

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
R.G. MENZIES, AT UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN
AUSTRALIA, 24TH JULY, 1961

Sir, Your Excellency, and ladies and gentlemen, and fellow students:

I want to tell you that I have a hat here which it is considered correct to put on. (Laughter) Like that. (Laughter) And once one has put it on and lifted it with due reverence in the right quarters, one takes it off and gives it to an innocent bystander. (Laughter)

I was tremendously interested in the cable from Harvey. (Laughter) There was one thing missing in the cable: I would have expected that it would have ended up "Collect" (Laughter) I don't know what makes me think of that except that I am in Western Australia. (Laughter) You have been reminded by the Chairman, with some difficulty I gathered, that I am Prime Minister (Laughter) and I very well remember that when I was first Prime Minister, many many years ago (Laughter) I had a telegram from Western Australia, from a representative of the wheat-growers who, as some of you, the more literate among you, may know produce a political commodity called "wheat". This telegram said to me that unless something was done for the Western Australian wheat growers all would fail, all would come to an end and confusion. At the end of this long, argumentative and costly telegram, he ended up by saying "Our position is so doubtful, so dangerous, that I am sending this telegram 'collect'". (Laughter) I'm not going to be disingenuous enough to say that I paid for it personally; but we did, in the office. And later on the wretched man came into Parliament. (Laughter)

Now what I really want to say to you is that I think this is about as remarkable an event as I've ever been invited to take part in because I am not unaccustomed - even my friend the Premier could tell you this - to having cases put to me which involve some finding of money from the inexhaustible purse of the Commonwealth. Indeed in the University field it has been my own great pleasure and great privilege to have something to do with the remarkable development in Universities in the last few years, something that I hope I will be permitted to be proud of and which has involved an enormous co-operative effort between Commonwealth Government, State Governments and a mass of people interested in higher education in Australia. But this, I think, Sir, is the first occasion on which I have been invited to open a fine building, a costly building, paid for by the personal sacrifice and efforts of undergraduates. I think this is a remarkable event. (Applause)

I don't want to flatter you unruly characters (Laughter) unduly but I am bound to say that this is the most spectacular piece of self-help that I have seen in this field. This is a wonderful performance and I would like to congratulate everybody who has been connected with it.

I think it is particularly appropriate that it should take the form that it does for residential and what I will call, in a broad way, social purposes. Things have moved on a lot in modern times. When I was at the University of Melbourne, and it may shock some of you to know that I was once at a University, (Laughter) the amenities, if I may call them such, for students were very sketchy. I don't know that we had very much enterprise in those days; or perhaps we weren't as rich as you are now. But certainly we didn't dream of things like this. It is terribly important that they should have been dreamed of and brought to performance here because it helps to remind us of the true character of a university education.

The University stands for not simply the provision of the means of instruction, the means of teaching, though they are, of course, essential. Every University today knows that it has great problems about the number of staff compared to the ever-rising number of people who want University training, or tertiary education

of one kind or another. This is an enormous problem, not only of money, but a great problem of training and procuring the necessary standards of staff. This is a problem that I think will be a more teasing one over the next five or six years than perhaps any other problem we have had.

But all that relates to instruction, to teaching. It includes the provision of equipment - equipment which, today, if it is to be of the proper standard is infinitely more complex, infinitely more expensive than it ever was before.

But a University doesn't exist just for some to teach, or for others to be taught. It is not an undesirable thing that in addition to sitting in lectures, one should do a little study, teaching one thing, studying another. But when we have considered teaching itself with all the calls that it makes on people of great skill and of great dedication, and we add to that the study that a student must put in on his own account if he is to reap the full harvest of being at a great University, we should then add to those the third element of University education, by no means the least, which is contact with students, the learning to live in a students' society, the subtle, indefinable, educational quality of rubbing shoulders with people, people who are in other faculties (Laughter) Yes, I know...I might have known somebody would be ahead of me. (Laughter) But you know I think that a lot of people who are not directly concerned with universities sometimes fail to realize that what seems to some of the more dour among them to be a waste of time - the social life that exists in a place like this, the life of the playing fields, the arguments that go on of a highly speculative, and sometimes violent kind, the infinite superiority of the second year medical student over the poor humble final year law student - (Laughter) are all splendid things because they mean that in a strange way, such is the wisdom of providence, the students are educating each other.

Now that is the great point about a university, that is the great point about bringing people together in a place like this, the great point about their having some social existence in the student body, of having contact with other minds and other disciplines. The great value of this is that it broadens the mind and sends out not merely a highly skilled graduate in a technical way, but a developed human being who can be a good citizen and a wise man or a wise woman.

Therefore I approve - if that means anything - I approve warmly of what has been done here, not only because it is a magnificent example of self-help, but because I believe that this kind of thing is of the essence of a university. My own approach to the financial problem of universities for the last ten years has been from the very beginning that it isn't enough just to provide the minimum classrooms. I have always believed it goes far beyond these things. Early in dealing with this matter the question cropped up, for example, about residential colleges and my first committee wasn't very interested in doing anything about them. I said, "You must include some recommendation about residential colleges even small ones, but we must have some". And the answer, quite common at that time was "But these are frills, residential colleges are frills; halls of residence are frills; union houses are frills". This is a pretty stark outlook on university training and from beginning to end I have said "I won't have this. A University must be a body which is a comprehensive affair, which caters not only for the bare minima of teaching, the bare minima of accommodation, libraries and so on, but provides also for the ultimate production of men and women of consequence".

I want to say quite seriously to all of you that the

future of Australia, the wisdom of this country, the true standing of this country, the true level of civilization in this country will depend far more upon those who are now undergraduates and who are getting the advantage of these things, and the responsibility of these things, than they will upon people like myself who have grown, or are growing old in the service of the country.

However, there it is, it is in a real sense in your hands; and the measure of the success of this university, this relatively young university, will in the long run be the kind of people it sends out and has sent out not only into Western Australia, but into Australia and the world, their quality and their contribution.

And this is really, all joking apart, a splendid example of imagination on the part of the undergraduate body, not only self-sacrifice in a monetary way, but of imagination and foresight.

Sir, for all these reasons I am delighted to be here even though it does involve me putting on a gown. I ought to explain this gown to you: I have been made an honorary graduate of a great number of universities for some reason or other - I got them much more easily than I got my own degrees in Melbourne in my own time - but the only time I was ever given the gown to keep (laughter) was in Brisbane the other day. And this is it! My wife thinks it is a villainous combination of colours (laughter) all I know about it is, and this appeals to me, I got it for nothing. (laughter)

Sir, I thank you for the opportunity of being here and I have the greatest pleasure in the world in declaring the building Open. (Applause)
