

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES, UPON RECEIVING AN HONORARY DOCTORATE
OF LAWS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE ON 15TH
APRIL, 1961

Mr. Chancellor and ladies and gentlemen:

You have just been reminded that this is not the first occasion on which I have received what I must properly describe as an unearned increment. (Laughter) Indeed I look back over some of those events with great pleasure, and with particular interest. Perhaps I might begin by telling you why it is so interesting to me, once more, to be in a position where I am receiving a singular compliment and to look back on some of these occasions that I have referred to.

I remember in 1941 when Winston Churchill was Chancellor, as perhaps he still is, of Bristol, and the Council thought fit to confer a Degree, or Degrees, upon Mr. John Winant the then American Ambassador to Great Britain, and myself. A few hours before the ceremony Bristol was bombed, and the ceremony which was to have taken place in the Great Hall took place in the Senate Chamber, and the members of the Council and the Professorial Board arrived with their academic robes over battle dress. They were all smoke-stained, the Hall was still blazing; and there were fires raging in the streets radiating out from the University. That was a most memorable, unforgettable occasion. Unforgettable, as I know, to Sir Winston Churchill himself. Certainly to me. And memorable in this respect: that in the middle of all the destruction - and the war was then in its very crisis - with all its destruction, the Universities and the University spirit, and the University tradition went on. That to me has always been a tremendously significant thing. It was, in a sort of graphic fashion, a proof of the indestructibility of the things that we all hope to stand for.

Reference was made to Malta. How I ever came to be given a degree at the Royal University of Malta, I don't know. But I was. And it was a very long full day of driving around Malta, having the experience, previously and subsequently unknown to me, of being cheered by people in the streets. (Laughter) When I began this journey somebody thrust into my hands not an elegant piece of English, but a long oath in Latin, at least 100 to 150 words. Well, of course, that would appal anybody. I have a certain native supply of impudence, but 150 words of a Latin prayer, this seemed to me to be a little hard. When I arrived I whispered eagerly to the Vice-Chancellor - Vice-Chancellors being, as you know, the fount of all knowledge on these matters - "Old pronunciation, or new?" (Laughter) He gave me the most superb piece of advice I have ever had. He said, "It's all right; mumble it." (Laughter) And I did. (Laughter)

Then, Sir, you referred to the French Canadian University in Quebec, Laval. Well that was something that I remember pretty vividly because although you allow me to address you here in what passes for English I felt very strongly that at Laval portion of my speech ought to be in French. From my point of view, it was. (Laughter) I must say that was the most polite audience for at the end they all nodded to each other with appreciation, and you could hear them saying, "Mam, il essaie, il essaie". So there we are.

The other occasion that I want to mention is that at Oxford the year before last I had the misfortune, as it turned out, to be first in the list to go up for a Degree at the hands of Lord Halifax. The public orator was there, ready to give us

our Citations in impeccable Latin - modern pronunciation. But when we reached the Divinity School and were being marshalled for the event, I was given a sheaf of paper which contained on one side Latin and on the other side the English, but of course I didn't have time to read it because I had to go off at once, you see. The others all sat down and read carefully, in English, so that they could thereafter pretend to have followed the Latin. I didn't have this opportunity; I had to stand up first and listen to it. And I want to say that it is a remarkable tribute to the truth that the older you get the more you remember of your early days, that I practically understood it all. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, may I just turn to this University, this remarkable place. It isn't the first time that I have spoken in this magnificent Hall, but this magnificent Hall characterises what I want to say about the University of Adelaide.

There was an itinerant book writer, some of you may remember, John Foster Fraser, who compiled that immortal phrase, "Adelaide for culture, Melbourne for business, Sydney for pleasure". Oddly enough there was something in it. Because when Sir Keith Murray was out here presiding over the Universities Committee of Enquiry, had finished taking his team around Australia, and had almost completed his report, I was having a long discussion with him about the problem. At that time he told me that in the true essence of what a University meant he thought that Adelaide was pre-eminent in Australia.

Now that interested me enormously, because he didn't mean that Adelaide had enormous buildings, surrounded by spacious grounds and gardens, vast sporting arenas and an area of land such as that which enriches the University of British Columbia. But I think I do know what he meant, and that was that this University almost uncomfortably placed, as one might occasionally think, right in the heart of the city, without the elbow room that one would like to see, has succeeded in attracting the interest, the help, the enthusiasm of the most eminent people in this city, and in this State. There is not that kind of remoteness about the University which one occasionally sees in Australia - "Well that's an academic place; nothing to do with us; let's go on with the business; let's get on with our profession; we've finished with all that." I don't observe that sort of thing in Adelaide because year after year I have seen men of the greatest distinction in the life of this city serving actively in the University, maintaining what is needed for a University, - an outlook by the University on the world, and an inlook by the world into the University.

