ANNUAL MEETING OF CONVOCATION OF UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE

9TH APRIL, 1965

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

Mr. Warden, Mr. Chancellor and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I have one or two grievances that I will expose to you in a moment but before I do I want to tell you that I have had two singularly happy experiences here on this platform tonight. The first was that the Registrar, the successor of the famous J.P. Bainbridge who was Registrar in my time, held up a massive minute book, leaned as he might be entitled to lean in a university with an engineering school (Laughter) on this thing, and it collapsed.

I am really here under false colours, under a complete misapprehension. I had a letter from the Judge some time ago, no doubt written with his usual lucidity, but I thought all I was being asked to do was to come here to the annual meeting of Convocation - which in my time was made up of about twenty-five people - and to have a few reminiscent remarks to make, you know, of a civil kind, but I had no idea that this old friend of mine was a sadist until three days ago I discovered - and the print was put in front of me - that I was to come here and make what I believe is loosely described nowadays as an oration - the address - and I even saw the subject for the first time (Laughter) : The Commonwealth and University Education.

Now, really, I am old and experienced, but for a long time now I have confined myself to doing one of these formidable jobs a year. I once fell in for two. They take a long time. For weeks and weeks and weeks you put in a few hours each weekend because you are supposed to produce something worthy of the occasion. And I woke up to it, (I won't blame anybody else), three days ago, and naturally for the next two days, I had Cabinet sitting until after midnight, and so whatever rough ideas I have assembled, have been assembled not with the midnight oil but with post-midnight oil over a period of two days instead of two months. And therefore you will understand my position. I have had no time to prepare myself properly. I prayed for laryngitis (Laughter) but although the prayers of a righteous man avail much, my prayers were not answered. My prayers failed, so all I could do was to say, "Well, I will do my best" and I took a vow and the vow was : Never again.

So I warn all of you. There are no new pronouncements to be made by me tonight. There is no controversy to conduct. There are no new statistics, you will be glad to know, because the statistics of the university's growth and problems in the last few years are now all too well known. And, of course, on top of that I speak with a little hesitation, Mr. Warden, because in my own city I have recently been described as a Johnny-come-lately in the educational field (Laughter) and therefore, of course, I must speak with immense reserve in preserving my amateur status.

Now, Sir, therefore what I have to say to you will be discursive, it will be occasional. It won't, I confess, be thoroughly or properly thought out, and above all things, I say to those of you who are academically disposed, it will be unfit for academic consumption.

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Now the Commonwealth has, in my own time, as the Judge has reminded you, entered into the universities field in a great and growing way, not, may I repeat, because of constitutional responsibility but because the considerable financial power of the Commonwealth has been allied to an acute consciousness on our part of the need to save the universities from retrogression and perhaps disaster. This is worth remembering.

The first grant ever made as a grant to the States for universities was made in my own time in, I think, 1950 or 1951 and it was a very modest amount of money, something a little over £1M. and that was done and then we established the Murray Committee later on and when the Murray Committee's report came in, recommending an enormous increase in Commonwealth subventions, we accepted it. I confess that I engaged in a certain amount of low cunning. I circulated the report the night before the Cabinet Meeting and kept the Cabinet sitting all morning, afternoon and night so that we might end up with a complete acceptance of the recommendations and we accepted them, and that of course, as you have been reminded, led on to the universities commission, the problem of the teaching hospitals, the Martin Committee on Tertiary Education. This has been the most astonishing development, though I say it myself, and it has all been based on the proposition that what I agree is the considerable constitutional and practical financial power of the Commonwealth has been allied to a genuine consciousness of the needs of the universities.

Now I said "considerable financial power". May I emphasise to you this does not mean inexhaustible financial resources. If I have one complaint that I can make about my academic friends, it is that some of them, not all of them but some of them, appear to think that there is no limit to what can be produced financially. I've even known one or two like that at Canberra. The sky is the limit, they think. The sky isn't the limit. Considerable financial power doesn't mean inexhaustible financial resources and that is not to be forgotten. May I remind you - admitting as I do that with uniform tax, with the ultimate control of the Commonwealth over the borrowing programmes, we have vis-a-vis the States very great and perhaps commanding financial powers - that the task of a Commonwealth Government in economic and financial policy is to preserve a good economic climate in which growth can proceed from a stable foundation within the limits of its constitutional authority and this, of course, presents classical problems.

There are those who may be heard to say, "Well, why worry about inflation? It's only growth that counts. But wise men want to have stability and growth. They realise that the stability of the currency to the extent that it isn't affected by authorities beyond the control of Parliament or by the terms of international trade, which we don't control, or by seasonal conditions at home which we don't control, is much affected by monetary control through the banking structure and through the Commonwealth Budget.

