

16

29 November 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE R.G. CASEY BUILDING  
BARTON, CANBERRA**

E&EO \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much Alexander; to my other Ministerial colleagues; to Gareth Evans, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and most particularly to three former Prime Ministers - Sir John Gorton, Mr Gough Whitlam and Mr Malcolm Fraser. And as I look around the room I really am reminded that gathered here today are people who, either themselves or through their direct family connections, were influential in or shaped the Foreign Affairs and Trade policies of Australia over a very long period of time. As well as, of course, acknowledging the presence of the late Dr Evatt's daughter and the grand daughter of the late Lord Casey. I also, of course, acknowledge the presence of the daughter of Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, Mrs Heather Henderson, and her husband, Mr Peter Henderson, himself a former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I really am delighted to be here today to open this magnificent building, to say a few words about the legacy of Richard Casey to the conduct of Australian foreign policy and also a few things about the contemporary viewpoint of foreign policy.

You might ask why it is that this building should be named after Richard Gardiner - Lord Casey. One reason - the obvious one - already stated by the Foreign Minister was that he was our longest-serving foreign minister, serving in that capacity for nine years under the prime ministership of Robert Menzies from April 1951 to January 1960.

While that record length of service by itself makes Casey a very appropriate choice, there are other compelling reasons. Casey's nine years as foreign minister were only one highlight of a remarkably varied and distinguished public life which spanned almost half a century.

As well as other ministerial appointments in the Lyons and Menzies governments, Casey served as Australia's first political liaison officer in London from 1924 to 1931. Although he was not officially described as such, he was Australia's first ambassador in Washington in the second world war years, from 1940 to 1942. He was minister of state

for the Middle East in the British war cabinet from 1943 to 1944, followed by two years as Governor of Bengal. His public life culminated when he was appointed Governor-General of Australia in 1965, and if my political memory serves me correctly, he was defeated - I don't know how narrowly - by the then R G Menzies for leadership of the United Australia Party after the death of Lyons in the late 1930s.

Casey's public career was marked not just by its length and diversity. It was a career distinguished by the personal qualities and values - including a deep integrity, honour and abiding respect for others - with which Casey lived out his public duties, and by which he lived through the eighty-six years of his life.

Walter Crocker captured well the essence of Casey when he wrote of him: 'He was not an ideologist of any hue or shape. His loyalty was to the truth and to good government'.

In the past, some people questioned his Australianness. What a furphy. He gave unstinting commitment to Australia, from the time he joined the Australian Imperial Force in 1914, including his service on Gallipoli and later on the Western front.

Much of his life was spent living or travelling abroad. He had an enormous range of personal contacts - friends, colleagues, acquaintances - in Britain, the United States, Europe and Asia. He did feel a special affinity with Britain. But for all his overseas experiences and connections, Casey's home was Australia. He remained an Australian at heart wherever he was.

So it's very fitting to name this building after such an eminent and honourable Australian. And it also happens to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of his death.

The naming of the building also reminds us that both sides of politics have made major contributions over the years to Australia's international achievements. Apart from Casey himself, the contributions of Dr Evatt, Sir John McEwen, Doug Anthony, who I noticed has arrived and is sitting down at the rear of the hall, and Gareth Evans - who all served as Ministers for Trade or Foreign Affairs for over seven years - are all recognised appropriately by having areas of the building or its surroundings named after them.

We are reminded by the presence of so many former Prime Ministers here today of the role played in shaping Australia's foreign relations by both sides of Australian politics. It was under Malcolm Fraser's government, for example, of which I was a member, that Australia welcomed more Indo-Chinese refugees per capita than any other nation in the world. As Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam opened up our modern relationship with China. A relationship to be built upon in different ways by successive Prime Ministers from both sides of the political fence, and a relationship which remains as important, if not more important, to Australia today than it was in the early 1970s. John Gorton was responsible on the Australian side for the Five Power Defence Arrangements which remain an important element in the security of Malaysia and Singapore.

It is fitting, given the occupant of the building, that Casey's preoccupations and legacy as Foreign Minister mesh so well, today and into the future, with the pursuit of Australia's national interests through our foreign and trade policies.

While Casey's term as Foreign Minister was marked by many achievements, two have particular resonance in laying the groundwork for Australia's strong engagement today in the Asia-Pacific region.

The first was his leadership, to which Alexander has already referred, in building links with Asian nations.

On Casey's retirement as minister for external affairs, the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, said in tribute that Casey had 'done more than any other man to cultivate friendship with our Asian neighbours, and to improve the mutual understanding which is the true foundation of peace'.

