

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.R.G.
MENZIES, TO STUDENTS OF TOWNSVILLE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE, ON 20TH JUNE, 1961

Mr. Warden, and ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to relieve your mind at once - this is not to be a long, heavy, political speech; nor do I propose to make a speech to you of any comprehensive kind about universities and what they do. All I do want to say to you is that after the last war one of the remarkable things that occurred in Australia was that there was a tremendously increased demand for university training. The number of students qualified for and desiring university training grew phenomenally. It became quite clear that the task of providing for them, the task of keeping the universities going and growing, was going to be beyond the capacity of the Governments of the States and could not be brought within their capacity by extraordinary increases in fees because that would have the effect of depriving people, too many people, of the opportunity of study.

So I went on a sort of frolic of my own. I got hold of Sir Keith Murray when I was in England, the Chairman of the Universities Grants Commission, and I asked him whether he would become the Chairman of a Committee to investigate the universities position in Australia. He said that he would provided that his Chancellor of the Exchequer for whom he worked was agreeable. The Chancellor was Mr. Harold Macmillan, an old friend of mine, and I was able to cope with him. And so we got Sir Keith Murray.

We got together a very, very fine committee, partly people from overseas, partly very eminent men in Australia. And the result of their report, I believe, was phenomenal. It was regarded as quite shocking, I know, by people in the Treasury because it presented us with a Bill which we speedily accepted - I did a little more dragooning on my own account - and which increased the Commonwealth's outlay on universities from a figure that it had stood at of about a little over £1m. a year to a total of £21m. in three years - what we call the first triennium. This was accepted by the Government. It imposed not only great obligations on the Commonwealth, but it imposed even greater ones on the States. One must always remember that the development of the university structure in Australia represents a remarkable piece of co-operation between the Commonwealth Government and the State Governments, each of which has accepted large burdens, financially, in relation to the matter.

Then we adopted another recommendation of the Murray Committee and we appointed a Universities Commission which is presided over by Sir Leslie Martin, the eminent scientist. Not to be outdone by Sir Keith Murray and his myrmidons, they brought in a Bill, the other day, which increased the £21m. over the first three years to £40m. over the second three years. I haven't yet begun to think of what the third triennium may bring forth. But it remains true that in Australia among us all, we are spending now sums of money on university development which would have been regarded as simply fabulous and absurd, before the war. This I believe is a great thing.

And one of the things that has happened is what is happening here. You can't just create a new University, so to speak, fully fledged, because it is a very expensive operation. I would hate to tell you what it would cost to establish, in the full sense, a full university, with all the equipment that goes with it. It runs into many millions of pounds.

But in various places in Australia the first step has been taken - some of them were taken before the war; some of them taken after it - the first steps have been taken by creating a university college and attaching it to one of the established universities. In Canberra, for example, we have had for many, many, years a Canberra University College which was attached to the University of Melbourne

and the degrees that were granted, though they were earned in Canberra in the University College, were granted in the University of Melbourne. Recently I brought about a marriage between the National University, essentially, at that time, a post-graduate research institute, and the University College. So that they are now all part of the Australian National University and a student may start in First Year, go through to post-graduate work, to higher degree, and if he is of the right kind, and has the right feeling for it, move into higher realms of research work.

The University College which was established at Armidale a good number of years ago has now become a full University.

I look forward myself to the idea that this so promisingly begun University College will, some day - don't be in too much of a hurry; these things take a good deal of doing - will some day develop into a University for the northern part of Australia. But that is on the knees of the gods, or rather, to be more precise, if less theological, on the knees of the University Commission which itself will advise us on these matters from time to time.

But I mention these matters merely to indicate - and I am talking particularly to the students - that you have the great privilege really of being the first students in a place which will, in due course, whether here or in expanded form across the river, or whatever may come, develop into a matter of immense importance to the north of Australia, and therefore to Australia as a whole. This, I think, is a great privilege. I permit myself to envy you a little because you are at the beginning of your studies; and I occasionally feel that I must be getting perilously near the end of mine.

