



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY - 30 JULY 1976

Mr President, Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your hospitality today. My wife and I have had a wonderful time in the last few days in the United States. We have been kept a little bit too busy I think perhaps, but that may be our fault more than the fault of other people. I would also like to pay tribute to Professor Manning Clark who conducted a number of the initial discussions with the University concerning today's occasion, in the formative stages, and Professor Derham who at the last moment and I know quite well at some inconvenience to himself and his wife, came here to be present at this occasion as Chairman of the Friends of Harvard Committee which will be associated with the Chair.

The Bicentennial of the American Nation provides a fitting occasion for the endowment of a Chair in Australian studies at this University.

For Australia was the un-intended offspring of your War of Independence. And I have been advised already this morning that in the Treasure Room of the Harvard Law School library there is a copy of an American edition of The Trial of Thomas Muir for sedition, for circulating Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" in the wrong places. And so he was sentenced to be transported for 14 years and sent to Botany Bay, as many other good people were sent with him. He was later rescued by an American ship, and after many adventures he died in France at a later period. So, an unintended offspring of the American Revolution returns to celebrate your Bicentenary.

But the connections between the history of our two countries extend far beyond our origins. They encompass the political and social ideals that have guided the development of both our societies.

The ideals inspiring your Founding Fathers had a direct impact on the development of democratic government in Australia. Your great revolution was one of the powerful forces that 75 years later helped the Australian Colonies to become self governing and to manage their own affairs within a highly democratic political framework.

Your revolution occurred in an age of intellectual ferment when men such as Locke and later Montesquieu, Rousseau and Hume were seeking to apply logic and reason to understanding man and his institutions. Harvard is amongst the foremost of the institutions embodying this tradition of logical enquiry.

It is a tradition, of course, in which Australians have shared, and to which we have made our own contribution.

What we need now, more than ever, is knowledge that is of positive value to man in increasing his understanding of the world, of himself. Our education needs to impart not only technical skills, it needs to impart a quality of judgement. The great challenge to educators is to combine the teaching of skills with that broader understanding. The view that the best education need not be relevant, even on a broad definition of relevance, condemns us to failure in our efforts to cope with a fast changing world.

Mr President, this Chair should certainly help to extend further understanding between Australia and the United States.

I hope also that the work which will be done through this Chair will address itself, in part, to some of the major issues that must concern people in both our countries.

Mr President, I would like to take the opportunity offered by the endowment of the Chair to speak a little about challenges which I believe both our countries face and about the contribution I hope the academic world can make to meeting them.

Modern science has given mankind great power and great strength. But it is evident that our knowledge and our human skills in using that power have not increased commensurately.

In this world political leaders are being asked to resolve the problems of societies undergoing rapid change. New and insistent demands are made upon them.

Old issues - issues with which your Founding Fathers were familiar - are now facing us again. Once more we are concerned with the relationship of our people to their institutions. We are once again debating how to reconcile effective government with the liberty (or as it is frequently now put) the autonomy of the individual.

I would like to elaborate on one or two of the issues related to these matters. While they particularly concern the politician, universities will fail in their role if they do not make an important contribution to dealing with them. The issue I want to mention quite directly is related to the role of universities.

Our education process has been designed to encourage people to think for themselves, to question, to search, to reach their own conclusions.

It is not at all surprising that our people, as never before are questioning their leaders and their institutions.

In these circumstances we need to ask ourselves, as we never have before, how we maintain the cohesion, the unity, the vitality, of democratic societies and the effectiveness of democratic government.

We preach independence and diversity, but there is also an essential unity without which any society will fall.

At the time of your revolution and in the two centuries since, the problem of achieving unity out of diversity was largely the problem of welding of different states, regions, ethnic groups, into one nation. These same issues have concerned us, though less forcefully, in Australia.

Today the problem has a new dimension. We are not talking merely about regions and communities. We are talking about individuals' demands for respect for their own views, their own consciences, against the larger society and its institutions. We are now talking about cultures, attitudes and ideas, which are becoming increasingly diverse.

Government, to be effective, must earn the respect of the people. In the age I have been describing this respect is more difficult to earn than in the past. How to achieve it is one of the most important issues of our time.

That takes me to the second issue that I would like to mention.

In order that people may have the maximum scope to decide for themselves the kind of lives they will lead, they must be prepared to accept certain restraints.

