

CANBERRA COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATIONUNVEILING OF FOUNDATION STONECANBERRA, A. C. T.28 OCTOBER 1968Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be asked to unveil the plaque and I have no doubt that in due time I'll be told precisely what string to pull in order to do it.

This is one of the most satisfying tasks that I could imagine myself undertaking, because the unveiling of this plaque is an indication that we are really moving in building the first Canberra College of Advanced Education and that College represents a significant new approach to tertiary education.

If I may say so, the occasion is of special significance to me, and satisfaction to me, because I remember not so long ago carrying out a function which was called turning the first sod on the site. This involved, not as you might imagine using a spade, but using some vast mechanical contraption which took a sod weighing some four cubic yards, if I remember rightly, and which at all times I felt was liable to get completely out of control. But I remember that well and if I may say so, Sir, the flies were just as bad on that occasion as they are today.

I don't claim any proprietary rights in this college. It falls within the jurisdiction of my colleague the Minister for Education and Science, and all the hard work and planning has been done by the Interim Council of the college under your leadership. But it is a symbol. It's the beginning of new things in the A. C. T. and the beginning of new things throughout the whole of the nation.

It is worth restating, I think, on this occasion what it is that we are starting here. We're starting an institution, one of many, which has flowed from the acceptance of those reports to which you referred, Mr. Chairman. Those reports suggested that we should tailor our tertiary education system to meet the demands of an exciting, changing age and to meet the requirements of the tide of the future which has caught us up and which is going to require of us new schools and new approaches to education.

I think most of us here would be familiar with the reports of the various committees - the Martin Committee, the Wark Committee and the Burton Committee - and we will know some of the special functions which these colleges have to carry out. But let us be fair about one thing right from the start, and let us make it clear right from the start, to all those interested in education throughout Australia. These colleges will not be second level universities.

Collectively they will provide an alternative system - but not an inferior system - to university education. I will repeat that - an alternative system but not an inferior system to university education. Each college of the many that will grow or have grown throughout the nation will have its own standards, quality and its own levels of efficiency. Each will be a tertiary institution with a strong vocational bias, as you said, offering courses leading to professional excellence in selected disciplines. And the colleges will aim to provide scholarship, not only for the sake of scholarship, which was the genesis of university education, but to meet specific needs of industry and of human endeavour in specific specialised areas. This is where the college courses will differ from the courses at our universities - not all the courses of our universities but very many of them.

The first building here is, as you said, to be a multi-purpose building and if all goes well, the students will be here at the beginning of 1970. I was glad, Sir, that you mentioned that the request of the Interim Council of the college that it be allowed to plan for the inclusion of teacher education has been accepted, at least in principle. When firm proposals, which I think have not yet been made, are received, they will be studied by us with great care and interest, and I hope and believe with the same results as have led to the plans for the college itself.

At any rate, a school of teacher education within the Canberra College will add to the pool of trained teachers within Australia, for use within Australia or the Territories, and indeed provide teachers for local schools.

Liberal Studies is one of the first courses which this college will offer. And I want to stress this, because a deliberate infusion of the liberal arts into a system which is essentially vocational and which many people seem to think will be extremely technical, is of first importance.

This infusion is designed to ensure that human values are not lost in a world of machines or the classics abandoned for calculus and computers. I don't see at all why humanists and technologists have to be different people or take different approaches to the problems of their lives or of the nation. What we aim to produce here, of course, is a new "end product" - a liberally-educated technologist, or, if I may put it another way, without upsetting my distinguished colleague, a technologically-educated liberal.

I believe, Sir, we must develop these colleges in a way which will give us plenty of flexibility; adapt the system to the changes now bearing down upon us - changes in environment, in social attitudes, in the application of science and technology. . . . changes which have a greater intensity about them now than we have experienced at any past time in the history of this country.

If we are to reach for the stars, then we must reach for them with trained minds and skilled hands.

One more thing, Sir, I would say. This college now is being built in open country, yet within measurable time, within a short time, there will be around it the new town of Belconnen. And I hope that this college will stand in that town as one example of an Australian Government's active interest and continuing interest in education. This college is being built to meet a demand in the Capital Territory, but that demand is reflected across the whole of this continent.

No doubt, the college will develop its own traditions as the years go by. You can't merely vest tradition in new things. You can't confer tradition like a diploma or a degree, or whatever it is you decide to confer. You have to let it grow from the quality of its courses and the capacity of its staff and students.

But I am certain that if the beginnings of this college are built upon in the future with the same devotion, with the same skill, as has been used in the past, that the tradition this college will develop will be second to none of any tertiary institution in Australia.

Sir, here, and again in colleges like it throughout Australia, we are going to see people being educated not merely for the 20th but for the 21st century, which we are rapidly approaching. And I believe that what may happen in that 21st century will largely be shaped by the products of these colleges, of universities acting jointly to provide that which this nation needs - a liberal education, scholarship for its own sake, a searching mind, a capacity to understand new things, a capacity to apply technology and an insistence that technology so applied be applied for the good of all and not for destruction.

So this is an important occasion; this is for me a satisfying occasion and for all those who have given their work and their minds and their time, I trust that it too is a highly satisfactory occasion.
