

OPENING OF THE MILLS CROSS RADIO TELESCOPE

HOSKINSTOWN, N.S.W.

19TH NOVEMBER, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

Chancellor, Mr. Ambassador, Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen :

I think I ought to begin by congratulating the Vice-Chancellor on the astonishing fact that although he was taught Latin in the same place as myself, he has since acquired, in the reading of it, an Italian accent. (Laughter)

Another thing I would like to say to you; it has been coming into my mind steadily, while all these people who have preceded me have stolen the thunder. It was said of the late Sir Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of Australia and later on a distinguished Justice of the High Court of Australia, that he usually said, when the Chief Justice had spoken: "I concur" and this was held to be a great proof of idleness on his part. It wasn't. He very frequently wrote a judgment himself of some significance, but having heard it delivered in substance by the Chief Justice, he had enough wit to say, "I concur." And I am jolly well tempted to follow his example. I could easily wind this up adequately by saying, "I concur; I declare the Cross open", but I won't go quite so far as that, but the thing kept beating into my mind.

It was said by you, Sir, although you know far more about scientific matters than I do, that you didn't understand what it was about. Well I could help you on that. This is perfectly simple. It's rather a long-winded way of listening in to what's going on upstairs, you see. As I understand it, that's the whole secret of this matter, that when you want to listen in to what is going on above and you want to probe the recesses of one of the galaxies, particularly Professor Bok's favourite galaxy, all you do is to go along and get somebody like Professor Mills and say, "This is what I want to do. Fix it up." Hey presto, here it is. That is a summarised account of this enterprise. But I, like you Sir, will never understand it. I think when politicians start to make it their business to understand the last subtleties of physical science, that will be the end of good politics and the beginning of an awful lot of bad scientists in office. (Laughter)

But the outstanding feature today, apart from these very important matters Mr. Foley has described so admirably, the great thing today is that this is a splendid example of co-operation in the field of science between the greatest and most powerful country in the world and one of the smallest in relative terms in the world. Getting near 200M in the United States, 11M. in Australia, but I have more than once taken comfort from the fact - I referred to it on one or two occasions in the United States, Mr. Ambassador - that when that great man and species of genius, Thomas Jefferson, first became President of the United States, the population of the United States was 5M. - one-half of the number which we now have in Australia and yet, quality being more important than quantity, on the basis of that relatively small population, we've seen the most tremendous developments in modern history, and therefore in Australia we are not going to be too downcast by the fact that the population is only 11M. It is increasing very satisfactorily. We are not going to be downcast about it because there are two things that

count. One is quality and this you must have yourselves and develop yourselves, and the other is a spirit of co-operation with all other people in the same field so that knowledge becomes shared. These two factors are both illustrated today.

After all, Mr. Ambassador, your great country and mine have a certain parallelism in their history. On a recent occasion, a year or two ago, I made what was supposed to be a powerful speech at Monticello, celebrating Thomas Jefferson, and I took occasion to remind all those present that the Declaration of Independence in the United States created two new countries - one was yours and one was mine. This was literally true, because as the result of the Declaration of Independence, the export of convicted persons from England to the United States - what is now the United States - came to an end, and they had to be sent somewhere, and with unerring skill, they selected Sydney. (Laughter, applause). So that's how it all began.

I have also had occasion to remind the people of Great Britain when I have spoken there that they don't need to be too superior about the fact that some convicted persons were sent to Australia and some convicted persons sent to the United States because the statistical records show conclusively that the majority of people convicted over that period remained in England. (Laughter)

And so, Sir, our two nations began their story by a similar cause, in the technical sense, quite early in the piece and at the same time. But think of what we have in common with the United States. A lot of people are always looking for some rather improper motive. The imputation of motive is one of the commonest of human failings. And we are told that we, of course, are friendly with the United States because they are great and powerful and they will defend us. Well they are great and they are powerful, and I think they will defend us, but this is the lowest possible level on which to put our association.

The truth is that we are friends because we have ideas in common, we have traditions in common, we have the same instincts, cultivated instincts in common, we both believe in the same kind of world and are determined to make our own contribution to making it a better one. These are great foundations for friendship, and here today we have the perfect example of how this works out. This....I almost said King's Cross....I don't want to steal that from Professor Messel. He seems to me to have got everything else. But this great instrument of science is itself, as we have been reminded, a product of association between Cornell University so famous in this field and the University of Sydney, the oldest university in Australia, a university, the founders of which, 125 years ago, would have been staggered to think that things of this kind could happen as a result of activities in which their university was taking a part.

Now, Sir, I don't want to talk to you any longer. You haven't failed to notice there are a lot of flies. This is not proof that we are in New South Wales. It rather suggests that we are in Canberra where we specialise on flies. I remember one time during Mr. Lyons' Government we were all taken out on to the lawn in front of Parliament House and photographed, movie camera, to be put on the movies on Saturday night. And Mr. Lyons kept introducing us one at a time. Mr. Hughes,

the late Mr. Hughes, was among us, and we were all photographed doing this.... (Laughter) The scientists hadn't got busy at that time producing maladorous things that ruin your clothes and are supposed to keep the flies away. We were all standing there, doing this, you see, and on the way back to the House, little Billy Hughes took me by the arm and looked up at me - he had to physically, at any rate - and I said, "That ought to look rather impressive, do you think, on Saturday night?" "Oh," he said, "don't be funny. When they look at that, they'll nudge each other and they'll say, 'Bill we've been had.'"

Sir, it's a great occasion. I won't prolong your troubles. I'm very honoured to be here, very delighted to be allowed to come on to strange territory for this purpose. I wish the whole enterprise well; I acknowledge the tremendous support that has been given by the Nuclear Foundation. We have heard a little about it from Mr. Foley who is among its most active people, but this has been a splendid example of co-operation between the business world, not notably scientific in its own right any more than we are as politicians, but between the business world, the scientific world, the university world. This kind of association of this type must go on and on in Australia until every university is not only a source of the receipt of funds but is creating a community of its own and making itself part of the overall community of the country. This, I think, will argue the best results and the brightest future.

Sir, retrospectively I say: I concur. I declare the Cross open.

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