

FOUNDATION STONE CEREMONY AT ROYAL MELBOURNE



INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

Mr Wood, Mr Anderson, the Hon Lindsay Thompson, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, students :

I was interested in what you had to say about our talks last week. I thought I was coming to a much friendlier atmosphere here this afternoon, but what you have said in your introductory remarks underlines the fact that, quite apart from what the Commonwealth Government is doing by way of reimbursement grants and in other direct payments to the States, - we are - and this project is concrete evidence of it, literally concrete evidence of it - we are contributing financially in other important ways. And of course when I say "we", I speak as the representative of the Commonwealth Government, but we really should include those people throughout the Commonwealth, whether they are in one State or another, who are contributing by their tax payments to the revenues of the Commonwealth which in turn in one form or another find some of their way, at any rate, into the activities of the States.

As you were saying, this particular historic college has come a very long way in the eighty years since Francis Ormond assisted it to develop with a grant of £11,000. In those days financial objectives were much more limited than we find at this time.

It is appropriate that the first function of this sort which I should attend as Prime Minister should be in substance the largest project of its kind that has been undertaken under this new programme of aid for advanced education purposes. This is one of the two largest building projects of its kind in Australia. The other one is in Sydney. But taking the money provided for this project, together with the funds the Commonwealth and State provide for recurrent expenditure, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology is by far the largest recipient of funds within the advanced education programme.

You get some idea of how Commonwealth provision has grown over recent years when I tell you that from 1961 when our expenditure on education was of the order of \$45 million, mainly for universities, it has grown to \$150 million in the financial year just closed, 1966/67, which more than trebles the 1960/61 contribution. Of course the provision for the years immediately ahead is considerably greater even than that very large figure. Inside these expenditures are important new areas of assistance, notably that made to the colleges of advanced education. Perhaps more important though than the rate of building and the growth of the student body to which you have referred, Mr Wood, is the quality of the College itself, and its reputation and standing in the community. Your college can claim the highest standard in its own field in the Commonwealth of Australia.

The prime purpose of Commonwealth assistance is to enable the standards of these colleges of advanced education to be raised, where indeed they need raising, to the level where they provide a genuine alternative to the university. They will differ from the universities, but they should by no means be inferior to them. As I read through a list of some of the

distinguished graduates taking their diplomas from these advanced colleges of education, I found some of the most notable names in the industrial and academic life of this country.

From this College alone, you could point in the academic field to Professor Gordon Brown, Professor in Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor Freeland, Professor of Architecture at N.S.W. University. In industry, Mr. Weichhardt, Chairman of Directors of I.C.I., Sir Ian Beaurepaire of Olympics, Mr Hans Ernst, Managing Director of the Cincinnati Machine Tool Company and Mr Perrett who is, of course, one of our outstanding architects. In the Public Service, Mr G. F. Browne, Chairman of the Victorian Railways Commissioners, Dr Lennox, Chief of the CSIRO Wool Testing Authority, Dr Symons of the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, Dr Grose, of Defence Science Laboratories and Dr Cawsey also with our Defence Science Laboratories. From other Colleges than RMIT, Sir Maurice Mawby, one of our distinguished leaders in the mineral field, and Professor Warner, an authority in the metallurgical field.

Now when I recite names of that order of distinction as the product of colleges such as this, then the point is made that those who come from these colleges can make for themselves a place in the life of the community in no way inferior from those who come from our universities. Indeed the practical knowledge which usually accompanies the work in a college such as this is becoming increasingly appreciated.

I find myself, as with advancing years my eyesight tends to weaken, that I am taking an increasing interest in the products of industrial design. Considering such mundane items as the bathroom, the stove, even wrist watches and matters of that sort, I have come to the conclusion that most of these are designed by alert, keen-eyed young men and women who have yet to experience some difficulties which those of us have reached a more advanced stage of life experience.

I don't know why we can't standardize, for example, on a red dot for hot water and a green dot for cold water, particularly when one has to grope through the mists of the bathroom, or when one travels abroad and they alter the initials in accordance with the description of hot or cold in that particular country. And occasionally when I try to prepare a modest breakfast myself down at the seaside, I find that I have to dart for the glasses these days because the signs on the stove aren't clear enough to tell me whether it is on or off or medium or high or low, and matters of that sort.

So I do urge that whatever care is given to the theoretical side of studies - and I expect to have a more responsive chord to strike in an organisation such as this than perhaps in one of the universities - that the practical outcome from those studies will always be borne in mind. It is all very well to study the humanities but the theories to be applied to the humanities must at some stage be put into practical terms for the human beings in relation to which the humanities are expressed. It surprises me that in so much of industrial design the practical application of what is intended for a mass of people tends to be lost sight of in the theoretical applications by a person having his own idea, perhaps, of what is wanted rather than visualising the needs of the community as a whole.

But perhaps I may briefly outline what we in the Commonwealth and our Advisory Committees see as the distinctive features of the colleges of advanced education.

I would name them as a wide range of courses to provide a broad educational basis and cross-fertilisation of ideas; a substantial proportion of tertiary students; standards of building and services, which can stand equal to those to be found amongst the best in the world; emphasis on new teaching techniques; the development of liberal studies both as an essential ingredient in all courses and as new courses in their own right, and in making references to liberal studies, I am making no particular allusion of course, to any political movement in the country; their difference from the universities in their emphasis on vocational and applied courses; the part-time students; teaching rather than research; and a close association with industry and commerce.

As I met members of your Council a little earlier, it was quite obvious from what I knew of their activities that you have managed to maintain that close association amongst leaders in their own field of industry and commerce with the work of the RMIT.

