

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
AT THE CANBERRA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, 12TH OCTOBER, 1959

Mr Chairman, Principal, Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As a rule when I'm required to wear one of these funny hats, and I've read the instructions that the hat should be kept on during the speeches, I make a mere token of it and I take it off, but, funny as it is, I think I'll keep it on today, under the circumstances.

I think we've all been delighted to hear the narrative given to us by Dr. Dickson: it's a very checkered history, but it's a very brave one and a very good one, and of course the development of the student body in recent years has, I think, been quite remarkable and perhaps, a few years ago, it might have been quite unexpected.

Now you've been told that in the near future decisions will be made - I don't propose to anticipate them. I'm fairly familiar with the views of Professor Burton on these matters - he has a persuasive manner - I've heard views from other people and all I can say is that we hope that whatever decision we take, which must be taken now within the next week or two, will be in the best interests, as they say, of all concerned.

But in the meantime I just want to say this to you at this particular occasion: whatever the future form of Government may be, there can be no doubt whatever that the time is overdue for the provision for this body of learning, whatever its actual structural future may be, the provision for it, of proper accommodation, and by proper accommodation I mean, in the first place, plenty of space. I dare say in the case of my own University, the one over which Sir George Peyton operates with such distinction, those who founded it many years ago thought that they were being almost extravagant in their allocation of grounds and today it's rather hard, as I discovered the other day, to find your way through the interstices between the buildings, all of which, to add to the confusion of the lay mind, has been constructed in strangely varied architectural style.

Sydney University is another example of how the passage of time and the growth of the community, and the demand for space can render all early anticipations quite inadequate. And therefore I'm very glad to know that as a result of the variety of discussions that have occurred there is, at any rate, in hand, a proper allocation of space. That's very important; a little substracted from, I think, by the Working Men's Club, but as I came along here today I thought: "Well there may be something in this", because, knowing what I do about students, I'm sure that it would be very easy for them to establish a Students' Union, not the usual Students' Union, but a Trade Union, though that, of course, might connote a certain amount of useful labour, and they will form a Students' Union, affiliate themselves with the local Trades Hall, become members of the Club and ultimately squeeze out all the other occupants. I just throw out that suggestion without any malice and without prejudice, but at any rate on space, thank Heavens, we don't need to be very mean about it in this City and I hope we never will be.

In the second place, of course, it is essential - start putting on one side all those intangible elements which make a University, those great things which make a University, and which could make a University in a series of tents, if it came to that, - it is essential, in my opinion, that there



should be adequate academic buildings and here is a good start: this block, the Science block, these, I hope are merely the beginning of a series of building operations which will give to this institution an adequate home, adequate accommodation, something that will not only provide all the things that are needed, but will provide them with dignity and with permanence.

And in the third place - and this, I think, is a matter that we must pay more and more attention to - if Canberra is to attract into itself a body of full-time students, it can't expect, and I hope it won't expect, to attract them only from the local citizenry. It is not at all desirable that any University Foundation in this City should be regarded as a purely local affair; it must provide its attraction for people from all over New South Wales, from older Universities that are overcrowded, and if it is to do that, then there must be, of course, residential accommodation. I have from first to last been tremendously keen on that, that we should have, not only the Arts building and the Science block and the other academic buildings, as I'll describe them, but that we should also step out to provide accommodation for the student body.

