your part in the Office as a symbol of the unity of all the people of Australia. You have carried that through throughout the four or five years in a very remarkable way.

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I think it is not/uncommon thing to say that somebody who has done a job as well as you have, could not have been done so well had it not been for your better half. Lady Cowen has always been with you, she has always supported you. She has always done much more than the people of Australia could have asked. She has had her own involvement in the welfare of many different groups throughout the Australian community, assisting people who are less fortunate than most of us. Lady Cowen I would like to thank you also very much for the way you have done your part of this Office.

In one way Sir, and this is not an offence, you have been a very cheap price because we got two for one and I am not prepared to say (inaudible) But you are both worth a very great deal and thank you very much.

On Australia Day in 1982 in this year you indicated in your address that Australians should concentrate their minds proudly on what it is that keeps us all together. I believe Sir, that that is one of the most important tasks in front of all of us. It is so easy to be cut up into different groups, to different parties, in different sectional or economic interests. But what you have epitomised over the years is the fact that as Australians our real interests are interests in common and you have personified that in a very real way.

You have got to remind us of it and I thank you for that. So you leave Australia in a few days time temporarily, I am sure you leave with enormous goodwill on the part of all of us. You go to look after the affairs of Oriel College Oxford and I am sure you will ease your mind and put your stamp on that college which is no stranger to you. As a result there will be many people who would never understand Australia and what we are all about. I hope to be here Sir on an occasion and able to offer you a dinner whenever it is you wish to return on an occasion such as this and welcome back the Governor-General that left us, but he came back and for whom we have a great affection and a very great regard.

So, thank you very much for what you have done for this country. You have done a great deal in many different tasks, but what you have done as Governor-General both you and Lady Cowen is something that we will always remember. It will be written in the history books, it will be written that you heal, that you unified and you filled the office with very great distinction and I ask all of you to rise and drink a toast.