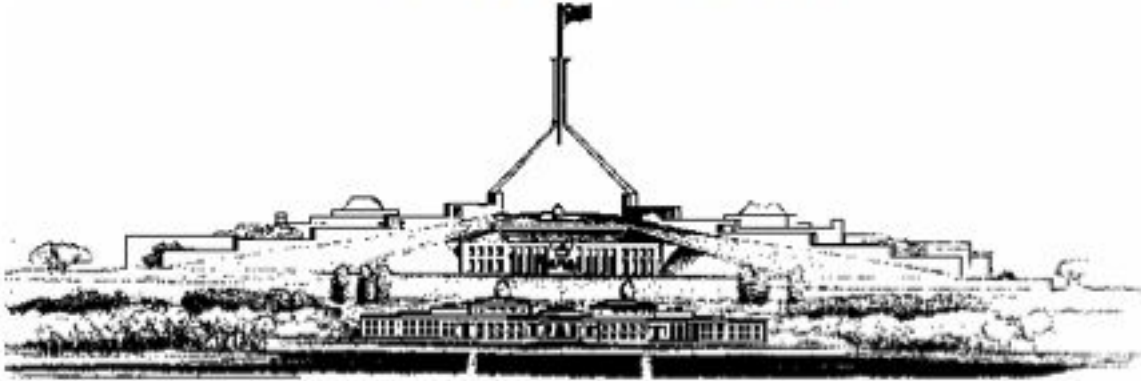COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Liberal Party

SPEECH

Wednesday, 27 May 2009

SPEECH

Date	Wednesday, 27 May 2009	**Source**	House
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Questioner		**Responder**	
Speaker	Costello, Peter, MP	**Question No.**	

Mr COSTELLO (Higgins) (7.30 pm)—I would not want this day to pass without commemorating in the House an event which occurred in this chamber on 27 May 1909—100 years ago. It was on that day that the member for Ballarat and two-time Prime Minister Alfred Deakin stood in the House and announced that he had become the Leader of the Opposition in place of Joseph Cook, the Leader of the Free Trade Party. It was the arrival of the 'Fusion' between the Liberal Protectionists and the Free Traders in this parliament and, indeed, the birth of the Liberal Party—and I am indebted to Senator Brandis for reminding me that this is the centenary of that great event.

The fusion of the two political parties—the Protectionists and the Free Traders—led to the defeat of Andrew Fisher's Labor government and the return of Alfred Deakin to the prime ministership for a third time. There had been many 'liberal' parties using the name before that time, going back to the colonial period. Henry Parkes, in New South Wales, had used the name 'Liberal'; Griffith, of Queensland, had used the name 'Liberal'; and in Victoria many different associations had at different times also used the name. But when the Commonwealth parliament was assembled, the defining economic issue which split the parliament was the tariff. The political associations took their identity from the position they assumed in relation to the tariff. On the one side were those who believed in protection and on the other side were those who believed in free trade. The Protectionists were stronger in Victoria and the Free Traders were stronger in New South Wales.

With the rise of the fledgling Labor Party the parliament split three ways. Alfred Deakin famously remarked that there were 'three Xis' playing the cricket match in the early Commonwealth parliament. It was a period of considerable instability. But the Fusion of 1909 established the two-party system here in Australia. The *Parliamentary Handbook* records Deakin's third government as 'Protectionist-Free Trade-Tariff Reform', but in fact Deakin had launched a platform for the new Liberal Party on 26 May 1909. The Liberal Party went into opposition in 1910. It was not returned to government until 1913,

and it was Joseph Cook who had the honour of being described as the first Liberal Prime Minister.

The First World War and the Great Depression led to reorganisations of Australian political parties and the names 'Nationalist Party' and 'United Australia Party' were used. When Robert Menzies reorganised the non-Labor political forces in the early 1940s, he consciously chose the name 'Liberal Party'— reaching back to Alfred Deakin and coming out of Fusion in 1909—for the party he led successfully into government in 1949.

The Fusion brought together Protectionists and Free Traders, and there have always been free trade and protectionist tendencies inside the Liberal Party. It brought together supporters of arbitration and opponents of arbitration. It brought together liberals and conservatives. It is almost trite these days to say that the Liberal Party is 'a broad church'. Very few people know that the Liberal Party is in fact the fusion of two political traditions which were brought together under the leadership of Alfred Deakin and announced in this parliament 100 years ago today. The Liberal Party ought to take great pride in that event, which gave birth to one of the great political traditions in Australia—and probably the most successful political tradition in Australian history. Under the leadership of, first, Menzies and then successive leaders, the Liberal Party in office has made an enormous contribution to the future of our country.