From the outset, Casey was in no doubt, as he remarked in an August 1951 entry in his voluminous diaries that, and I quote:- 'South-east Asia is of the greatest importance to Australia'. That conviction was expressed in his energetic and productive pursuit of closer relations with the countries he called Australia's 'friends and neighbours'.

Casey's statements during his visit to Japan in 1951 were seen then and since to have marked the first real movement from enmity to close cooperation between Australia and Japan after the end of World War II. He foresaw the importance of bringing China into the international community.

Casey's was a practical approach. He established and widened his personal contacts with regional leaders. He expanded Australia's diplomatic representation in the Asia region. He promoted the humanitarian and strategic value of technical and other assistance through the Colombo Plan. He played a vital role in negotiating the SEATO treaty.

He took issue very strongly with the White Australia policy. He saw the White Australia policy, and the way in which it was implemented, as an unnecessary and offensive barrier to Australia's relations with our neighbours. He worked against it in a quiet but persistent way, helping to prepare the ground for its eventual abolition.

At the end of his term, Casey was able to reflect, with justified satisfaction, that 'Australia was accepted in South-east Asia as a country with a significant interest in the region, seeking relations of good will and cooperation and prepared to make a tangible contribution to the management of the region's problems'.

In a speech marking Casey's death, Gough Whitlam - then leader of the Opposition - said that Casey was one of the first Australian statesmen to recognise the importance of Asia to Australia. He said that Casey, and I quote:- 'had a regard, almost a love, for Asians which was free of sentimentality and rooted in a knowledge of their history and the diverse cultures of the region'.

It is on the foundation established by him that we continue to build our engagement with our neighbours and make our strong contribution to the Asia-Pacific region today.

His second achievement of enduring importance was the deepening of Australia's relations with the United States.

He was convinced that the United States - with its economic, military and technological capabilities - would be crucial to our security in that he knew would be the vastly changed strategic circumstances in post World War II specific affairs.

The ANZUS treaty was negotiated and concluded in 1951 by Percy Spender. Casey cemented the alliance, and took it forward as an active reality. He was convinced not only of its political and strategic worth to Australia, but also of its importance to the security of the region

In developing our relations with the nations of Asia and reinforcing the alliance with the United States, Casey did not lose sight of the continuing value to Australia of traditional associations with the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. His approach to Australia's foreign relations was a comprehensive and interconnected exercise. He saw the scope for Australia's relationships with individual countries to reinforce and benefit each other and to achieve Australia's regional and international goals.

I respected Casey, as a person and a politician, for his role in helping lead Australia to make its way in and adapt to a changing world. Having so recently welcomed President Clinton to Australia and participated in the APEC leaders' meeting in Manila, I am even more struck by the foresight of Casey and his legacy.

I am sure that Casey would have taken great pleasure in the President's visit. That visit was an emphatic and unambiguous demonstration of the continuing vitality of the partnership between Australia and the United States. The welcome which both President Clinton and his wife were given by the Australian people said as much as any words about the closeness and warmth of the ties between our two countries.

But the message of that visit - and the earlier steps my government took to reinvigorate the alliance at the time of the AUSMIN talks in July - was not just about the importance of our bilateral relationship and the strength of its historical and cultural roots. The message - both to the Australian and the American people and to the people of the region - was also of the contemporary relevance of our partnership, including the ANZUS alliance, in pursuing the shared future of Australia and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region.

Of course, it is only to be expected that we will have different perspectives from the United States from time to time. Each of us has our own specific national circumstances and interests. But Australia and the United States have both over-riding common interests at stake - economic, political and strategic - in working together and with other regional countries to ensure stability and continued economic growth in the Asia Pacific.

Our relationship with the United States is naturally complementary with the closeness of our relationships with the other members of the Asia-Pacific community.

Along with our links with the United States, those relationships - with Japan, Indonesia, China, and Korea, to name just a few - individually and collectively form the building blocks of Australia's engagement in the region.

During my visits in September to Indonesia and Japan, I reinforced the new Government's commitment to strengthening Australia's cooperation with these two of our most important partners.

China's success in fulfilling its potential is important to Australia, as it is to the rest of the region.

At my meeting with President Jiang Zemin in Manila, I told him that I was committed to developing further the fundamentally sound relationship between Australian and China - a commitment that I'm happy to say was reciprocated by the President. I look forward to giving further practical demonstration of that commitment when I visit China in the first half of next year.

A China fully involved in the economic and political affairs of the Asia-Pacific region would be a force for stability in our region, as well as a proper expression of the huge potential of the region's most populous nation.

I met also for the first time President Kim Young Sam. I also assured him of the priority my Government gave to our relationship with Korea which Australia's second largest export market and a very important political partner. That relationship is expanding dramatically and gaining a wider base as our people-to-people links strengthen through education and tourism.

