

OPENING OF TEXTILE DIVISION BUILDING AT
C.S.I.R.O. LABORATORIES, GEWLONG,
ON 3RD MAY, 1961.

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Sir Frederick and Ladies and Gentlemen :

For greater precaution, I will reverse the process :
I declare the building open. (Applause)

I did intend then to go on and make a few remarks but I want to tell you that Sir Frederick White, whom I had hitherto regarded as a friend, sent me some notes and I brought them in my inside breast pocket, giving me the true milk of the word, as you might say, from beginning to end. Splendid. He has now sabotaged me. (Laughter) So I'll put them back in my pocket, and I will just say that I was tremendously impressed by a number of matters today, and in particular by what Sir Frederick himself had to say about the fact that these developments in the wool textile industry are completely modern.

When I was a boy and some of you were boys and girls, wool - well, there it was, wool was the accepted commodity. You wore wool, you regarded its occasional destruction by moths as one of the chances of life; it could hardly be avoided. In fact, it was only when I went up to Leeds a couple of years ago on a similar sort of errand that I discovered that the moth is an innocent creature. It doesn't eat. It doesn't bite anything. It is the wretched larvae who do the damage, and their table manners, judging by the amplification on that little machine that I saw here today, are deplorable. (Laughter) If you listen to it, you can hear these creatures at work, magnified a million times or something and it is like a rather noisy collection of children eating peanuts in the shell. (Laughter) But there it is.

We were very ignorant, most of us, about these matters. As for wool, well, I think it was regarded as rather a sort of divine dispensation against which it would be improper to battle, that wool would shrink - it was wonderful stuff, but it would shrink. Of course, if you had a woollen blanket, it stood to reason that before long it could be used as a felt underneath the carpet because that was the divine order of events. There is a lot of truth in this and it is really only in my own time - I have had nothing to do with it but it is in my own time chronologically speaking - that the scientists have got to work and, of course, under the CSIRO with increasing activity and point and skill, to take some of the disabilities of wool out of wool which means, of course, to take some of the risks out of the greatest industry in Australia.

This is, from a national point of view, life or death economically, and therefore I think it is tremendously exciting to go to a place like this and see what is being done, to keep the crease in the masculine trouser, to avoid shrinkage, to keep the moths at bay; to do all these things will increasingly enable wool, woollen textiles, woollen fabrics of all kinds to be presented to the world and to compete successfully with young and lusty competitors in the artificial fibres field. And of course - this is my profound belief - we have only to keep on

believing these results with wool to make the result of this battle a certainty, because anybody who would compare what can be done with wool in the dressing of that untractable thing, the male animal, anybody who compares what can be done about him with wool and looks at people going down streets in another great country in the world by their thousands, dressed in some synthetic fibres and looking like tramps (laughter) anybody who does that will, like myself, have an immense optimism about the continued authority and success of wool in the world.

But all this can't be brought about only by the scientists. You can go through here and you can see a lot of distinguished scientific men and women doing remarkable research work and doing it, as it seems to me, with astonishing speed and getting results with really remarkable speed. You can see that. You can be impressed by it and say "Well, now, that's the job, and we will leave it to the scientists. We'll leave it to the experts, and as long as Sir Frederick White, aided and abetted by his executive can come to the Government and get a certain amount of money and go to the wool industry and get some, all will be well." This is not true. One of the great problems in Australia in all fields is to marry the work of the scientist to the work of the farmer and grazer, to the industrialist or whoever it may be; to reduce the period of time that elapses between the evolving of the discovery and its adoption in field or industry. This is a matter of extreme difficulty because for some reason, no doubt deep in our race, we are a little conservative about adopting new ideas. It took a long time to persuade farmers in this very State to understand in certain areas the vital importance of using superphosphates. I can remember as a boy the deep scepticism - "What's this? My old man didn't use this." Very conservative, very shy.

And in our secondary industries which are great and growing in Australia, there is still far too little attention paid by most of them to research, to keeping abreast of the world, to meeting demand, to improving production, to reducing costs and meeting the high competition of modern life. This is a challenge to us, both in the woolen industry and, indeed, in all industries upon which Australia depends for living, for export, for international solvency and for prosperity at home. This is the problem of extension, of extending the results.

One of the pleasing things here, which I was happy to observe, having read something the other day, is the extent of co-operation that has been developed between the scientific and technological work being done here and the local woolen textile manufacturers who, of course, are celebrated because Oolong is very celebrated in that field. This is a great thing. This must go on more and more, all over Australia. Time doesn't run in our favour in this context. We have to take time by the forelock on these matters; we have to press forward as indeed the wool authorities are, I think, increasingly and splendidly, in the wool promotion field, in developing all around the world an understanding of the demand for wool.

But we must also have inside Australia that happy day to come when people who are interested in wool and what

goes on in a place like this won't be merely the people who grow wool or merely the people who buy wool but will be masses of people who see in this a symbol of what can be done by co-operation between the scientific worker and the man outside.

We are, I think, only at the beginning of this problem. It is rather complicated in Australia because in all these primary production fields, we have seven governments to be taken into account not only the Commonwealth government which, characteristically, is usually looked to for money, but six State Governments, all of them with competent people in their service and all of them, perhaps understandably a little jealous of their own preserves. I know, I've been a State Minister myself. I know something about it and how it feels. Therefore, all these processes tend to be slowed up by the division of authority.

One thing that will overcome that is a growing public understanding of the fact that six months lost in transferring a discovery from the laboratory to the spot where it needs to be employed is six months gone out of the history of the industry which can never be recaptured. Time is not on our side on these matters. We must make time our servant. Therefore, I urge upon everybody, everybody particularly who is concerned with public administration in Australia, the vital importance of seeing that what is discovered by the scientists is, before long, being employed by the grazier, by the farmer, the manufacturer, to the great advantage, I trust, of himself, but through that to the great advantage of Australia.

Sir, I would like to compliment you, if I may, on the wonderful work you do for this country and I appreciate it to the full and I think it is increasingly well realised all around Australia. All I need do now, Sir, is to remind this audience - this long-suffering audience - that I have already declared the building open.
