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SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN, AT JAYCEES NATIONAL CONVENTION.
BUNDABERG. 18.10.74.

Thank you very much for asking me to be with you tonight and to speak to you.

To do so I have today been in or over four capital cities and have crossed three State borders. I have travelled from Adelaide's mediteranean climate, to Melbourne's temperate climate, through Sydney's semi-tropical climate to your sub-tropical climate. But this, in the Australian context, is an unremarkable statement. Journeying between capitals and crossing State boundaries is something that thousands of Australians do every day with - to adopt a phrase - a minimum of fuss.

But it provides, immediately, an illustration of what I want to speak about tonight: national unity and national diversity.

Australia's national unity is the product of its national diversity. I believe we must nurture our diversity if we are to achieve the kind of civilised dynamism which, I think, most Australians want.

We are one people spread across an enormous country. Our geography is diverse. It ranges from tropical rain forest, to desert, to lush grassland, to temperate rain forest, to light woodland and so on. Our climate is diverse ranging from the equivalent of Singapore's to that of the Tyrol.

But, above all, we are a diverse and cosmopolitan people.

For a start, from the moment of European settlement, we became in effect a multiracial society. And to the original British stock, (itself diverse) have been added the peoples of every European country and many of those of Asia.

Nor is this a recent development. It is true, of course, that the post-war period saw a massive influx of European - and especially Italian, Dutch, Greek and Yugoslav - migration. But this was a continuation of an established pattern.

Another ready illustration that comes to mind is that the Premier of this State is directly descended from Danish stock (that is, from a nation famous for theologians, good design and, dare I, in Queensland, note its sexually explicit literature. I myself am descended from Cornish migrants - a people noted for their sturdy acceptance of hard work - and their stubbornness.

In short, if then there is such a thing as a discernably Australian character it is crypto-Anglo-Saxon-Greco-Italianate-Slavic-Aboriginal.

Our political and economic history, too, has been marked by diversity, the inevitable conflicts of that diversity, and by its opposing tendencies towards unity.

Quite by chance, the somewhat arbitrary borders between the original colonies, and later States and Territories, were established on what were, and in most cases are, natural boundaries, such as rivers and deserts or areas of sparse settlement.

They are for the most part sensible. That is not to say that we should today necessarily regard them as inviolate. Nor to say that there have not been some distinctly curious anomalies. In fact, for years there was a several miles wide no-man's land between South Australia and Victoria because of surveyors' confusion. In the nature of these things, lawyers were kept in gainful employment for years and the case wound up in the Privy Council.

But the very existence of these boundaries, imposing as they did, varying patterns of settlement and colonial development led to each of the colonies, now the States, developing a distinctive character, its own social flavour.

This was reinforced by constitutional development. Each colony was invested with constitutional integrity by the imperial parliament. Each established self-government with its own legislature.

Self-government gave each of the colonies an idea of individuation, of uniqueness that, wedded with the glittering idea of English-speaking Empire, determined the course of Australian history, the nature of our Federation, the friendly rivalries of our cities and the endless wrangles over State-Federal rights which still continue as an inevitable concomitant of Federalism.

Accordingly, the federal structure agreed by the representatives of each of the colonies during the series of conventions which hammered out the constitution was that of co-equal governments, parliaments and judiciaries.

The powers of the central government were defined. All other powers were left with the States.

It was a solution which suited the nature of settlement and the temperament of the Australian people of the time. Their cherished individuality was protected along with, in many respects, their idea of unique self-importance.

And this basic politico-historic structure established a pattern of social organisation which was, and is, reflected at all levels of public organisation - in business, cultural and social activity. Organisations such as chambers of commerce, trade unions, charitable bodies and the like commonly have federal structures which mirror the nature of our Federal governmental system.

The result is that the diversity which has always been a pronounced feature of Australian society is constantly reinforced and even - at times - strengthened.

I believe we have gained much from this process.

It is true it impedes efficiency. But efficiency is not - should not and cannot be - the major criterion in the organisation of society. Totalitarian governments are proud of efficiency - in the sense that the trains run on time and order prevails, both in the streets and the labour camps.

In fact, Australia may shortly discover that rather than having an interestingly inefficient and antiquated system, it has one of a kind which many countries are seeking to establish.

Around the world today in a score of countries people are grappling with the problem of making government properly responsive to the needs of citizens. Britain has a fine central administration. But M.P.'s can wait literally for months trying to ask a question affecting their constituents. And one of the most significant political developments in the United Kingdom in recent years has been the emergence of Welsh and Scottish nationalism (leaving aside the appalling tragedy of Northern Ireland) with their demands for regional governments.

regional government. This is just one instance. There are many others, both in the west and the east. The proper business of government as we approach the end of the 20th century requires by the very nature of new skills and philosophies an ever increasing involvement with the people for whom it should be working.

Accordingly, I believe it is perfectly proper that within Australia there should be creative rivalries and regional tensions; they are essential to the health of this country.

They would exist anyway, regardless of the formal structure of Government. The Federal system has provided means to accommodate them.

Now I am very well aware that what I am saying is open to misinterpretation.

Our political opponents make Federalism an article of faith and wildly accuse the Labor Party of rampant centralism. What they want is the fossilisation of the status quo.

I don't.

I think the present system has served Australia well. I think, it is, in a number of very important ways, outmoded and archaic. I would like to see it overhauled. I believe the proposals of the Labor Party for an integrated system of central, regional and local government provides a solution.

But I also recognise that the achievement of constitutional change of this order will be both immensely difficult and time consuming to accomplish.

The record and recent experience of referenda proposals for quite minor constitutional change demonstrate this. And the initial meeting of the Constitutional Convention - soon to be reconvened - gave little reason for hope of speedy reform.

And, of equal importance, I do not for a moment deny the right of the national Government to protect the national interest and to set national priorities.

I believe it is right and essential for the leader of a State or Regional (call it what you will) Government relentlessly to pursue the interests of those he or she represents.

But I also believe that there are in a Federal system two proper areas of responsibility - one is over-ridingly national, the other is detailed and local.

If I may give two examples of relevance to Queensland.

The Great Barrier Reef is national. It is a world treasure. It is unique and vulnerable.

If action by a State put it in jeopardy, then the National Government, upholding the national interest, must act to ensure its survival.

The Aboriginal people of this country have been much wronged. Belatedly, we have now recognised this. As a people we have accepted a national responsibility to provide the assistance they want, and have accepted their right as a people to guide their own destiny.

Any attempt then, by State or local authorities, to disrupt or deny such a pressing and essential programme must properly be resisted by all lawful means by a Government charged with national responsibilities.

What I am saying, then, is that diversity in both a national and governmental context is wholly admirable. We as a people have prospered and maintained a stable society because of our diversity not despite it.

Our present system creates inevitable tensions. All Federal systems do. But a centralism in which the bureaucrat is more representative of the Government than the local M.P. is more tension-ridden.

In this context it is important that people should feel that decisions which vitally affect them are taken close to home, where they can exercise influence, rather than thousands of miles away. The efficiency of Governments, and more importantly, their responsiveness to citizen's needs varies in inverse proportion to the distance of bureaucrats from the governed.

Unqualified centralism would weaken democracy in Australia.

That is why it has been rejected by all major parties in Australia.

For the truth is that Australians encourage and delight in the non-conformity of their States whether it be in the achievement of better laws, cities, artists or sportsmen.

It is a responsive system, but not an ideal one. Yet out of the tensions it creates, out of the compromises it achieves, the shape of Australian democracy is rendered increasingly human.

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