AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although my departure from the Commonwealth Parliament in 1957 is now a remote and distant recollection, I am grateful for the opportunity that this pause has given me to reflect upon many of the issues which were of interest to me during my period as a Senator for New South Wales. One of these opportunities is to be able to express a purely personal point of view on a number of defects of the system, brought about by the restraints and constraints of party politics and formal party policy. It should thus be clear from the outset that the views offered in this article are purely my own, and in no way represent or seek to represent the views of the Liberal Party, the Fraser Government or anybody else.

In commenting on the future of Australian universities in the society of the late twentieth century, I think it of some importance to explore the major historical factors which have shaped the political and educational debate about universities in this country. To my mind they are unique to Australia in a number of respects, and provide many of the explanations for the difficulties which I think that our universities have had, and will have increasingly, in their attempts to adjust to new social and political realities.

When the Murray Committee reported in 1957 it found it necessary to open its report with a long chapter entitled "The Story of Universities in the Community". This report set a great deal of the tone of subsequent discussion about universities, with its heavy emphasis upon universities as institutions designed to produce good citizens:

It is the function of the university to offer not merely a technical or specialised training but a true and true education, befitting a free man and a citizen of a free country. . . .

The good university must always aim to put out men and women who in spite of the differences in their outlooks and vocations can live harmoniously and use their specialisation upon universal interests as institutions as designed to produce good citizens:

... in addition to the two aims of education and research, universities have a third function. They are, or they should be, the guardians of intellectual standards, and intellectual integrity in the community . . .

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... it is not that it would be of much benefit to try to weigh up the achievements of Australia's universities against the Murray standards, but I have no doubt that these sentiments have had a significant bearing on the thinking of many Australian politicians — men essentially of the older generation — who have played important roles in shaping national educational policy.

By the time the Martin Committee reported in 1964, there was already clear evidence of a shift in attitude on the part of Australia's educational planners and thinkers about the role of the university in Australian society. Although Martin made the necessary acknowledgements of the older tradition:

The human values associated with education are so well recognised as to need little elaboration, but the Committee emphasises that they are the very stuff of a free, democratic and cultured society.

... it did not take them very long to shift their arguments for greater government support for education onto a more economic footing:

If a community devotes additional resources to education, growth is likely to be fostered in at least four main ways. Firstly, the work force should itself become more skilled and efficient as a result of the steady continuing of existing knowledge may be applied more rapidly in the modernisation of capital equipment, and in the introduction of new products and for new methods of producing old products. Thirdly, it may lead to the development of new industries. Fourthly, improved methods of management, whether at the level of decision-making or that of detailed control, may become available.

It strikes me that the Martin philosophy had come a long way from the Murray philosophy, but the two between them illustrate the great extent to which the nature of the competing forces (essentially liberal intellectual versus economically beneficial) which have continued within the system when the questions of resource allocation in education came to the fore for decision and debate.

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... it should not be thought that the even older, essentially British ideals of academia and its place in Australian society were absent throughout this period. They had their champion in the almost legendary Sydney University professor John Anderson. Against the rising tide of economic arguments, he railed:

University teachers in general are more and more taking on the character of coaches and ushers, with getting students through "eliminating wastage" as the phrase generally. One is capable of rising, under a certain intellectual stimulus, to a certain intellectual standard — a standard which can only be aped, not attained, by those who have been given "personal assistance", and shown the methods of passing . . . we have to take a pullalist view of the University as well as of society in general and to see that, within any so-called academic Institution, there are educational and academic activities — that what is academic (for it is a question of movements and traditions, and not of individuals) has to fight for survival against pseudo-academic Philistineism as well as against the inculc socialism, that the struggle of culture against "bourgeois society" exists also on the campus . . .

Anderson's views cannot be ignored, as he was quite dedicated to the Liberal philosophy and was one of a large number of persons whose subsequent careers took them into politics (essentially in the Liberal Party) and important positions vis-à-vis the making of education policies throughout the whole of Australia. 8

For reasons which need not detain us here, but which are nevertheless worthy of speculation by others, the Australian universities have never played, nor intended to play, a role in the intellectual life of Australia as their counterparts have in either the United Kingdom or the United States. Clearly there has never been an Australian version of the Oxford Movement. Perhaps that is not surprising. But equally there has never been an Australian version of the New Cambridge Influence. Large numbers of its pupils (and others) have been given "personal assistance", to a very great extent the Martin philosophy had come a long way from the Murray philosophy, but the two between them illustrate the great extent to which the nature of the competing forces (essentially liberal intellectual versus economically beneficial) which have continued within the system when the questions of resource allocation in education came to the fore for decision and debate.

