

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND  
LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY PARTY,  
MR. JOHN McEWEN,  
AT THE OPENING OF THE COUNTRY PARTY FEDERAL HEADQUARTERS,  
JOHN McEWEN HOUSE  
CANBERRA, 4TH NOVEMBER, 1968

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Mr. Chairman, Prime Minister, Mrs. Gorton, my many friends, ladies and gentlemen:

First, I thank my party for giving me the opportunity to speak to you to-day. And secondly I thank the very, very many people I see here from city and from country, from near and from very remote areas. I thank you all very much for coming to this which is for us a very important Country Party occasion. And then, Prime Minister, I thank you personally and most warmly for agreeing to come and speak to this gallery, to officially open the House for us and to give to the occasion the importance which the presence of a Prime Minister lends. And I let the audience into a secret - the Prime Minister left the Cabinet meeting to come here and when he leaves us he will return to a Cabinet meeting. So he has set aside this part of the day for us and we are very grateful.

John Gorton and I are personal friends and we are political allies. We have, I hope and believe, much in common personally. And in our political thinking and aspirations for the good of this country we have always proved to have much in common. And finding ourselves as allies - as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister - in a coalition it has not been difficult for us to work together. Differ on certain points of view? Of course. Men do. But I am never prouder as the leader of the minor section of a coalition than when I am able to say this: "When we have been in Government since 1937 when I first became a Minister, there has never been one occasion when a coalition has divided on party lines." And this is quite a remarkable thing to be able to say.

It is the living evidence of the fact that when we go into the Cabinet room we go in with our firm political convictions, but when the crunch comes each man records his attitude as he sees

it through his own eyes for the good of his country and there is no alignment of a major section overcoming a minor section.

And while, in mathematics, this is always possible to happen, I thank you, John Gorton, for giving the lead which was given previously by the man under whom I first served, the late Mr. Joe Lyons, Robert Menzies, Harold Holt, none of whom as leader of the Liberal Party ever sought to impose his will on a minority party, and it is because of this that such a good relationship has existed over the years and we have been able to act in such an harmonious, and I believe myself, in such a fruitful manner throughout.

I believe that under the leadership of John Gorton this happy and fruitful relationship and state of affairs will continue for the good of our country and the harmony of our two parties.

The occasion to-day is the opening of John McEwen House. This establishes the home of a Country Party Secretariat, a dream that I have had for many, many years. And I have supported every proposal in its dream days, every proposal in its days of action; I have supported everything about it except one thing. I oppose the name of the place and I had to be overcome on this. I know that I have been a long time on the stage and I wouldn't like to believe that people think that I have been so long on the stage that it's time to build a memorial to me. I can take a hint without that.

But turning to the serious side of it. This provides for the first time a physical home for the Country Party in the Nation's capital. Our party is a federation of State parties, as indeed our country is a federation of States. Each of our State parties has its own home in the capital cities and its own secretariat there. But we have worked in a fairly disorganised manner, as Doug Anthony explained to you, at the Federal level. And this, thanks to the work of a multitude of people, provides us with a home, a work centre, an ideas centre and I am sure that the value of this will be revealed as the years go on.

The Country Party does not occupy a tremendous space in this building. I am completely sure that as the years go on we will require and we will occupy a very much bigger space than is occupied at the present time.

So the fact that this building exists and that the Prime Minister has been able to open it to-day requires a tribute to be paid to the very many people who worked with confidence, when some lacked confidence, to bring this about.

We had important people from the rural industries and, I am delighted to say, important people from the city industries, important people from mining activities. They are here to-day. I hesitate to name names because there are so many important people who evidently have a respect for the Australian Country Party and who wanted to make a contribution to increasing its effectiveness by giving it a home.

But it's not only important people. It's not only the substantial contributions they gave which made to-day possible. There has been an enormous volume of contribution at a small level, by farmers, rich farmers who have made their contribution, struggling farmers have made their contribution, in money, a calf, a bag of wheat, a bale of wool, children raising a calf, a grazier taking 100 calves or 200 calves separately donated and grazing them until they were grown or half-grown cattle. This is the kind of source from which the totality of the money needed has come from.

First of all the project required an air of respectability and I now break the rule of naming names to say publicly "Thank you, Sir John Crawford. Thank you for lending your name and your great public stature to the chairmanship of the Appeal Committee." This has been something tremendously important to our ultimate success.

With Sir John Crawford has worked a national committee representative of all the States. And as great committees don't do all the dog work, that national committee has had an executive committee of its own. Without naming names, I thank them for the work they have done. But it's one thing to have people willing to work on a wide base. It's another thing to have them co-ordinated, to see that the work is orderly. So that when the work flags that the pressure is kept on. And here I am quite unabashed in naming the name of one man. Those who know what has been going on would resent it if I did not name him. That man is Mr. Mac Holten. With all the goodwill in the world which has existed, I don't believe for a second that we would be here to-day, opening this building, if it were not for the efforts of Mac Holten. Thank you very much.

There has been a background to all this, of course. It is no flash in the pan. There has been a wide recognition of the existence and I think of the worth of the Country Party over the years and so we have both the total body corporate of the Country Party in all the States to-day that exists to be seen and is respected, and behind that more than 50 years of record of the many, many Country Party people who have lent their names and their efforts in a small and unnoticed manner and in a great and public manner to the forwarding of the things that the Country Party stands for.