Now, Sir, in a Commonwealth Budget - let's have a look at it on the expenditure side. Nobody need suppose that I am going to expose the grisly secrets of the next Commonwealth Budget because I don't know them, so I have no temptation to disclose them. We haven't got within months of that yet. But on the expenditure side - let's face up to it - we have an enormously increased defence expenditure, enormously increased. We have incessant demands for social benefits. We have great cash outlays on developmental projects in Australia and we have increased outgoings to make up the shortfall in loan raisings when the loan market weakens. Could I elaborate one or two of these dreary-sounding items because they are important?

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Developmental projects. You will always find, and perhaps you will within the membership of Convocation, somebody who will dispose of the whole problem by saying, "Well, of course, the Commonwealth ought to conduct the whole of the works programme out of loan money." Oh, how much I agree, if he could produce the loan money. These theoretical approaches are not worth much.

Why is it that a Commonwealth Government, mine or any other, finds itself finding capital works provision out of revenue, out of the taxpayer? Not because it wants to but because in spite of the enormous expansion of the loan market over recent years, it just can't produce the amount of money that is needed, and we in the Commonwealth have for years sought to solve this problem by saying that when we had a loan programme and we raised loans on the market, the States would receive the whole of the proceeds - we would take none for Commonwealth works, and that is why we spend Commonwealth revenue on Commonwealth works.

And in the second place, of course, we said - and I think very properly, though without obligation - if there is a shortfall on the loan market, if we have approved of a loan works programme for the States of £240M. and the loan market produces £180M, we accept the responsibility for finding the balance out of the Budget.

Now these are very important matters, and if the loan market weakens, it follows that there is a greater burden on the Commonwealth Budget. These things have to be borne in mind when you are confronting the problem of education, because after all - this may sound heretical - there must be reasonable limits to taxation, because if taxation is carried too far, it can inhibit investment and growth, and above all that we know, in the broad, all of us, instructed or uninstructed by the critics, that in a time of boom, when there is overfull employment, when there are all these things, a surplus Budget may very well be called for as a controlling factor, and in a time of recession, a deficit Budget with its injection of credit into the system may very well be called for.

Now, Sir, I am sorry to be so tiresome on this matter, but all these things have to be watched. They all have a bearing on university programmes which, I repeat, can't be unlimited if every other factor is under observation and control. Therefore, looking back on it, I am really delighted to think how, with all these principles in mind, we have been able to find increasing millions and scores of millions for university activity. But I do beg of those who think that there is no financial consideration to be allowed into academic studies to bear in mind some of these elementary truths about public finance.

Now, Sir, as I have just said, the recognition of this truth hasn't so far involved any substantial modification of our support for university projects, but it would be an error to suppose that demand can always be satisfied. This is something that I do want you to have in your minds.

Now of course, so far I have been talking about finance, but there are other elements no less important - perhaps in the long university view much more important, and they are these.

First of all, to preserve and improve the essential nature of a university. This needs to be thought about much more than it is by some people who have the advantage of not being

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Johnny-come-latelies. The essential nature of a university - to maintain and improve the standards of teaching, of research and of intellectual leadership - these are the things for which a great university like our own stands and must stand.

Now, Sir, what is the essential nature of a university? Well, in the first place, if I may repeat a truism, we must aim at some balance between the natural science and the humanities. I repeat that. It needs to be repeated quite a lot. We have had an awful lot of science in this century, a tremendous amount of technology in this century. The only way in which the world has failed in this century is by man's inhumanity to man, and therefore the humanities, which give breadth of outlook, a wisdom of judgment, are of the most supreme importance. There it is - the balance.

In the second place, Sir, I think that the essential nature of a university involves a high standard of attainment leading to a widespread recognition of the degrees that the university awards, a high standard of attainment. You might fill Australia with a hundred universities, but if their standards were low, their degrees would fall into contempt. It is vital to me - and to you - in this university, that the degrees of the Melbourne university should continue to rate high all around the world, and that means a high standard of attainment.

We must have post-graduate and research work on a scale which will improve the peaks of attainment. I don't talk about the ordinary average level, but every university, every seat of learning that has distinction has achieved it not infrequently by having men of immense distinction, women of immense distinction in the various faculties. These are the peaks. We are not to produce a flat graph, are we? We are to produce one interrupted by peaks of distinction. We must have work of that kind which excites the minds of undergraduates. It is not a matter of just going through as a matter of routine, "Well, I have to read this and I have to read that. If I can get 50-odd per cent., I'm through." This is terrible. The best kind of undergraduate ought to be a man or woman whose mind is excited, and it will be excited if the student is working under or in direct or remote contact with people of an immense standard in the post-graduate and research field.