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The gap between Australia's universities and the mainstream of the Australian community is enormous — not only in intellectual circles, but in terms of the relationships between the universities and industry, or between the universities and the arts, or between the universities and the political system itself. Recent reports by the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC), and the debating of the debates which proceeded the establishment of the separate Film and Television School would illustrate some of these points. 9

There is not, mercifully, anything akin to the British old-boy network based on Australia's universities (although the same cannot be said for its private schools), despite the criticisms frequently made in the past about the recruitment patterns of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Thus I would contend that from the days of Murray onwards, the universities grew very much separately from the growth that was taking place in the rest of Australian society. Although this has been a point of criticism from my perspective, I am sure that it also allowed the universities to develop with less political interference than might have been the case had they been more actively involved in other social developments. Throughout the Menzies era the growth of Commonwealth concern and support for universities was mainly influenced upon a large number of persons whose subsequent careers took them into politics (essentially in the Liberal Party) and important positions vis-a-vis the making of education policies throughout the whole of Australia. 5

The winds of political change however soon sprang up all around. Strangely enough, while the Whitlam Government promoted many innovations and reforms in education (most notably with the Schools Commission and the TAFE Commission), its impact on the universities as such was not dramatic. The abolition of fees generally failed to achieve some of the hoped for results, while the acceleration of expenditure (especially on capital works) was in a two-edged sword. Labor's sole Education Minister (Kim Beazley) was an Education Minister in the old style, whose speeches reflected the Murray philosophy, and rarely if ever came to grips with some of the growing financial issues which emerged in the early 1970s. 11

The return of the Fraser Government coincided with a new economic era for Australia — economies and cuts were the order of the day, and education having been seen by many as one of the pampered playthings of the socialist government was one of the obvious areas to target. Therefore, the education having been seen by many as one of the pampered playthings of the socialist government was one of the obvious areas to target. Therefore, the education ministry (firstly Tom Forgan, then Brian Talboys) proceeded to cut back on Commonwealth spending on education by 50% . . .

Footnote

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Both told the Government exactly what it wanted to hear. that universities should be more cost-efficient and that greater emphasis should be placed on the provision of basic skills to equip students for direct places in the workforce. The Williams Inquiry made one of its major recommendations that undergraduate entry to universities should be limited more by the statistical probability of success in degree studies and that universities should have a greater concentration of honours and post-graduate activities (including non-award courses for graduates). more research centres. Finally, by way of historical perspective I would draw attention to the notable absence of the universities from the mainstream of political debate and activity in Australia. I am by no means decrying the lack of an Australian Berkeley or Nanterre, but rather drawing attention to the limited role which Australian universities have played in this respect.

During my days on campus (1965-1969) there was only one issue of any significance taken up by the student movement, and that was conscription. Viet Nam arose only after the introduction of compulsory membership of student movements, and that was conscription, Viet Nam being the victim of the economic downturn. I have taken a long digression into the past, but one which I feel was necessary to set the background which colours the way in which the political sector has approached the university sector in Australia. Because of the relative isolation of the university sector from the mainstream of political debate there is, isolation from the arts and crafts of the community — it has been possible for successive governments of both persuasions not to have to invest too much time and effort in thinking about the basic issues in university development. Rather it has allowed them to turn the debate essentially into one about money and the alleged value for money spent in the tertiary sector.

I think that given this premise we can now turn to a more general discussion of the future of the universities.

Not surprisingly, the first place to start has to be with the question of money, for all the political sector is able to do is to raise the issue of research. Does the Federal Parliament bother with debates about qualitative issues in Australian education; the debates that are monstrously debates about quantitative issues. The most recent report of the Tertiary Education Commission was clearly aware of these constraints, and its eventual recommendations for expenditure for both capital and recurrent expenditure for universities and colleges of advanced education in the 1982/84 interim were fully some $20 million. Because the Commission did not seek to determine the fundamental importance of the evaluation and its educational rationale of the move was to assist them to make their opinions public have come out against the possibilities of student loans schemes. It is certainly not my intention to dwell on the murky waters of student loans and the possibilities of student loans schemes. In summary, I am convinced that most academics and representatives of students who have bothered to make their opinions public have come out against such proposals. There is the hope that this has really been able to provide the sort of data to sustain some of their more extravagant claims. There is no convincing and unambiguous data about the effects of the removal of the necessity of a degree fees in 1972, for while the total number of enrolments showed an increase, they did not show that the poorer and less affluent sections of the community were the principal beneficiaries, given that the rationale of the move was to assist them specifically.
Equally confusing in the welter of claim and counter-claim has been the question of future demographic change in the Australian population. The rather pessimistic conclusions of the Borrie Report in 1975 were superseded by others which, like those advanced by Robert Monis at Monash University, 26 gave more encouragement to education planners by stressing that participation rates in higher education were about to begin a process of expansion and show only a small decline in the 1990s. However, a very recent study by Professor George Myers for the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat has once again focused attention on the 'greying' of the Australian population, with in fact a greater emphasis on the significant increase likely in the proportion of our citizens described as the 'older-old' (i.e. seventy-five years and over) group. 27 However, that much of this must be added to the continuing uncertainty about levels of immigration, which have altogether been the most important factor in determining the ageing of the existing Australian population.