It's a fact, a trite truism, that politicians get the limelight; whether for good or evil, they get the limelight. But behind the politicians, in every political party, you will find there is a tremendous mass of loyal, believing people, who stand behind them and whose loyalty and whose confidence gives confidence and a willingness to carry on to the politicians. It is in the days when we are under attack, either as political individuals or as political parties; the day when we are unpopular, when it is the knowledge that we have behind us the believing confidence of thousands of people that gives us the strength to carry on.

Now, so much talking about the Country Party as an organism. But what is it all about? What is it for? Why does it exist? And the answer is simple. We have our own views and our own beliefs and we want to make our contribution to governing a nation. We want to make our contribution to seeing that our nation is a good nation; that it is a self-respecting nation at home and that it is a respected nation when viewed by overseas people. We want to make our contribution to developing a community with high standards of living, a community with high standards of efficiency in its industrial and other activities. We want to make our contribution to developing a community which has high cultural standards. These are things all to be envied, all to be aspired to, but they would be poor things if we did not have one other great aspiration: and that is to see that whatever is done within this country to make it a better and a great country, better educated and a healthier country, to see that there is equal opportunity for all Australians to share in the good things of this nation.

These are the things that we stand for as a political party and hope that we make our contribution. We live under great pressures, all politicians, all political parties do. We start out as young people with things that we believe ought to be done and we're anxious to get in, either in Parliament or in the machine of the organisation, anxious to get in and try to help bring about the things that we believe should be brought about. This is a good thing. But we live then under this bright glare of publicity and criticism and it is very easy to drift from concentrating your thoughts upon the good things that you want to do and allow your thoughts to wander onto the popular things that you might do. And you can't live in politics without your modicum of popularity.

Here there can be -- and I say as one a long time in political life -- there can be a conflict of interests between the things that you want to do and the things that would be popular to do, or the things that would be popular to refrain from doing. And how do you reconcile these two things? Well, I've tried to make my contribution in my day of leadership, at various levels in the Country Party, by preaching a fairly simple doctrine, and that is that if we can have, over and above what we call our policy points, a total political philosophy that deals with the kind of nation we want to build, that deals with the kind of people that we want to see occupying our country, if we have a philosophy, then it is fairly simple if you never allow that to drift out of your mind to ensure that every act of legislation that you're involved in, every act of administration that you're involved in, every dream or aspiration that you have; if you can see that all of these things in their turn combine to fit in with this proper and good political philosophy, then you'll be on a good straight course and have no need to fear wandering from it. If you see that you've got one great, bright star in the distance and you're steering towards that all your time.

I believe that this has helped us to steer a steady line. For my party -- and I speak without contrast to any others -- has been fortunate. I speak to you in 1968. Sir Earle Page, as leader of the party, became Deputy Prime Minister in 1922 and I am the third leader of the party since then. This is a picture of internal stability

in the party. We have set a steady course. We have had no schisms in the party to tear it to pieces. And Sir Earle Page left behind on the statute books and in the material and fabric of this country something greater than a McEwen House. He left the financial agreement between the Commonwealth and the States. That was his brainchild. The very cornerstone upon which governmental and financial stability was built. And whether you turn towards roads, or health, or banking, you will find his imprint there. It is too recent to remind you what Sir Arthur Fadden has left in the field of sound finance and sound banking and banking innovation. But these are things we are proud to remember from our past. Doug Anthony has spoken to you to-day and we could put up other fellows who, Doug Anthony wouldn't mind me saying, are comparable to himself and here is the evidence that you need have no fear of the future leadership of this party.

We have never sought to run alone. We have seen ourselves always as a party planning and destined to run in double harness with our political blood brothers, the Liberal Party. There is this long record of a successful partnership between the Country Party and the Liberal Party - a partnership that has its roots in a common political philosophy, a partnership which has its operation in coalition Governments and a partnership which has a cap on it when we are good personal friends, each respecting the other, as is the case between John Gorton and myself to-day. Just as we have the objective of living in partnership with our Liberal colleagues, so we have tried to develop a policy of living in partnership between Government and industry.

When I first came into politics in the '30s, if there was anything that you wanted the Government to do, or anything you didn't want the Government to do, there was only one way you could go about it - one modus operandi - to flog the Government, to threaten the Government, to try to bully the Government into doing or not doing, according to how your will went.

This isn't really a good pattern of relations and it isn't a good way for human beings to live with each other. I believe in the life of the Menzies, Holt and Gorton Governments there has been a complete transformation between industry and Government in which each has learnt to respect the other; in which

each has learnt to trust the other; in which each has learnt that it can learn something from the other. Here is a happier relationship on which to carry on your basis of government.

So we will endeavour in the future as in the past to carry on the period of stable government in this country - to hope, and with high confidence, believe, that the fabulous growth in riches and population, the growth at every level in this country over the past almost 20 years of Liberal-Country Party government, can be continued and even bettered and accelerated.

This is where we go. And to make our contribution to us, those of you who are here to-day represent the many, many more people who have made their contribution to giving us a home to work in, a place to research in, a place to come and think, a place to come and plan; and this is for me, and indeed for my party, a day of political necessity come true.

Thanks, all of you who have come to this function and thanks also to that wider audience who have contributed towards enabling it to come through. And thank you, John Gorton, very much for coming here to-day.