



# PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
OPENING OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA - 9 MAY 1988

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Your Majesty  
Your Royal Highness  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

At a time like this each one of us will have some thoughts of the ghosts, or spirits, of the past.

At the most remote level, we are reminded by the historians and archaeologists that this region has nurtured human habitation for at least 21,000 years. The aboriginal civilisation and culture that developed from those earliest times was so quickly disrupted after the arrival of European settlers that we do not even know with precision what they meant by their word "Canberra". Certainly, one version is that it meant a meeting place. So it seems that this place, by its geography and the actions of its inhabitants has been a natural meeting place for countless generations.

But we think too of more recent spirits. We think of those in the first abode of the Parliament of the Commonwealth - the first twenty-seven years in Melbourne's Legislative Council building - so many of them the giants of the Federation conventions which gave birth to our nation.

We think then of those who over the next sixty-one years have graced what surely must be one of the more durable "temporary" Parliament Houses in the history of democracy. The names are too legion to mention. But they are certainly not for us all ghosts or spirits as the robust presence today of Whitlam, Gorton, Daly, Killen and Anthony so well testify.

I do, however, mention one who for so long dominated our long-time temporary residence. I believe the spirit of Sir Robert Menzies, whose commitment to the concept of Canberra as a truly great national capital should be respected across the political spectrum, would be smiling with approval today.

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These intimations of our mortality and the presence of the Treasurer remind us of the paradoxical truth that in life the only certainties are death and taxes.

And so it is true that just as we have looked with some wonderment at Tom Roberts' remarkable painting of the guests and members in the first Parliament in Melbourne, so future generations will look at photographs and films of today, remark on the quaintness of our style and costume, and ask - of us - "What was in their minds on that momentous occasion?"

And what will our answer be?

I hope it would be something like this:

- That we have a feeling of deep gratitude to all who are responsible for this great and imaginative building - to those who conceived and designed it, to all who by the labour of their mind and body have made it the remarkable reality it is.
- That we do feel a sense of history and indebtedness to those who have fought in war, and in peace, to ensure the survival and the enlargement of the democratic principle.
- That we understand the danger of taking for granted the continuing survival of this principle in a world where so many people have succumbed or been subjected to despots to whom the concept of a parliament of the people is anathema.
- That we therefore understand the awesome obligation that is upon us. For those in the new Parliament this will be an obligation to recognise always in the conduct of debate that whatever their views, their ideology, their Party, they are part of something bigger - an institution which must endure long after the divisive issues of the day have been fought and resolved.
- That because we know we will discharge that obligation this building will become for our nation both the forum for our differences and the instrument of our unity - a building for all Australians, a Parliament reflecting the diversity of our entire society and responding to the needs of the whole community.

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If these things are indeed in our minds today then it will be a worthy answer to that question that may be asked about us when we are all long gone.

For none of us can now foretell with any precision all the issues which will confront the Parliament of Australia in its new home in the centuries ahead.

We face rapid, dramatic change in all areas of our national life and in the wider world. The challenge of adaptation will be great, the problems often complex, the decisions difficult.

But we do know this to be true. This new meeting place, this Parliament, like the old, represents that principle of government - indeed the only principle of government - capable of meeting, and mastering, that challenge.

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