

OPENING OF NEW SCIENCE LABORATORIES AT WESLEY
COLLEGE, MELBOURNE

ON 7TH JULY, 1962.

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

Mr. President, Headmaster, Mr. Robson and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I always like to begin even the feeblest of speeches with a couple of preliminary observations, and the first one that I want to make to you is that the President of the Council is a man possessed of low cunning. (Laughter) I have found, after many years in office, that if people write and say to me, "We would like you to do so and so on 15th of August, or whatever it may be and I am engaged on the 15th of August, I can honestly say how deeply sorry I am that I can't be there. (Laughter) But with great, low cunning, as he has practically admitted to you, he said to me, in effect, "Now, do come and do this job, and name your own date." (Laughter) Well, you know, I don't want anybody to be encouraged by this example, but there's nothing more difficult than that. The only possible hope you have is to get out of the country. (Laughter) And, believe it or not, I can't be out of the country all the time. (Laughter) He also made a glancing reference to my majority. Well, as I said to an audience last night, I'm "it". (Laughter) (Applause)

But, Sir, one develops a certain amount of philosophy about these things. I've had the most remarkable experience; no doubt bred into me by this school. I've run a minority Government. I had a majority Government once which was sustained in office by one and a half Independents, (Laughter) and each time I went back to the Lodge at the end of the week for dinner, I would say to my wife, "My dear, nothing but death can put me out of office before Tuesday." (Laughter).

Which reminds me, Sir, that my wife is tremendously sorry not to be here. She's not only been under doctor's orders, but doing frightfully well under them, I am happy to say. She is also becoming impatient of them, and therefore I have to say every now and then, "No. You shall not go." I don't think she can be all that well, because it is the first time she has ever taken my advice. (Laughter)

Now, Sir, I'm the least scientific of mortals. All I know about science is that a few misguided fellows in my time did chemistry, and they had a distinguished teacher who was known irreverently as "Bunse" and some of them studied physics and some of them branched off into a mysterious thing called mechanics. All I know is that the only record you will find of me in the scholastic history of the school is in things like History, English, French and Latin. As for the mathematical and scientific subjects, having an indecently good memory, I was a master of the bookwork and didn't know what it was all about. (Laughter) So I could get 50, and that, after all, oddly enough, was more than some people got. (Laughter)

Yes, Sir, I associate myself a great deal with the humanities, with those studies of humane letters which the world needs so much and which, perhaps, it tends to neglect not a little. But, more and more in recent times, I've had borne in on me that this world is changing almost at an explosive rate. The population of the world - we used to think we knew about it - will probably more or less double between now and the turn of the century. This presents the most colossal problem. More thousands of millions of people,

and in a world in which the pressure of population on the resources of the world comes greater and greater; where the mirrored problem of sustenance becomes more and more acute as years go on. And if all these problems are to be solved, if they are to be solved on the principle of justice which doesn't breed hatred between those who have not and those who have, then we, ourselves, must make a contribution in the field of science which will harness the resources of the world to produce more to feed more people, to give more hope, more skill, more productivity to other nations in the world.

This business of scientific training - it is not just a matter for ourselves, though we need it. It is something which will represent some measure of what we are contributing to the world. That is not to say that everybody is to become a scientist. I had a faint and friendly quarrel with a very distinguished scientist, one of the most distinguished in our history, when he suggested one day that every Cabinet Minister ought to be required to have a scientific degree. And I thought, "Oh dear." (Laughter) It would afford me a much-needed relief from office. I had no complaint about that, but the idea of twenty experts sitting in a Cabinet really frightened me, rather. (Laughter) I wondered what would become of the real experts when they were being overruled by the political experts.

But, Sir, it is true, profoundly true that this world, not only as we see it now, but as we look at it over the next twenty, thirty, forty years, with the eye of imagination in my case, this world is going to require such added stores of pure science, such added stores of applied science, of technology, if it is going to sustain itself and raise the average level of wellbeing and of happiness. In other words, Sir, to come back to the point about the humanities, I think it is tremendously important that people should pursue humane studies, but they won't be able to in the future unless the scientists and the technologists have done their part to raise the standards of the world and to give us the means of justifying our own independent existence in Australia. Science, I see as the developer and the protector.

