

OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH

Derek E. Homewood\*

Mr President, Ladies & Gentlemen

I am very pleased to be here. I shall clip through my opening address as we have lost a bit of time. I know you have a very heavy programme, and I think you are going to get more out of it by listening to your colleagues' discussions rather than a long opening ceremony. I appreciate the invitation to open your seminar. As somebody said, it is most timely. I am quite amazed to see the number of people here, I think it is excellent and looking through those who are attending there is a wide diversity of interest.

I will start by saying that it is always wise to read your speech notes right through. There was an American politician who rose to heights on the basis of brilliant speeches written by one of his speech writers. He rose through the ranks of his political party and eventually reached a very senior position in Government and became Secretary of State. All the time he had speech after speech coming from this poor speech writer, and I say poor speech

\* Mr Homewood is the Secretary of Transport, Ministry of Transport Head Office, Wellington.

writer because this politician was pretty brutal. He gave no thanks and no recognition to the speech writer. He was very critical of him, kicked him in the butt more often than not, but this fellow was pretty loyal. Eventually one day the Secretary of State stood up before the United Nations and he took his first page and he told them how pleased he was to be before this great gathering of the diversity of Nations etc. He went on to say "I am going to deal with one of the most important problems facing us today, the future of mankind and I want to make four points". He turned over onto the next page and said "you're on your own from now on you big creep". Well I'm only a little creep but I still read through my speech notes.

May I say to begin with that the other thing I thought about was, it is pretty unwise to talk about things you people are expert in. Instead I'll talk about the things I'm a bit expert in and that is the Ministry of Transport. I have only been there a year but I'm now an expert. I'm also interested in economics and I've been around that a few years longer. I think that the message I would like to give you, which I think you are already aware anyway, those of you who are working in the private sector particularly, but even those of you who work in the public sector, that we have changed conditions today. We have more rapid change occurring than for a very long in New Zealand's history. We are in a situation that you are aware of perhaps more than others where the economic pressures are on us in N.Z. We have for a long period of time tried to adjust at a relatively

slow pace and the Government of the day says that is too slow. We are in danger of going down the chute if we continue with the kind of steady adjustment we have had since the early 1970's. Now you may agree or disagree with that prognostication, but the leaders of the Government believe that we now need to move much more rapidly. The Transport Industry is already changing, land transport has through deregulation; and that means that companies have to adjust to a new environment, and that, I believe, puts increased pressure, increased stimulation if you like, into those of you who are concerned with the engineering side of the road transport industry. Certainly it also doesn't stop there. It isn't the private sector where the adjustments have solely to be made, it is also very important in the public sector too.

Now we have a Government which is also telling public servants that we have to embark on improved management practices. We have to use the resources available to us in the best possible way and that is a general economic prescription for N.Z. We are not going to get anywhere if we continue to do the same old things to make a little bit of adjustment here and a little bit of adjustment there. We have to rethink what we are doing and that applies in the public sector as well as the private. Because, in the public sector we are using a very large proportion of the resources available today. So in the Ministry of Transport, we are looking very carefully at what we are doing, getting into corporate planning, call it what you like, management by objectives, but we are looking at ourselves and considering, can

we do things better, should we be doing certain things and generally trying to reach a better standard of excellence than we have in the past. We can always make improvements. The other thing we have to look at, it goes beyond the Ministry, that's our use of resources from an economic point of view. But we also, in my view, have to look very carefully at the kind of regulations that we have to see what economic effects that have in turn. Because we can lay down regulations from a safety point of view or make sure that an industry operates within a certain framework, but if we are not careful, we can in fact severely effect the ability of that industry to improve its economic efficiency. So in the Ministry we have to start to broaden our vision and look further than just the question of the technical aspects and the safety aspects. Safety aspect is very important let me not suggest that we dilute that in any way whatsoever, but I believe that we can review, revise, update regulations and in fact improve the safety aspects and improve the economic implications of those regulations at the same time. Now if you take an extreme example of what I am talking about we could reduce the death toll on the roads by having a little person walking in front of every vehicle with a little red flat. That would certainly have a good effect on road safety. But it would have a very dramatic effect on the economics of our road transport system and so you have to in fact balance things up. But, if we take as an example a topic which is very relevant at the present time and that is this question of proposals by the Road Transport Association, that there be changes to the all up weight maximum

weight allowable for vehicle and changes in the dimensions. That I believe, is something which is very important, and has obvious important implications for the industry because it does allow us to re-think our regulations, to take into account changing technology, to take into account the economic pressures on the industry, and at the same time to improve the safety aspects. I think we can achieve those three objectives.