It is true that people's ultimate obligations are to their own consciences. But that does not mean that one is entitled to ignore laws with which one merely does not agree. Such an attitude destroys the effectiveness of our institutions and the possibility of effective social reform. Laws after all flow from institutions which though admittedly imperfect are the best form of government yet devised.

Without the acceptance of such obligations people may become frustrated and disillusioned with the democratic processes and institutions, and their frustrations could ultimately feed the ambitions of those who seek undemocratic solutions to our problems.

That is why the practice of freedom and the acknowledgement of social and political obligations go hand in hand. There needs to be a recognition that some freedom must be forgone to expand our capacity to enjoy freedom.

And here we come to a striking paradox. Not only is this an age when people are demanding greater personal freedom, it is also an age when the demands on government constantly increase. In order to meet these demands governments almost inevitably tend to dispose of more of a nation's resources and to further regulate people's affairs.

In Australia there has been for decades an inexorable move of financial power to the Central Government, destroying the independent capacities of State Governments and making the States subservient to the centre.

My Government has begun to implement a major reform of our federal arrangements designed to restore a large measure of financial independence to the States and to expand the financial base of local Governments so that they can respond effectively to problems they recognise in their own communities.

The capacity of Government to assess problems accurately and to take into account people's judgement of their own needs is essential to effective social reform. More than ever such sensitivity is required to foster respect for our institutions. We are all aware that some approaches to social reform do more harm than good. Effective government

action requires a deep awareness of how that action will be seen and evaluated by our increasingly active and informed citizens.

So often people have sought to solve social problems merely by spending money, so often that is only a small part of what is needed. Many problems are related much more to the capacity of people to adapt to a complex society. A solution that relies on providing funds but does little to encourage the capacity to cope with problems can be a most damaging response to genuine need.

Our institutions can only maintain respect if people can achieve their legitimate aspirations within them in a democratic and peaceful way; if reason and argument can lead to effective reform.

We have to make sure that our institutions are as responsive as possible to the needs of those they affect.

Preventing these institutions from becoming over-powerful requires not only legal and constitutional restraints but also a recognition on their part that they have broader obligations to the wider community.

The contribution of the universities on this continuing issue will have an important effect on the response of other organisations of many different kinds.

And that brings me finally to the challenge to democratic leadership in the kind of world our universities are helping to create.

Despite the problems I have been discussing it is obvious that democratic political institutions have exhibited a remarkable capacity to adapt to change. Ultimately however institutions depend for their survival and respect on the quality of men who hold office within them.

The more rapid social change is, the more complex issues become, the more essential it is for democratic politicians to explain the problems they face clearly and realistically.

They in their turn need the tools for this task. They need the knowledge and understanding that it is in part a responsibility of universities to generate.

I have commented on the unparalleled burst of knowledge in the Physical Sciences and the unmatched power that they have placed in the hands of politicians. It seems man can do almost anything so long as it involves technology. But it is in our understanding of society that we are now desperately in need of new knowledge.

Scientific knowledge has placed unaparalld power in politicians' hands. Our capacity to see that it is used for good is scarcely better than it would have been if man had possessed that power two thousand years ago. Our criteria for judgement are still so often inappropriate to the circumstances. What does this say of the way in which we have pursued learning and understanding? What we need more than anything is an adequate recognition of ourselves.

To understand and respond to present and future challenges is a major task of politicians. The paradoxes of our time are great. The possibilities of our time are unlimited for advancing mankind through the use of our resources in humane and realistic ways.

We need to establish an environment in which respect for institutions and they way they operate, for the manner in which politicians go about their business, leads to moderation and reason in public debate, where violence and the extreme view are rejected, where rational argument can predominate. We need to have it understood that extreme ways of pursuing objectives degrade the spirit of our democratic institutions. We need it understood that progress and reform can be achieved through moderation, that democracy is strong when people deal rationally with each other, with compassion, and without hatred.

Universities do not exist in isolation from the larger society. The values they teach or assume, the knowledge they produce will profoundly affect the future, and the way in which politicians, too, will be able to carry out their task.

If the Chair endowed today can contribute something to this broader purpose Australia - all Australians - will be well satisfied indeed.

It gives me great pleasure, Mr President, to present the endowment for this Chair.