As part of the plan to raise standards, quite apart from the much larger sums to be provided for buildings and recurrent expenditures, the Commonwealth is making available for the triennium 1967/69 special unmatched grants of a quarter of a million dollars for research in advanced education, and of half a million for library books and materials in colleges of advanced education. Without wearying you too much with statistics, let me just summarise by saying that from 1965/69, the Commonwealth expects to contribute to advanced education and technical training the following totals: To all States \$36.6 million; to Victoria \$22.2 million, to RMIT alone approximately \$6 million. This \$6 million reflects a total State and Commonwealth programme of some \$13.9 million. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that in Victoria, for some reason of historical development, we find that the diploma student population of colleges in this State now totals upwards of 68 per cent. of the total Australian enrolment. In addition to the diploma students there are large numbers of individual trade or craft students.

Now you have another distinction. You are the only Australian college of advanced education to have a Royal Charter. Yours is the oldest college in Melbourne. Ballarat I understand is the only older Victorian college. You were founded at much the same time as our public schools and the Melbourne University.

Reflecting on the burst of education activity about the time when you were founded, perhaps there is a parallel in that we are now seeing again a similar age of expansion in education. New universities of advanced education; new emphasis on science education; a quickened awareness of the importance of training our most valuable asset, the young people of our community. The Commonwealth has played a significant and, I hope you will feel, an imaginative part in this new emphasis on education. Nevertheless, we have continued to recognise and act on the basis that the States have the primary responsibility for education.

In referring to the new emphasis we have given to it in our Commonwealth role, I must pay a tribute to my predecessor, whose drive gave so much lift to the programme and also to my colleague, the first Commonwealth Minister for Education, Senator Gorton, who is bringing so much energy and enthusiasm to his tasks.

In the Department of Labour and National Service, my colleague, Mr. Bury has been active in the work of the Productivity Committees and in the programme of training of apprentices encouraged by that Department. In other fields - in our Australian National University - the new university we

are establishing in Papua and New Guinea - you get further evidence of this Commonwealth activity.

It is not often recognised how much we are now spending on education. I gave these figures earlier and mentioned that the total would be increasing very rapidly. But it is rather interesting to note that payments to the States, the colleges of advanced education, the universities, the science laboratories and teacher training in the financial year ahead of us will have increased from \$22m. to \$115m. or roughly an increase in that one year of 40 per cent. The grants for colleges of advanced education in the new financial year will be more than double the grants of the last financial year. We are of course spending a great deal on education in our own fields of responsibility, partly by way of assistance to students under the various scholarships schemes, and partly in our own territories. Mr Thompson may be interested to know that the Commonwealth's payments to the States for education are increasing at a significantly faster rate than the Commonwealth payments for its own immediate responsibilities. A recognition I believe of our growing support of the States in their programmes.

Now, the importance the Commonwealth is placing on colleges of advanced education is evident from the percentages I have just given. In the words of my colleague, Senator Gorton, they are to be treated in the important field of capital development in all respects as universities as to standards, priorities and so on.

Why is the Commonwealth providing this assistance? We believe in the importance of giving our young people a chance to develop themselves for their full potential. We believe that in these colleges there is a genuine alternative to the universities on which insufficient importance has been placed in the past. We value the wide range of courses the colleges offer, the cross-fertilisation of ideas they encourage, we value the emphasis they place on the inclusion of these liberal studies in technical training. And we value the emphasis they place on vocational and applied courses which fit their students well for playing their important roles in industry and commerce.

These are the features of education which the colleges of advanced education emphasise, and which the Commonwealth, in partnership with the States, hopes to promote. Of them the RMIT is a notable example. But much of the value of these colleges will be lost if the general public is not made aware of their existence as a genuine alternative to the universities, and if people are not given every encouragement to use them.

As to your new project, this is the first and largest of those being undertaken under the Commonwealth \$24 million capital assistance programme for the 1967/69 triennium. Your 8-acre site is in a unique situation. I believe the project will take you up twelve storeys high, and it is being redeveloped under an ambitious scheme which should result in more unoccupied ground space by 1974, combined with three times the amount of floor space. It is estimated - unless they have gone up since these notes were prepared for me - to cost \$30 million over a ten-year period. I thought there was a rather ominous ring about your comment, Mr. Wood - this building is the first step.

The Commonwealth has committed itself during the present and past triennium to assistance of \$2.6 million towards the project, to be matched by a State grant, and already to a further \$360,000 unmatched out of its \$10 million grant to State technical colleges. They are also providing

substantial funds to the RMIT for recurrent expenditure over \$3 million during the 1967/69 triennium. Without this assistance from the Commonwealth and State Governments, it would not have been possible for the Institute to develop these buildings and to cope with the enormous increase in student population for which you are now preparing.

The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Colleges of Advanced Education in its report to the Government during 1966, commented that it has found this type of education going on too often in old gaols and breweries. Well, you should be doing a good deal better than that, Mr. Wood. The Commonwealth/State programme of \$48 million during the coming triennium for capital projects is evidence of the serious and determined approach by both national and State Governments in partnership with the problem. The new building to be erected on this historic site will be evidence in concrete and steel of the outcome of our endeavours.

But, as I said earlier, perhaps I should fittingly close on this. While we will see a massive project in terms of concrete and steel, it is in the quality of the student body and the achievements which they are able to carry out in these buildings, in the maintenance of the splendid tradition which marks the RMIT as an outstanding example of what can be achieved in the advanced education field that we will count the results in the years to come from the financial provisions we are now undertaking to make. It is in the hope that there will be added important new and significant chapters in the distinguished history of the RMIT that I now have pleasure in formally laying the trowel or whatever the phrase is. I saw the size of it a moment ago. I felt I should have got a union ticket out before I took hold of it. It will serve as a useful implement for the next Premiers' Conference if for nothing else!