And, of course, on top of that, a university must serve to generate much-needed teachers to satisfy the future demands of the students who are to come. Now this is not so much a definition of the essential nature of a university. I don't profess that it is at all exhaustive, but what I have mentioned refers to those matters which achieved will make a great university and which not achieved will make a poor one.

I think, Sir, that it is unwise for these reasons to treat as universities institutions which fall short of these requirements. That is why we have, as a government, in the light of the Martin Report offered to support institutes of colleges up to a tertiary diploma standard. It is just because we believe that you can't lower the standards, that you can't have things passing as universities which are not universities according to the defined structure that we ought to move carefully in this field.

Encouragingly, the more tertiary education we have in the country the better, but it doesn't need, of necessity, to be university education in the sense in which we understand it. It's a great pity for people to think there is no middle course, that it is either a university or it's nothing. There is plenty of room, as the Martin Committee pointed out, to have tertiary institutions which will give most valuable instruction in the tertiary field but which will not be universities.

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Now, Sir Leslie Martin, in this last report - a very long, carefully considered, valuable report, with some aspects of which we haven't found ourselves able to agree - has had much to say of supreme value in this field, and having exposed the problem more or less as I tried to expose it to you myself, the Report says :-

> "To assist in this development, it is suggested that each State Government should establish an Institute of Colleges."

and then later on -

> "The function.... should be..... to consider general plans for the expansion of technical and other tertiary non-university education...."

and then later on it says, looking forward very appropriately -

> "At some appropriate time in the future, the Institute might arrange for more advanced training leading to degrees such as Bachelor of Technology..."

> "The Committee's proposals envisage a greater diversity of tertiary education in Australia, but any hope of achieving this diversity would be nullified if Colleges attempted to transform themselves into Universities. The responsibilities of Colleges to the community are of a different kind."

Now that is worth thinking about. It is very easy for somebody who is a little parti pris on some matter to say, "Oh, yes, but there is such-and-such a technical school and it does very good work." Of course it does. The R.M.I.T. does splendid work and has tertiary elements in its courses. I don't deny it. I admire it. But the thing that is brought to our notice here is that a university is one thing. It has some essential structure which we are not to forget. And that a non-university which may still be in the tertiary field can be an entirely different thing. And the Committee, I thought with great wisdom, promoted ways and means by which somebody having done some course, a diploma course in one of these colleges in the institutes of colleges, might pass from there to a university in order to take a higher course and take a degree.

Now, we are not going to settle this problem in a few minutes. All I am asking you to do is to think about it, and I start my thinking with two premises - one, I want to see an enormous extension in this country of genuine post-secondary education. I will define tertiary education in that sense - genuine post-secondary education leading to higher skills of the kind that people need both in industry and in business and in other aspects of life, and I don't want to see the great name, university, pulled down, I don't want to see its standards lowered, I don't want to see bodies or institutions called universities which are not according to the structure that I have described. And believe me, ladies and gentlemen, this is not a matter of intellectual snobbery. We have lived too long for that kind of nonsense. There can be no room for intellectual snobbery. There can be room only for a high intellectual standard which ought to be maintained.

And that brings me to the last thing I wanted to say to you and that is that the greatest problem of the lot today is the problem of standards, maintaining the standards, not letting them

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slip away, not letting them be swept away in the flood of numbers. These are hard words I know in some sense, but standards are all. If in fifty years' time the standard is no higher than it is now, then it will be worthless. Standards ought to rise and rise all the time.

I had something to say about this when I was invited by the University of New South Wales to do the Wallace Wurth Memorial Lecture. Do you mind if I quote you a few lines of what I then said? I had longer to consider them than I have had this time. I quoted first of all the Robbins Report in England which said this :-

> "Throughout our Report we have assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so. What type of education they should get and in what kind of institution are questions we consider later on; and the criterion by which capacity is to be judged is clearly a question on which there may be a variety of opinions. But, on the general principle as we have stated it, we hope there will be little dispute."

