

OFFICIAL OPENING OF TANDEM ACCELERATOR LABORATORY
and
NEW LIBRARY WING

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, CANBERRA, 11TH MAY, 1961

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

Sir,

I am credibly informed that as we sit here, more or less in comfort, there are other people clustering around foundation stones and switches, hanging on our every word. That may or may not be the case, but I've been informed that it is, and so I must get on with my job. I will follow the order that you followed, Sir, and speak first about a matter of which I am an utter master, the Tandem Electro-static Generator! (Laughter)

There are two things among many that excite my admiration in Professor Titterton. The first is that he is a persistent fellow and never takes "No" for an answer. The second is that he pronounces this controversial word "laboratory" which is, after all, much easier than "laboratory", and indeed, much less liable to misinterpretation. (Laughter)

Now I just want to tell you this about the Tandem Electro-static Generator. It came up to me because, for some odd reason, though it hasn't worked out too badly from the point of view of the University, I happen to be their Minister. They brush everybody aside, they come into my room and they lay down the law to me. Well, I shouldn't say "lay down the law" because I might have some opportunity of correcting them on that. But they produce their ideas. When this one came up I was completely baffled as to what it was. Indeed, it was only yesterday that I said to my wife, who is a perfect mine of unscientific information, "Do you know, my dear, what a Tandem Generator is?" She said, "Everybody knows that a Tandem is a bicycle built for two". But I said "This one cost half a million!" (Laughter) She said "It must be studded with diamonds". You know, jewelled in every movement. But really, we were quite mystified.

I cast an eye on to Sir Mark Oliphant, who is a fount of wisdom for us, and he gave it a benevolent look. He said: Yes, he thought this had a great deal of merit, that it would open up a new phase of this tremendously important research work that has been going on in this department. As for Professor Titterton, he had no doubt about it. By the time he had finished with me I wondered whether perhaps we shouldn't have three (Laughter) you know, at a slight price advantage if we took three, instead of one. But that's the kind of man he is.

Then I thought, "No, no, we must get back to what we talk about in politics, but seldom practise, the great principle of priorities". So I asked the then almost newly formed Academy of Science whether it would care to advise us on this matter. And it gave this a high priority. Well that left us defenceless, if not to our enemies at any rate to our friends. And so all that remained for me was to engage in the trifling exercise of persuading the Treasury that half a million pounds would be well spent in this direction. And the Treasury, still reeling from the blows of the Murray Commission and what was to come thereafter, collapsed, more or less, and in a small voice said, "All right", with proper reservations, and without creating a precedent, and without all those other things that a decently-constituted Treasury says, and it got through.