We'll continue to work at strengthening all of our regional relationships. Each country in Asia has its own dynamics, its own characteristics, and its own importance and its own separate national characteristics.

I am confident - especially after my visits to Indonesia and Japan, the meetings in Manila with other regional leaders and my discussions with the United States President - that Australia's contribution to the region is both recognised, wanted and valued.

Our engagement with the region is as strong as it is not only because our interests require it, but because our regional partners also have an interest in our active participation.

Under the Coalition Australia will be an energetic and unreserved contributor to the region, not only by strengthening our close partnerships with other nations in the region, but also through practical support for regional prosperity and stability.

Australia has so much to offer - in our people, our distinct national identity, our natural resources, our skills, our technological innovativeness and our political and social stability.

The people from Asia who have settled in Australia have come here because of the sort of country we are. They are welcome because of the qualities with which they enrich our society, our economy and our culture. And they are an especially valued link with our neighbours in the region.

We do not need, as a nation, need to turn ourselves into something we are not in order to be confident of our place in the region. We do not have to pass tests set by others any more than we should be setting tests for others to pass.

But we do have to measure ourselves against the region in some important respects if we are to achieve the prosperity we seek. We cannot, for example, expect to benefit simply because we live cheek by jowl with the major source of the world's economic growth. We have to be competitive enough to profit from it.

The one thing we can say with certainty about the future is that the regional and global environment will continue to change rapidly. Looking back over his years as Foreign Minister, Casey himself remarked on 'the speed with which human affairs can change'.

At the APEC leaders meeting I described globalisation as perhaps the most potent economic force in the world today. An economic revolution has been wrought by free movement of capital and the rapid pace and spread of technological change.

We talk a lot about the impact of globalisation on sovereignty because of the pressures that a global economy puts on the policy-making of individual national governments.

While outside influences impinge more and more on domestic issues, it is likewise true that practically no domestic policy act in any country is without some repercussion elsewhere. And our domestic policy positions have a direct bearing on the effectiveness with which we can pursue our interests abroad.

We cannot today afford to put our domestic and foreign policies into separate and unconnected compartments. Australia's success in improving her competitiveness, its market share, its influence and standing in the region and wider world will depend in large part on the government's success in implementing its economic reform programme.

Equally, foreign and trade policies are a significant element in determining how successful we shall be in meeting the government's domestic economic objectives.

In Manila, I was very struck by the commitment of APEC leaders to maintaining the momentum of trade liberalisation and the need for that as a key ingredient for the future growth and stability of the region.

My government will do all it can to keep up that momentum. We want to see the free and open trade goal of APEC turned into reality, and - even better - with a knock-on effect to freer trade globally.

As I have said before, this is not because of any conceptual ambition or blind ideological commitment. It is because, for example, my government wants to see our agricultural exports treated more equitably so that our farm sector is not discriminated against. International trading rules at present allow practices that would not be allowed in respect of manufactures to operate to the detriment of primary producing exporting nations.

Most important, it is because my government sees the dividends the Australian people can gain in the form of faster economic growth, greater opportunities and more jobs for our younger people especially.

We need to ensure that markets are open so that we can increase our exports and the employment within Australia that those increased exports generate. For example, exports of medical and scientific equipment have more than doubled from \$300 million in 1987 to \$750 million today, creating many hundreds of highly skilled and well-paid jobs. Under our recently concluded trade agreement with Taiwan, exports of Australian-built cars will increase from zero at present to 6,000 by the time that Taiwan joins the World Trade Organisation. This has helped create many new jobs at Mitsubishi's Tonsley Park plant in South Australia.

Moreover, jobs in export industries are characterised by higher productivity and, therefore, higher wages. For instance, among small firms the wage differential is as high as 17 per cent.

In the case of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ladies and gentlemen, there is, as there should be, a fundamental continuity between my Government's objectives and those of my predecessors' especially in the priority we give to our region and APEC.

There are, however, differences of emphasis, some of which I have already alluded to in this speech.

You will be well aware of the Government's strongly held view that when it comes to foreign policy there is no requirement on Australia to choose between its history and its geography.

While we have to decide priorities in terms of allocation of resources and effort, we do not have to regard our links with countries in Asia and elsewhere as a zero-sum. While multilateral institutions play an important part - especially in dealing with issues such as proliferation and trade - we see success in achieving our objectives in them as likely to be founded on strong and well-matured relationships with our allies and friends. While committed to global free trade in the overall national interest, we are looking for practical results at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels that will yield early concrete benefits for our own business community.