I was very pleased to notice, among other things, warden, that you have already, wisely, if I may say so, aimed at developing even though in a small way at this point of time, all the aspects of student life. A University College which has an ambition, some day, to be a full University, must be able to cater, in my opinion, not merely for the work done at a desk, but for the whole life of a University: the life on the playing field, the life in a social way, the life of the common room; in due course, I trust, the life of residential colleges. All these things build up into something that distinguishes a University from any other institute of learning because it encourages freedom, it encourages the ability to meet people, to get to understand people, which is, after all, one of the great problems of life and one of the problems that requires a great deal of work, and a great deal of experience.

When I came in I saw an eminently respectable young man who turned out to be the President of the Union, the Students' President. I want to confess to you - this may discourage you a lot - I used to be that myself. That, perhaps, was the beginning of the end with me. It marked the beginning of my downfall which ultimately took me into political affairs.

But it is a fine thing for students in a University to feel that they have not only an individual existence, but a corporate existence, that they are part of a body and that as the University College goes on, as the University goes on, more and more they are part of a continuing body - each of the years, each of the drafts of new students - learning something from those who have gone before them and translating into terms of the future their own influence, and their own work and their own knowledge. It is a wonderful thing to belong to a continuing body. I want you to have that firmly in your mind.

If you just came along here and were told, "Well, you are going to do a year's work, and then disappear and the whole thing's over", that would be a rather depressing thought, wouldn't it? But to

be members of something that will go on and on and on, if we are left alone, for a century, for two centuries, that will ultimately build up its own immense tradition, its own marvellous moral and spiritual and intellectual compulsions, on the mind, this is a great thing. So that people some day will be able to say, "Oh, yes, I know so-and-so, he's a Townsville man", just as they might say, "He's an Oxford man", "He's a Cambridge man". Getting something and giving something all the time.

I could talk to you for a long time about this; it is a matter very close to my heart. I sometimes permit myself the unworthy hope that when I have departed from politics, voluntarily or involuntarily, when I have departed from public life and somebody sits down, as somebody will, perhaps rather unpleasantly to say, "Well what did he do, anyhow, what did it all amount to?" I hope No. 1 in my credit list, which will be a short one - I hope the deficit will be on the next page so that you have to turn over to reach it - will be, "Well he understood the need for Universities in this land; he understood something of the need for the highest intellectual and scientific training that can be given in this country".

Ours is a new country crying out for first-class people; and first class people, trained people, are always, as the economists say, "in short supply". It is very true; it is very true that when I survey the whole of the university structure in Australia and discuss it with the Universities Commission we are naturally influenced in our minds, made a little fearful, when we contemplate the enormous financial demands that will arise. But much more important than the financial demands will be the demands for first-class people. You can't have a first-class University with second-class University teachers. We must maintain the standard of the Professor, the standard of the lecturer, the standard of the demonstrator, if we are going to be satisfied that we are going to produce graduates whose degrees will be honourably recognised around the world; and who, themselves, will be able to make a powerful contribution to their own country, or, indeed, to other countries outside Australia.

That, Sir, is one of the great problems that we have in the future: the problem of keeping up the supply. We can't hope to get too many teachers from overseas because they, themselves, have a growing demand no less than ours. There are new countries around the world which we are bound to help if we can and they certainly won't be able to help us much in the field of teaching and of scholarship. So we have the responsibility of doing it ourselves to the utmost of our capacity, to concentrate our minds on it, to seek to achieve the ultimate in excellence because if we do we will be able to furnish the universities of the future, and the university students of the future, with the high level of teaching that they require. It is because I have been able to do a little about this matter that I not only wish you well and envy you this opportunity, but would like to have that little credit entry in the book of my life that I did something about it.

But chiefly, this morning, looking at you, I hope you will allow me to say that I do envy you a little -

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive;
But to be young, 'twas very heaven."

That is the way to look at this thing and you will create a new heaven on earth. (Applause)