That's what the Robbins Committee had to say. And then when I was discussing this in the Wurth Lecture, I went on to say this - and again I trespass on your patience :-

> "Far too many people in our country, when they urge the creation of a new university, seem to think of it in terms of financial provision by governments, and the bricks and mortar of practical construction. Yet the fact is that the value of a university depends primarily upon the standard of its research and its teaching. In short, the greatest problem about the expansion of universities, or the creation of a new one, is that of securing a highly-qualified staff. Any man who has any share of responsibility for the general national balance and prosperity cannot fail to be conscious of such problems as the pressure of numbers on financial resources, the pressure of numbers and demand on physical resources, because these things form part of the economic problems of the nation. They have to be considered. They can produce some limitation upon the financial provision by governments. But, in the ultimate, the capacity to establish new universities or to expand old ones is primarily to be judged by reference to the maintenance of the quality of research and teaching and the value of the degrees to be awarded.
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> "Gresham's Law, if I may say so, applies to universities and their degrees just as much as it did and does to money. In short, we have occurring under our eyes a tremendous explosion in the number of those who seek tertiary education. Our task is to see that they get it without lowering the standards.
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> "Unless we can, by one means or another, encourage and produce an increasing percentage of university students who aim at higher degrees and research work, then we will do a gross disservice to university education by concentrating our minds exclusively on numbers and on money."

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Now these were my views, and as I stated them I don't alter them but I was interested recently to read the journal of the Royal Society of Arts, an eminently respectable body in London of which, for some reason quite obscure to me, I am Fellow. Sir John Lockwood of the University of London was speaking on tertiary education in the Cantor Lectures. Now I will quote a little of him, if you don't mind :-

> "I want first of all to discuss one of the major issues which is being faced by many countries of the world. Social theory in most places insists on the essential importance of equal educational opportunity for all young people. The consequential logic of such theory seems then to require that consumer demand is the basis of educational provision. For entry to higher education, this principle would appear to mean that anyone who has satisfactorily completed a particular period of secondary education should have the right of access to some form of higher education.
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> American State Universities have largely followed this principle, and in areas where the American practice has been developed, for example in the Philippines ....."

(I speak subject to the distinguished representative here from Mindanao)

> "admissions and policies of universities are much the same. The effect on a university of indiscriminate expansion to satisfy demand is incalculable. Educational inflation may be socially desirable as a theoretical proposition but it has an insidious capacity to do damage to the currency value of education."

Now I quote that. It's worth thinking about. Without adopting it all, it is very well worth thinking about. And he went on to say, a few minutes later in his lecture -

> "To the economist....."

Well, I don't venture to speak for economists. They speak for themselves with an infinite variety of tongues, but -

> "To the economist, a full 'open-door' policy to meet 'consumer demand' is well-nigh stupid folly. It is the very negation of wise and constructive planning. It takes no real account of the needs of the economy. It is based on the self-interest of the consumer, and, if uncontrolled, leads to an output of graduates who may not find employment within their own specialist competence. India was an unfortunate example of this situation."

And I should add to that without adopting all those words that it is fascinating to read of what has been going on in the African countries about universities, about the conferences they have had and about the way in which they are trying to channel university education in such a way as to serve the overall interests of the nation. Very interesting; very difficult; much too complex to be gone into tonight.

The Chairman of the meeting at which Sir John Lockwood made this speech was Mr. Walter James, who is the Editor of the "Times" Education Supplement, and he said something quite provocative and worth thinking about. He said -

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> "There is one point I should like to put to him (that is, the speaker) about the relation between a rapidly-expanding university system and schools in the developed countries. (A good deal has been said about the under-developed countries.) Does he think that you can expand the universities rapidly without bringing a certain diminution of standards in the schools? I have heard from a number of English people who have gone to America the assertion that the sort of people we should find teaching in sixth form in this country are, in general, not teaching in American schools at all, but in American universities."

Now this may be an exaggerated statement - I don't know - but it does serve, as do the last two citations that I made, to bring back into our minds the kind of problem that we have. Not a problem to be ignored, not a problem to be dismissed by being told that you are old-fashioned or something of the kind - I'm not a bit old-fashioned on this business. My life has devoted itself for years to the development of education in this country. Nothing old-fashioned about it. It's mostly been brand new. But I think we would do badly by getting into our minds the idea that all you want is a lot of money and all you want is a lot of builder's labourers and building material and you can create a university. We must get that out of our minds.

You could have the finest buildings in the world, with all the greatest facilities in the world and have a third-rate university. You could have the most shocking buildings and a great university. It depends entirely on the people inside and how they look at it and the people who teach and the people who investigate and the people who work, and the great object of modern statesmanship is to reconcile the two things - to have the best people, the keenest people, the most enthusiastic people doing research, doing teaching, giving leadership to their students, have them all in that sense and combine with them buildings in which they will be proud to work and live and surroundings which will give them happy memories in future years.