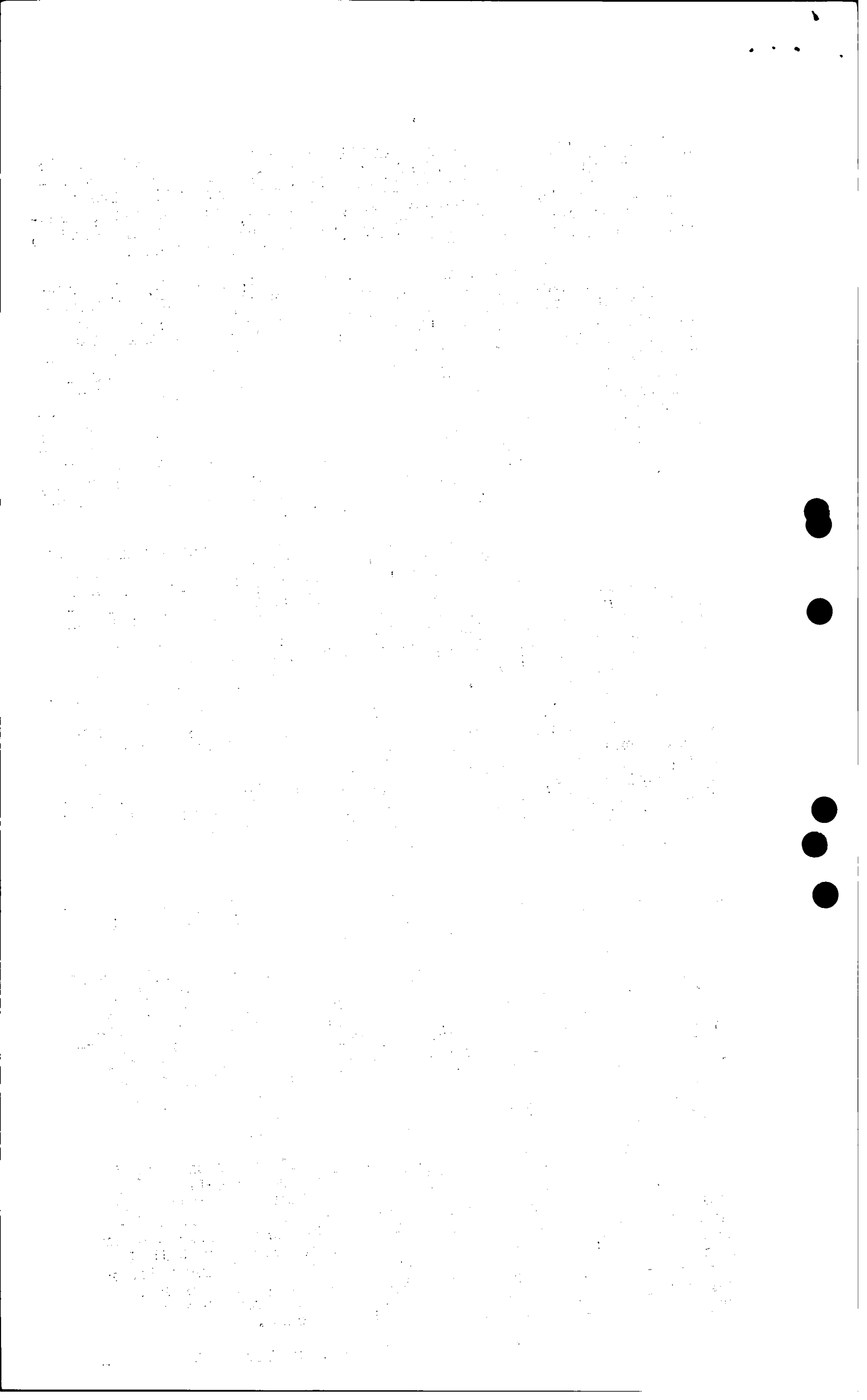
And at best I would just like to make one remark which I hope will prove provocative. Just as it would be a calamity for any University, whether it's one or two, in this City to regard itself as catering only for an official Capital, so I believe it would be a very great calamity if all residential accommodation, if all Colleges of residents, should be regarded as Government Institutions, which might just as easily be referred to as Hostels, as by any other name. This is not just a matter for Government. Just as in the Universities, the older Universities, you have splendid residential Colleges which have been established by the Churches in Australia, which provide the foundations for residential studies, which Church foundations can do so well provided they have, as indeed they have, an instinct for scholarship and quality and character, so I am hoping that, as times goes on, we will find the great Churches of Australia willing to recognise the inevitable future of education in Canberra and to take their part in establishing residential Colleges on the lines of those with which we are familiar in the other Universities.

So I think all those remarks may be made, getting wetter and wetter as time goes on, irrespective of what decision may be made on the structural future.

All I want to say is that nobody, least of all myself regards the position of this College as being static; it has developed; it must grow; it must more and more provide for the student body, primarily, in the first instance the undergraduate student body, opportunity for the higher learning. It is indeed one of the unforeseen results, I think, of the increase of our population and of the stirring of minds in the course of the War, that the population of Universities, the number of people willing and anxious and competent to receive University instruction has grown so enormously.

I can remember the time when, believe it or not, I was President of the Students' Representative Council at the University of Melbourne and the total student population was fourteen hundred - perhaps that explains how I was elected - (laughter) - but that was the total constituency, fourteen hundred, and now, where we used to talk in hundreds, we talk in thousands. All the developments even since the Murray Report have shown that the growth of student numbers, or desired student numbers, is far greater already than even that highly competent committee imagined would be the case.

And therefore we are not here, taking part in some-



thing that is small and is, perhaps, expected to remain small, we are, I believe, taking part today in a ceremony which will be regarded as quite historic in the development of Canberra, the first of a number of steps to be taken which will bring distinction to this place, which will provide proper facilities for instruction and association, for conversation as well as for study, for playing as well as for work, and therefore, Sir, I have the greatest pleasure in the world in taking part in this proceeding - I must say that I was relieved when I heard my friend George Peyton say a few kind words about my activities in relation to Universities, because only this morning, in an eminent Melbourne newspaper I read that some man, occupying some official position, and therefore qualified to talk, said that it was high time that the Prime Minister woke up to the fact that there was a University problem in Australia - and so George I will use your testimonial if I commit the unpardonable error of making a reply.

I have the greatest pleasure in being here, Ladies and Gentlemen, and I deeply sympathise with you for having had to become wetter and wetter as the minutes have gone by. I will now step across - is that right? - and perform that mysterious act known as "Setting the Foundation". Please you from all my past experience that if it is left to me to set it properly, it will never be set at all.