Well, now Sir, you may be a classical scholar or a student of history or of literature and want nothing more than a library. I don't mean one of those great things, containing all those well-bound books that every gentlemen's library ought to include, I mean a library - the books that you know, that you read, that you look at, that you turn to. This is all the reflective scholar in those fields will need - an adequate library and there you are. But in science I was so interested today to hear Mr. Robson talking about the difference between his time and today. Of course there is a difference.

When I look back, even looking through the door at these mysteries, at the rather sketchy equipment, the rather sketchy apparatus, I just marvel when I go into a well-furnished lab. today and see what is needed for these purposes; how far the boundaries of scientific knowledge have been pushed. So far indeed that what was advanced in my time is elementary today. And this is as it should be. The more advanced the study, the more complex will become the apparatus needed, the methods to be employed.

Every time I speak with the Universities Commission, which is something that gives me satisfaction as I look back on it, I am reminded that in a new university, in the development of a university, the cost on the scientific side far

excels anything on the other side of university life. If a university is going to be a great university in the scientific field, then it must expect to spend hundreds of thousands or millions more on scientific equipment than it would on the side of humane letters in the old-fashioned nineteenth century way. Well, I acknowledge this.

It has been my great honour and Mr. Robson has referred to it, to have been the promoter of a lot of new things in the university field and of vast expenditures in the university field in Australia. So vast that I don't even talk about them now until the last moment in case the Treasury overhears me. (Laughter) But on the scientific side, no longer can things be done on the cheap. This is why this industrial fund seems to me to be such an imaginative affair. Quite frankly, Mr. Robson, Mr. Booth and Mr. Trigg, I had no idea that big businessmen were so imaginative. (Laughter) But those limitations on their imagination which makes them fail to understand my Budget (Laughter) have not prevented them from this tremendous conception.

Think of it. School after school helped in a massive way to produce first-class scientific training. And don't let us think of any training at school as ending when the boys leave school because that's not true. The best of those who use these facilities will be in the universities. The best of those who go to the universities will find themselves irresistibly drawn into post-graduate work, into research work and will provide the scientific leaders of the future. Right down through the line, we must aim at the very best that we can get and we can't get the best in the field of science, whatever the genius of the teacher, whatever the incipient genius of the student, unless you have the scientific apparatus that can be used. People like myself can achieve a certain amount of half-merited success scholastically by having good memories, by being able to read and learning how to read and learning how to remember and learning, I hope, how to think. But you can't teach science in the modern world unless you can also put into the hands of the student the things that are needed to illustrate to him, to give him the feel of the developments that have occurred in physics and chemistry and in a score of other subsequent and perhaps more refined studies.

So it is for those reasons that I am delighted to be here and I am particularly delighted to be here in my old school. I notice a few changes - well, I don't mean individually. I noticed today with some astonishment that my contemporaries who are here today seem to me to look rather elderly. I don't understand it. But putting that on one side, the one thing that I notice with regret is that in my day there were forms with backs and if somebody of a wicked disposition got in early at assembly and pushed the first one back, the whole of them went right back to the back wall of the hall (Laughter) and this was received with magnificent applause. (Laughter) It was regarded as the most instructive physics lesson for the day. (Laughter)

But now, I'm afraid Sir, with prosperity you've become respectable. You have chairs, but you can't prevent me from turning my mind back to the fact that when I used to sit down in that corner, it was my pride and joy to look at L.A. Adamson and be frightened of him. (Laughter) To look at Harold Stewart and be more frightened of him, with his gimlet eye and a most unflinching perception of the gaps in my knowledge of Latin. (Laughter) But all came well on a Friday morning when he would stand up and sing, in a fine true voice, much to our enjoyment, "When I was a new boy, and an addle-headed cub". (Laughter) So my mind goes back to that, Sir - new boy no longer, addle-headed cub only in the views of my more biased adversaries.

Sir, I have the very greatest pleasure in declaring the new laboratories open