In other words, a combination of financial pressures on institutions and individuals, together with a possible decline in the proportion of persons seeking to participate in tertiary education either by virtue of choice or age, is likely to produce a smaller, slimmer education sector than has been the case in the past.

On the other hand, the recommendations of both the Williams Committee and the Tertiary Education Commission on the subject of mergers and amalgamations appear to be sending the institutions in altogether another direction. The two may not be incompatible, indeed with fewer institutions to go around (hence fewer of those marvellous creatures the WSU and the EFTS) fewer institutions may make sense. The imminent arrival of a generation with so much leisure time on their hands that they do not know what to do with it has been predicted since the start of the Industrial Revolution, and one wonders whether similar predictions made for that much more likely to be correct. 28 Nevertheless the clear evidence of part-time and mature age enrollments at universities and colleges indicates that an increasing number of people, education is in fact seen as one of the better ways to occupy otherwise leisure hours. General practitioners have responded to the increase in mature age enrlolements, but far less sympathecally to the rise in part-time numbers (after all they may have to be taught at inconvenient hours!)

Universities need, in this instance, as in so many others to develop a far greater flexibility in their planning and administrative strategies.

Ellice Swinburne has spoken of this as indicating that

New forms of higher education will need to be evolved to satisfy community demands for more relevant associations of this type for a better balance in the provision of education for adults and the young. 29

Although speaking specifically about problems facing the TAFE sector, the remarks of Colin Read are most pertinent. He writes,

In the long run, the extent of change in TAFE institutions will be a function of the degree to which the future can be accurately predicted and the extent to which inherent flexibility is able to cope with unpredictable change. . . . In fact, change is the invariable feature. In this decade, social attitudes, employer-employee relationships, the role of the individual, recognition of minority groups, technological developments, increasing international mobility and expanding communication networks all cause the individual's perception of the world to change. But an educational organisation is invested with resources which, by their very nature, have a degree of inflexibility about them—land and permanent buildings impose constraints, and teaching staff are continued when their particular areas of expertise. In fact the greater proportion of funds and recurrent expenditure is characterised by short-term inflexibility. Hence, spontaneous reaction to suddenly emerging social change tends to be inhibited by budget and resource commitments which often leave little margin for manoeuvre.

This capacity to adjust to change will be the principal determinant of which educational institutions survive in the next couple of decades, as I have no doubt that some will in fact fail to adapt and will disappear as meaningful pieces on the educational chessboard. 30 Many institutions and indeed many educators believe that they have fudged the changes that have taken place in post-war Australia, they will be able to survive anything which the future may hold, but they have said the accidents may be missed. It is not only that change is becoming ever more rapid, but it is also changing in a qualitative sense. As Allen Toffler remarked they

Technological and social change is outracing the educational system, and social reality is transforming itself more rapidly than our educational images of that reality. 31

However perhaps the most important change facing the universities, and indeed at educational institutions in the not too distant future, will arise from changes in information technology and its associated hardware.

For many people the advent of cable television, a matter now under investigation by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, is seen as relevant only to an increase in entertainment. 32 However, as the experiences of the United States have shown, cable systems are increasingly being used by businesses for marketing and data transfer, and by private subscribers for the conduct of some of their business affairs such as banking and shopping. The growth of some of the more esoteric systems such as the Warner-Amex QUBE system in cities such as Cincinnati and Columbus (an inter-active system which allows subscribers to 'talk back' to the television set and to the presenter of programmes) have in fact excited educators who see a new role for themselves related exclusively to the provision of educational services via the television cable. 33

The advantages for educational users of cable over conventional television are, in my view, considerable. This is not the place to explore them in detail, it is sufficient to say that one of the most important of these is economics.

We are unlikely to see cable flourishing in Australia within the next few years, indeed there are many opponents of its introduction, 34 but I am sure that by the end of this decade cable will be a flourishing growth industry in Australia. Its implications for universities will be profound.

These are most likely to have their initial appeal to two classes of people, who are otherwise inhibited from making use of educational facilities as they currently exist. 35 These are part-time students, but whose current employment situation has made it difficult for them to fit in with the existing arrangements; and those who would like to update existing skills and qualifications with access to refresher courses.

Not far behind these will come those who seek to undertake essentially non-vocational courses, and those who see education as an increasingly attractive alternative in terms of the use of their expanded leisure periods.

