

NUCLEAR RESEARCH FOUNDATION DINNER
SYDNEY, 23rd MARCH, 1962

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Mr. Chairman, Chancellor, Mr. Renshaw and gentlemen:

This is really an anti-climax. Here am I a simple soul, dealing with the better part of £2,000m. a year and every time the expenditure of the Government goes up our Lordships of the Press say how disgraceful it is; and every time the Revenue goes up they say how wicked this is; and I've been listening now to Professor Messel who positively secures merit, not only in your mind, but in the mind of one of the masters of the Press, by being able to say that he has increased the expenditure 20 times. (Laughter) Parkinson's Law becomes respectable tonight! (Laughter) Even the Vice-Chancellor, my old friend, Stephen Roberts, I thought played his cards very badly: he explained that he was going to blackmail somebody, but he at once disclosed the means by which he was going to blackmail him which, if I may say so to him, was a mistake. A competent blackmailer never puts all the cards on the table. (Laughter)

And here is Messel being positively applauded by you for spending more money than he has. (Laughter) And when he wants you to make up the deficiency, does he do what poor wretched creatures like Governments have to do, and say, "Well we must raise your taxes a little"? Not at all. He just says to you, "Now, make it a pleasure, make it a privilege, give me another £150,000 and I'll settle for it". All I can say is that when I go back to Canberra on Monday I'm not only going to send for the Treasurer, but I'm going to send for the Commissioner of Taxation. (Laughter) And I'm going to say, "We've missed something." (Laughter) "When the assessments go out, add a little note in red ink, 'If you feel moved to give us another £50,000 don't hesitate'". (Laughter) And, of course, I don't want to be too cynical but I don't think the response would be all that magnificent.

Still this is a very interesting experience for me, because I have a simple job, a sort of anti-climactic job. I just propose the health of the University of Sydney. I think it is a remarkable University because although I have a Degree from my own University which I won't mention - down there somewhere - for which I had to work and sweat, I have been given a Degree in the University of Sydney unearned, and, so far as I remember, unpaid for. (Laughter) Therefore, as a graduate of the Sydney University, *causa honoris*, it is my task to propose the toast of the University which has attracted to its numbers the greatest collector of revenue, voluntary revenue, in the history of Australia. (Applause)

This, of course, all puzzles me very much, very much indeed. I wouldn't want to talk about politics because as you know I'm now in a state of almost ineffable bliss at Canberra, (Laughter) but this throws a new light on Sydney where up to now I have always been in the habit of being told by my "friends" that there is much to be said for me - but the taxes ought to be lower. And here you are, you come along at vast expense to yourselves and you listen to a man putting the hard word on you; and all the evidence is that he has put the hard word not only on you but on people all round the world and that you pay and like it. Now I'm going back to Canberra to say to my Victorian colleagues "Don't be faint-hearted. Make it a pleasure, and they'll pay". Do you understand that? I think that's something.

However, my job tonight is not to marvel at what has been done, but to say something about the University of Sydney, the oldest University in Australia. This University, the first in Australia, has seen its children, its nephews, its derivatives in one way or another, this or that side of the blanket, spreading all round Australia. And I happen to be here not simply because I am Prime Minister - because that, as you have reminded me of late, is a somewhat precarious post. (Laughter) I am here as one who, if he's given time to look back on his life - whether that's a good thing or a bad thing I wouldn't quite know - they say that when a man is drowning the whole of his past life comes before him - there's no first hand evidence of this (Laughter) - nor have I ever thought it a very happy way to die - I don't want the whole of my past life to come before me (Laughter) - as one who would like to think, when I am ultimately relieved, with somewhat bogus expressions of gratitude, of the tasks that I now pursue, that I could look back and say "What is the thing in your public life that has given you the most pleasure?" And my answer would be clear and unambiguous. I would like to remember that it has been my singular fortune to be somebody who, with the complete backing of his Government has done something to begin a new era for the Universities of Australia. (Applause)

This is one of those things that satisfies the mind and will, I hope, satisfy the memory. If one speaks in that way, if one thinks in that way, then it is, of course, completely clear that as one looks over the University field, the whole field, now so rapidly expanding, now reaching out to cover hundreds of thousands where it once covered thousands, one must always come back to the University of Sydney, the first University.