You have only to see here my two old friends, the Chancellor and the Deputy Chancellor, to realise that in this city, in this State, men have not forgotten this place when they have gone out from it. But they have come back to it, and worked for it.

Now, Sir, you have been reminded that I have had some small part to play in the furnishing of funds for the Universities. The State Governments have aided on the great scale, but my own Government has, progressively, entered into this field - and I think very properly so. I am sure when my sponsor, my learned sponsor, threw out that slight but delicate hint of favours to come (Laughter) I'm sure that he was right. Because when Sir Keith Murray's Committee brought in a report, we having been in the habit, at that time, for a few years of spending about £1m. a year, or £1¹/₂m. a year by

way of subvention to the Universities, found ourselves with a recommendation that amounted to about £21m. over a period of three years. If it hadn't been for a certain amount of rather devious conduct on my part I don't know whether it would have been approved. I won't go into the devious methods, but anyhow Treasury approved - and that is a great milestone in the history, not only of the Universities, but perhaps other people.

Then we appointed a Commission under Sir Leslie Martin. And they brought in their report, not long ago. £21 million in a triennium, that shocked us. This time it was £40 million for the three years! What it will be in the third three years I wouldn't know. But I will be quite safe to consider that it will vastly exceed any figure that we now have in mind.

It is a great pity in Australia that Universities should have become so remarkably dependent on Governments, on the decisions of those in politics, on the particular outlook on Universities - their status, their freedom, their future, - which may be possessed by some current political mind. I would like to feel that in Australia, as in the United States of America more and more will we find people who have wealth to dispose of looking to help the Universities. Having so said, and before I conclude, I would like to offer a few perhaps platitudinous remarks about why I believe so deeply myself in the University structure. What does it stand for? What must it aim at?

It is a trite observation that it exists for more than the training of people for professions; although so be it that it does its job it will train them not only in learning but in character and in wisdom.

The first thing that is needed - and this is going to be no easier as the years go on - is to preserve the highest standards in objective study and enquiry, the highest standards. This vast pressing undergraduate population which we can see coming along over the next 10 years, over the next 20, is going to put the most enormous strain on Universities, not merely on their buildings, not merely on their breathing space, but on their capacity to teach, to lead, to guide, so that the standards rise all the time. I hope, Sir, that in the course of these processes, and particularly under the pressure of modern events we will not neglect "useless learning", as it has been called, useless learning which has contributed so much to civilisation, to tolerance, which is the same thing, and furnishes the minds of men and women for hours and days of great importance to them and to others.

I am always prepared to make a plea for what is now called "useless learning". Not, of course, that we are to neglect the tremendous impact of science on the world and the clamant demand upon Universities to produce people of science. These two things are not irrenconcilable. The great danger would arise if we preferred one to the other so exclusively that we failed to strike that balance of the mind, and that balance of interest, that balance of contribution by a University which the world so much needs.

Finally I would like to say this: to those who are the academic people of this audience it is a great pity that the word "academic" should have acquired a somewhat contemptuous connotation, "Oh, he has an academic mind; he lives an academic life; these academics, you know they are not strong, practical, sensible fellows like us". We have all heard this kind of thing said. The truth is that without those who devote their lives to academic work this would be a pretty sorry place.

They perform an enormous service not only for the University but for the community. They incur two dangers. If I state them I will leave it there.

One is of becoming so completely absorbed in their own discipline, in those fascinating matters of the mind which we have all experienced who have been students, those matters which command the whole of a man's intellectual enthusiasm and interest, that they may be tempted to be rather contemptuous of ordinary men and women outside. That would create a gulf of a dreadful kind.

The second risk is that in order to avoid developing what I will call a somewhat academic contempt for unacademic people there may be a disposition to go to the other extreme and be too much influenced by the opinion of people outside, too much afraid of what the politicians may do, of what the public may think. Never, never fall into the error of thinking badly of the public mind, because the public mind in this country is a good mind, and the public character is a good character. Never fall into the error of looking down on it. But in the name of academic freedom and study never be afraid of it, never be afraid of what the opinion may be outside.

Here is this happy balance, I hope, that will continue a great tradition in a great University. Because I believe that, I would like to say Mr. Chancellor that I am profoundly honoured by this occasion. I regard it as no formality. I have received a singular honour from a great University; and I am happy to think that I have received it, physically, from the hands of an old friend.