The question of the pace and change of technology is something that we in the Ministry have to recognise. I am sure we do in many respects, but we are living in a world in which change is occurring and it is forced on us whether we like it or not. That change in the community sometimes is expressed as a fear, the effect on employment, the effect on the way people live, but it doesn't have to be that way. If we can in fact grab hold of progressive technology and use it to our advantage then we are going to get a benefit in the total community and not just for some of those who are concerned about improving their own particular back yard. I think that the importance of the work you are doing has to be recognised, and I think that the willingness to come together and to put on a seminar of this nature is a great credit to you.

I understand that the financial resources of your Institute are really based on individuals, rather than large organisations putting in sums of money as they do in say some of the Industry associations and I think that you are to be congratulated on your

willingness not only to make that financial contribution so that you can come together, but also the work that has been done in helping in the development of codes and some of the codes you have in fact developed yourselves. There is a lot of time and a lot of resources invested in those, but I would hope that there will be a return for you from that investment. It may be pretty tough at the time. I have problems in the Ministry on occasions when we have to allow our people to go on training sessions or to do other work which is not directly related to the day to day work. The controlling officers, quite naturally, say that I am losing a part of the resources I have in order to carry out the kind of responsibilities and functions that I have to supply and meet. But, we also have to see some of these activities as an investment for the future. It is pretty hard at the time, but the benefits will come further on in time.

Mr President, I really don't want to go on much longer because I am very well aware that we had a slight technical hitch at the beginning so we lost a few minutes, and on the other hand I don't want to short change you, I mean if I am going to stand up here and open your conference you obviously want me to say something. Well I have just about said it. It is an economic message to you that a lot of you are technical people engineers, and you will have your heads down or your butts up working away at the technical aspects. Let me say to you that as a member of the public, that you also are fulfilling a very important function more generally because to the extent that you can develop or

adapt or become familiar with advancing technology and apply that in N.Z. then you are making an important contribution to the kind of progress we are looking for. We are going to go through difficult times over the next 18 months to two years and it may be even longer than that, but if we are to make the kind of progress we want, if we are going to be able to set aside resources for undertaking more research then we have to first generate sufficient economic wealth, and we can only do that by people like yourselves coming together in these kinds of seminars and also being willing to spend your time trying to get together codes of practice, or joining with the Ministry, other Government Departments, and with members of other industries to see if we cannot improve the kind of approach that we have to land transport. One area that I am interested in, and I hope that in my time as Secretary for Transport, is to see if some of us can get together and develop a co-ordinated and larger research resource in the transport sector. I haven't looked at it as yet because I have had other things on my mind, but over the next year I would like to get round and talk to your Institute and to others to see what needs to be done and should be done. I believe in the transport sector there has been a lack of thought given in a general way to the kind of research resource, research facility, the sector as a whole, and I am not just thinking of land transport, really needs. We are developing some of it in the Ministry. We already have a research section in our road transport division. We are building a research resource into our economics division, but what we will be doing will be a little

drop in the bucket and if we do it on our own then I think we are only going to be partially effective. The Road Transport Association apparently is also developing a resource themselves with a little research centre and we, I believe, have to get together amongst each other, co-ordinate and co-operate to get a clearer idea of what kind of research opportunities we should be following. I am not suggesting that, in little old N.Z. with our limited resources, we are suddenly going to burst into advancing the frontiers of technology in the transport area. A lot of our work in the research area in my view is looking to see what is available from overseas, adapting that to our N.Z. needs. In the course of that, we will make our own contribution. Each of us can remember some of the projects which N.Z. has come forward with, which haven't existed elsewhere in the world. But the real drive has got to be to find out what is available from overseas, what is happening overseas, what is happening even within N.Z. and bring it together and see how we can further it.

In that regard I am very pleased to see that you have invited two overseas speakers, Bob Ervin and Dr. Peter Sweatman, who I met very briefly on Monday. From what I have heard out of that Monday meeting you are going to find it very valuable to have these two people talking to you. They have a tremendous knowledge that they can call on and I think you are going to find that very satisfying.

Mr President, it is now my pleasure to open this conference and I



wish you all an exciting, interesting and hard working conference. I shall think of you tomorrow morning at 6.30 having your breakfast. Unfortunately I have to leave after about an hour so I can only sit and listen for a short while.