This is a tremendous privilege for people to belong to the first University, well over 100 years old. You look back on the people who started it; you look back on the state of Australia when they started it; you look back on the way in which their friends no doubt said to them, "But how crazy can you be? You want to start a University? We're a mere colony. We're a handful of people". But they started it. They laid its foundations. And if they could now come up from the tomb and look at what has happened in the field of Universities in Australia they would know that they built better than they knew; they would feel a great pride in what has happened in their country, then a new country, in some ways a crude country, but a country in which they were determined to sow seeds that would grow and flourish and ultimately do something for a vast section of the people of a future great nation. This, I think, is a tremendous privilege for the University of Sydney.

Of course there are other Universities. I have made a modest and glancing reference to the University of Melbourne. There are, I'm credibly informed by the Chairman of the Universities Commission, Universities in other places which have their demands, which have their ambitions, which have their function to perform. We are now living in a period of time in which we not only talk about what we can do for the old Universities, but about what we can do to create new ones, about what we can do to establish a varied, and perhaps complex system of tertiary education in Australia which will all serve to make this country the great country that we know, in our hearts, it is and is bound to be.

But tonight I'm going back to the origin. There is an old Latin maxim which, for the benefit of those educated at the Sydney Grammar School I will translate into English (Laughter): "It is better to seek the fountainheads than to divide up the little streams". It is a good thing that we should go back to the fountainheads.

But it was merely a graphic way of putting this: that that was a time, even in my young manhood, when the University was something apart, a home of privilege, dealing with matters not to be understood by ordinary people; and that the rest of the world might go on ignoring it with great satisfaction, and, indeed, with some advantage. Today, thanks to the fact that the Universities have injected themselves into the public life of the country, into the social life of the country, and thanks to the fact that scores and hundreds, and perhaps for all I know, thousands of practical men of affairs have made it their business to see what goes on in a University, to help it, and to influence it, that old, false dichotomy has disappeared. We no longer say, "Ah, yes, University men and ordinary decent blokes, different compartments!" No. All that has gone, and it is a good thing that it has gone.

The fact that it has gone is not, if you will allow me to say so, due to the unassisted genius of the business man; it is, to a very formidable extent due to the new and practical and enthusiastic approach of the people who are in, and of, the Universities themselves.

This, I think, is a great period to live in. I would like to live, and I won't, for enough years to see some of the fruits of this. But I believe that if one could, by a mere wave of the hand, or even by an Order in Council, arrange that one should live for another 40 years - not in office, don't you worry (Laughter) - and just retain enough wit and enough memory and enough historic imagination to appreciate the picture, one would find in this wonderful country of ours by the turn of the century a community which, because the Universities and the public had been married and had had issue, was making a contribution to life and to living, a splendid example in the world, rivalling, in the eyes of the classicist, the contribution that was made by ancient Greece.

All this takes me back to where I began because there is a sort of "folie circulaire" about politicians for - you may not have noticed - we end where we began. If I may end where I began I would like to say that this brings me back to the University of Sydney, the father University of Australia, to use the modern jargon, "the father image" of the Universities of Australia. And it is one of my pleasant satisfactions that when I have sat down, as I'm about to in a minute and a half, you will hear in reply to this toast a man who is the Chancellor, this great man, Charles Bickerton Blackburn, (Applause) a man who, if I may say so, is the greatest of Chancellors, the Chancellor of the oldest University in Australia, and himself, technically, but only technically, the oldest Chancellor in Australia. So when you drink the health of the University have in mind this venerable person who is at the same time the youngest Chancellor in Australia, and, I sometimes think, the youngest man here. (Applause)