One of the election promises made by the Government was to commission the first ever white paper on Foreign Affairs and Trade policy. That process is underway and, on the current timetable, the paper will be issued in March of next year. I expect the white paper to take a hard-headed approach and suggest clear strategies for pursuing Australia's national interests and achieving the Government's agenda.

Finally may I say something rather more specific about the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and those who work within that Department.

Much of the responsibility for protecting and advancing our national interests rests with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with its officers here in the R G Casey Building and in Australia's many overseas missions.

Coalition governments have always had a strong sense of the benefits of a highly professional and apolitical public service. My Government will be no exception.

Inevitably a change of government after thirteen years will prompt some uncertainties in the public service. Public service and governments naturally get used to each other over such a long period, if not in the policy sense then at least in human and operational terms.

I want to take the opportunity to say that my government looks to all of the public service, including, of course, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for fearless, objective advice. It also looks for creative and innovative advice in implementing its goals.

As society's demands change and a new government takes office with a different agenda, the public sector does need to adapt. The Government is working on reforms that aim to increase the public service's capacity to serve the Government and Australian public effectively, and the scope of the service's members to achieve greater satisfaction from their work.

Jibes are often made about public servants. But my own experience has been one of dedicated and well-qualified people with a strong sense of national responsibility, integrity and commitment to their work. I have great respect for the quality of the Australian public service. The international reputation of Australia's public service and its foreign service is deservedly very high.

The history of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is very much part of Casey's history. His connections with the Department and the various stages of its evolution go back a long way.

When he went to London in the twenties, he did so as an official of the then External Affairs Branch of the Prime Minister's Department. As a new member of Parliament in the early thirties, Casey advocated a diplomatic service for Australia separate from Britain's. As a member of that newly-established service, he was the first Australian representative in Washington. As Minister he supported the development of a professional and highly qualified department, which served him and Australia with great distinction.

If he were here with us today, Casey might well be surprised - I'm sure he would - by the size of this building, and by the size of the department which it houses. The Department's expansion since Casey's time is partly owing to the amalgamation of the separate Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1987 - a very sensible move in recognition of the linkages between those areas and their effective implementation. The planned co-location of AUSTRADE in this building is to welcomed for similar reasons.

The expansion reflects also the reality that, despite the tyranny of distance, Australia has never been isolationist and inward looking. We have always understood that our survival and prosperity depended on the world around us. As Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser commented on Casey's appreciation of the effect on Australia of events in other parts of the world. And our history as a nation built by immigrants from all over the world has reinforced that good sense.



The Department has had to continue evolving and adapting since Casey's time. The implosion of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism - by far the most profound example of the triumph of values and ideas in my life time - have precipitated a transformation of cold-war structures and strategic balances which is still being worked through.

The explosive growth of the Asian economies has brought about a second great sea change in world affairs. World economic structures are only beginning to adjust to the changes in economic relativities. Our region must cope with the consequent strategic changes over the coming decades.

Now more than ever Australia has to be an outward-looking nation, confident and proud of our own distinctive identity, our place in the region and in the world, and properly equipped to pursue our national interests at home and abroad.

It is sometimes said that advances in information technology and communication - and the ease and speed of transport - are reducing the importance of the role of foreign affairs and trade officials. There is no doubt that technology and transport have changed enormously the way in which our foreign service operates.

But my visits overseas this year, to the South Pacific Forum, to Indonesia and Japan, to Manila for the APEC meeting, have made me keenly aware of the crucial role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in conveying - in a way that is listened to and acted on - the right messages about Australia and the Australian Government's objectives and policies.

In his 1958 book 'Friends and Neighbours', Casey referred to the qualities required of diplomats then, the need to know - and I quote: 'their own country, its interests and strengths and weaknesses', to be 'well-acquainted with matters of defence and of trade' as well as international politics, and to be practised in what Casey called the 'relatively new art' of conference diplomacy and to deal with the media.

Today, Australia's international agenda is even broader and more intense than it was in Casey's time. But the basic qualities identified by him are still demanded of our diplomats today. My own experience of their professionalism and skills convinces me that Casey would agree that Australia continues to be very well served by them.

In declaring this building, which I do so with very considerable pride, I want to thank Mr Flood and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for inviting me to undertake that honour. I wish all the officers of the Department a happy and purposeful working environment. I want to reiterate the enormous value that my Government places on your professionalism, the spread of your understanding of the friends of neighbours we have all around the world. And to emphasise again as I finish that sound, competent, professional, high quality advice in the area of Foreign Affairs and Trade remains as essential as it has ever been for Australia and in a new and constantly changing world, perhaps even greater than it has ever been.

Thank you very much.