This could well develop in such a way that the existing Australian universities would find themselves increasingly with less face to face teaching to do (and all the consequent problems arising from this) but with more and more resources available to direct into fields of research. Those who survive the best will be those who demonstrate the flexibility in terms of planning and administration of which I have already spoken.

Together with the domestic satellite, part of which will undoubtedly be dedicated to educational uses, 36 the new communications technology will in fact mean that the basic proposals formulated in the Report "Open Tertiary Education in Australia" will in fact be adopted in the long run.

The Open University committee was of course chaired by Professor Peter Karmel, and it looks very much as if, that just perhaps in New Guinea, and in the Schools Commission, and in the Universities Commission, and in the Tertiary Education Commission, once again—a rather astonishing track record for any one individual, even of Professor Karmel's brilliance. 37

The four key words for education in the next couple of decades are Economies, Evaluation, Flexibility and Technology. I have tried to say something about each of them.

In doing so have I neglected one area of critical importance to universities, or rather have touched upon it only very briefly. This is no doubt the whole thrust of modern society, or modern technology, and indeed of clear government policies has been to indicate that Australia's future is intimately linked with its capacity to undertake quality research in a variety of fields and institutions. I believe that in the next few decades the universities will have to devote more of their resources to research, even at the expense of having to take them away from teaching. 38 The continued decline of research efforts in the private sector and the current questioning by bodies such as the Industries Assistance Commission 39 of programmes such as the Industrial Research and Development Centres Scheme all presages a greater role for the universities in ensuring maximum national effort in this critical area.

Such a shift in emphasis, I will suspect, be of quantum proportions and will present yet another challenge to the planners and administrators very much along the lines which I have already suggested.

Throughout the whole of my argument, one theme has constantly been repeated, namely that the growth of Australian universities in relative isolation from the mainstream growth of Australian society has brought about a situation in which the universities have developed a degree of inflexibility which has hindered their capacity to adapt to rapid shifts in political, social, cultural, economic value systems. They have thus been left with few helpers outside their own ranks, and many more only ever supporters among the political and economic decision-makers in the States or at the Commonwealth level.

In seeking to set themselves apart, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, in allowing themselves to remain separate, the universities have found that when they have been threatened by the
It is not necessary for the values which underpin the operations of Australia's universities to change. Indeed there is a real role for the Anderson style of philosophy, but it is necessary for the universities to become, and to be seen to become better 'citizens' than they have in the past. That is the essential challenge facing Australia's universities in the decades immediately ahead.

References
2. ibid., para. 12.
3. ibid., para. 21.
4. Of the six Federal Ministers for Education since 1980, five were over the age of 50 at the time of their appointment to the portfolio: Bowen (Liberal, 1969 age 50), Fawcett (Liberal, 1971 age 50), Fraser (Liberal, 1971 age 54), Beazley (ALP, 1972 age 55), Carrick (Liberal, 1975 age 57),帮助 (Liberal, 1980 age 51).
10. for an industry viewpoint on this theme see K.G. Hall, Australian Film—The Inside Story, Summit, Sydney, 1977, at chapter 32.
13. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia (Myers Committee), AGPS, 1980, see at pages 7.106 to 7.112.
15. In the light of the Williams Committee comments cited above, it is interesting to note a comment relevant to the situation in France in 1968 as follows:
"France is now thinking of introducing a selection system for university entrance. For one thing, the "open door" policy has proved mistaken, because between a half and a third of students fail to get a degree."
P. Seale and M. McConville, French Revolution 1968, Penguin, 1978, p. 23. The same work reports a comment of the French Education Minister of the time as saying that such a policy was "as if we organized a brothel and mercy has knocked few responsive chords in the wider community."

16. The Impact on the Student Population

18. ibid., para. 4.
20. To see for example the Senate Debates (House of) 4 and 5 June 1979 detailing the States Grants (Tertiary Education Assistance) Amendment Bill and the Guidelines for the Education Commission.
22. ibid., paras 9.65 to 9.72.
23. ibid., paras 6.6 to 6.27.
25. for example, Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare: Training: Tertiary — Evaluation in Australian Health and Warfare Services, AGPS, 1979. The Joint Committee of Public Accounts which has also been conducting an inquiry into the methods used by the Tertiary Education Commission in formulating its financial recommendations to Government.
28. see for example the Senate Debates: (House of) 4 and 5 June 1979 detailing the States Grants (Tertiary Education Assistance) Amendment Bill and the Guidelines for the Education Commission.
35. see for example the Senate Debates: (House of) 4 and 5 June 1979 detailing the States Grants (Tertiary Education Assistance) Amendment Bill and the Guidelines for the Education Commission.
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