

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE CUNNINGHAM LABORATORIES, BRISBANE, MONDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER, 1959.

Dr. White and Ladies and Gentlemen, I think I ought to follow my normal practice by naming them the Cunningham Laboratories and declaring them open before I get taken up with my own remarks and forget to do what I came here to do.

I never think of the C.S.I.R.O. without thinking of two things quite detached, one from the other, though they may be. First of all I think of money, because under Dr. White's very distinguished predecessor, Sir Ian Clunies-Ross, one of the great men in the history of this country and, I regret to say, no less under him, every time I see somebody from the C.S.I.R.O. around, money crops up. Well, the subject of money crops up, and sometimes the money crops up too! Every time my colleague, Mr. Casey, comes in to see me with a particularly thoughtful air I don't fall into the error of thinking that he's worrying very much, that day, about Laos or Cambodia or one of these other trouble centres in the world; it is bound to end up by him saying to me: "You know, we're getting a very poor deal in C.S.I.R.O." And so millions are produced from time to time and we go through all the motions of pretending to be annoyed, but in reality I don't mind telling you we're very proud of the work of C.S.I.R.O. (Applause)

I don't know of any institution, if I may call it by that horrible name, which has done continuously such magnificent work, so much of it, perhaps, little recognised. It isn't only a Government enterprise this; it has, particularly in recent years, been able to attract from the great primary industries a considerable amount of support, as these great industries have more and more realised that research in their industry is the whole condition of future success, and both Dr. White and I have an ambition in common, and that is, that as years go by more and more will the great secondary industries of Australia realise the tremendous importance of this work, and themselves come to contribute more and more to its achievement.

When Dr. White was speaking about Cunningham, the lawyer gone wrong, the Botanist gone right, I thought to myself: 'Well, there are two things, to people of my generation, that stick out very clearly in the memory'. The first is that when I was a student, Botany was regarded as a rather feminine attainment (laughter). People who studied Botany were supposed to be those useful people who could walk around a suburban garden with you and dazzle you with science. Just as I was thinking to myself - my wife's good at this, I'm not - now: 'Is that a carnation or - what's the other thing I like - a geranium?' the hostess, or her friend who was a student of Botany, would be attributing in a somewhat ill-pronounced Latin the most remarkable names to all these vegetables that one happened to be looking at. Botany - I think I'm right Dr. White in saying - that 30 or 40 years ago this was regarded as a rather amiable sort of occupation, and in that period of time it has come to be one of the dominating things in the development of Australia.

The second thing that one always recalls is that, 40 years ago, I'm going back - I'll make it 50 years ago - back to my own time, when I was a boy - it was well understood that Australia had a fertile coastal belt and that inside that there was country that ranged from "Marginal" - that horrible word - to "Desert", the great dead heart of Australia, and there were vast tracts of land - now completely fertile and productive - which were regarded as unworthy of the attention of sensible human beings. There were vast areas of Queensland covered with prickly pear and not available for productive employment in the production and growth of stock.

And then the scientists got to work and the great leader among the scientists has been, Sir, your wonderful Organisation. And they got to work and they said: "You know this can't be right" and the result is, that today, by a variety of means running from the work of the metallurgists to the work of the entomologists and the botanists, there are millions of acres of land in Australia, fertile, productive, which were at that time regarded as, more or less, hopeless and useless. The last development, and we are associating ourselves with it today, has been to devote proper study to the improvement of pastures, the introduction of new grasses, the discovery of legumes in the sub-tropical areas of Australia, because everybody who thinks about these problems except in terms of current £s Ss and pence knows perfectly well, that much production in sub-tropical areas has been grievously handicapped in the past by an undue dependence on native grasses, by our relative failure, so far, to discover the right kind of grasses, and above all, the right kind of legumes if we are going to improve our production of cattle; not only of dairy herds, but of cattle in the vast and growing meat industry of Australia. And I like to look forward on these matters. I like to feel, and I'm sure you do, Sir, that on top of all this work on the sub-tropical areas of Australia, will come concentrated work on the tropical areas of Australia. How much remains to be done in the north of Queensland, for example. If we could only encourage our scientific people in their patient work, because it is patient work, to discover these remarkable instruments for growth and development.

I said then, Sir, 'it's patient work'. I'm afraid, speaking on behalf of my own craft, the politicians, we are sometimes tempted to believe that if we find a few million pounds today we will have thirty million pounds worth of results in 12 months time. And it doesn't just happen in that way. It may be that in these very Labs. there will be work done under simulated conditions which will last, by trial and error and careful experiment, for 10 or 15 years, and nobody may be able to say that any one of those years, to the political people who produce so much of the funds: "Yes we have a result, and this is going to be worth so-and-so". Science just doesn't operate in that way. As citizens of this country it is our duty to find just as much as we can for the scientists to enable them to do their work, take every possible pains to see that we have earnest and skilful people engaged in the work and then leave it to them, because the best results they will obtain will not be as a result of some happy fluke, as so many people choose to think, but the best results will come as a result of patient examination, patient testing, patient elimination of things that have proved not to be useful. Ofcourse, there will be happy flukes. Who am I to deny the existence in the world of happy flukes? I'm one myself. But all scientific work doesn't involve the happy fluke. It involves enormous scholarship, and skill, and patient and support.

I believe, you know, that out of the work that will be done here we may very well hope some day to find the production - let us take one case - the production of cattle in these sub-tropical areas, multiplied four or five times. And think of what that can mean to a State like Queensland, so rich in resources, so many of her resources so difficult to tap. And after all, what's good for Queensland is good for Australia, and what's good for Australia is good for the living standards of men and women all over the world.

So, Sir, I'm most honoured and delighted to be here this afternoon. I can see, sitting around here today, people who have been closely associated with this remarkable work. I wish it well: it's a great honour to be asked even to speak for a few minutes on such an occasion, and feeling that way, I express my gratitude. I offer you and your colleagues the gratitude of the country, and once more, not having, contrary to past experience, forgotten it, I declare the Laboratory open, and I will, I think, go down and unveil a plaque.