
Crossroads: The Future of University Education in Western Australia

Lecture delivered by: Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton

Murdoch University is twenty-five years old, and Walter Murdoch has been dead for thirty years. This year 2000 has also seen the deaths of two fine citizens, his wife Barbara and his daughter Catherine. A few weeks before Walter Murdoch died they brought him the news that Western Australia's second university would be named after him. It was a wonderful honour, the old man murmured, and characteristically then added: 'But it had better be a good one'. Murdoch himself had little doubt about what it took to constitute a good university, and in the early years of this university's existence debate was frequent about the nature of the 'Murdoch ethos'.

In this year 2000, however, the question is unavoidable: Are the academic values which sustained Murdoch throughout his long career, are even the professedly innovative and forward-looking values which were expressed at Murdoch University in the 1970s, relevant in the university world of the 21st century which awaits us? I don't intend to take a narrow and introspective view of the question. In one form or another it confronts every university in Australia. Speaking tonight before a Western Australian audience, however, I deem it my duty to speak largely tonight of the question as it affects Western Australia.

Walter Murdoch was born in Scotland in 1874. At that time there were four universities in Scotland, four in England with a much larger population, and two in Australia with a third about to come into being. When he died in 1970 Murdoch was about to become Australia’s fifteenth university. Thus Walter Murdoch was born in a Scotland committed to Adam Smith's definition of education as a human necessity. He lived through a period of expansion when Australia took as its model Scotland, with its traditions of open university access to the deserving, rather than the elitist classical model of 19th century England. But Murdoch grew up in Victoria during the depression of the 1890s, a time of financial stringency.

Walter Murdoch arrived in 1913 as foundation professor of English in a university located in a small town which thought of itself as the most isolated capital city in the world. For the first 18 years of his tenure the university was housed in a ramshackle collection of largely
weatherboard buildings in the centre of Perth. It would have still been in those buildings after the Second World War had it not been for the great generosity of Sir Winthrop Hackett, whose legacy to the university, eventually totalling more than twenty million dollars in today's values, facilitated the construction of those core buildings which grace the University of Western Australia. Hackett's was a unique gesture.

His executor, Sir Alfred Langler, under whose stewardship the estate doubled in value, complained pointedly that in Western Australia rich men and women seldom gave generously to philanthropic causes, contrasting their conduct with the attitude of American millionaires such as Andrew Carnegie. However controversially Carnegie accumulated his wealth he considered it wrong to hoard it after his death, and his benefactions enriched libraries and art galleries throughout the Western world. Walter Murdoch was one of those who saw to it that a small fraction of Carnegie money was used to furnish the University of Western Australia with prints of high quality reproducing the work of European old masters. Until that University began in the 1950s to acquire the paintings of contemporary Australians such as Sydney Nolan and Elizabeth Durack that was for many students, myself included, our first introduction to high art. I shall return to this issue of philanthropy later.

Even in the later stages of Walter Murdoch's academic career in the 1930s there were elements of pettiness in the university scene. As he once wrote: "It's like looking into a glass case in which a lot of insects are stinging one another." These were the years when the pro-chancellor, who was also the chief justice, spent his Saturday mornings rigorously going over the university accounts; a custom which I am pleased no longer holds. In 1931 the State government of the day closed the Teachers Training College as an economy measure. A veteran member of the Legislative Council, Sir Edward Wittenoom, proposed that in addition the government should discontinue funding the university and state high schools. (He was at least consistent; 20 years previously he opposed Hackett's plan for a university on the grounds that it would benefit only a minority).

This roused Murdoch to write an article for The West Australian entitled: "A Bright Idea: 'Women and children last!'" "This, as all the world knows, is the cry of all true British hearts when the ship is sinking and there are not enough lifeboats to go round. And the sound practical man, with no sentimental nonsense about him, almost invariably adds, 'Me first!' In the same gallant spirit, at this moment of economic shipwreck a number of distracted passengers have hit upon the happy idea of making the younger generation suffer for the bad pilotage which has brought us on the rocks. To starve or stunt the minds of the rising generation seems to me the worst kind of default. We can sink into no lower slough of
dishonour than this into which Sir Edward invites us to descend - this of making our young people pay, now and all their lives long, the price of our own follies."

Wittenoom's proposal was not acted upon, and the university survived. Remarkably it survived those years of economic hardship in the 1930s and 1940s as the only university in the British Commonwealth which charged no fees. To our generation, brought up as we are to believe that a university education is worth having only if it results in substantial debt, this may seem a dubious achievement. To the Western Australians of my parents' generation it was a source of communal pride, as well as a factor persuading them to make the financial sacrifices required to enable their children to attend university. If in an era more prosperous than the 1930s we can no longer afford to fund universities without fees we must make sure that the same sense of open access and opportunity is ensured by other means.

I don't know how Walter Murdoch would have survived in today's university environment of centralised accountability. Those who remember his lectures describe him as a short, gowned figure who, having shuffled to the podium, would fix his eyes on a spot on the rear wall of the lecture-room about two and a half metres above the floor and address that spot. He was not always punctual about marking and returning assignments, and the students called him 'Weary Wally'. But he reached out to a wider public through his essays in The West Australian and the Melbourne Argus, and he was never afraid of controversy. Sometimes his interventions were misguided. He spent far too much time advocating the economic heresy known as Douglas Credit, and an essay of his debunking psychology may have finished the career in Western Australia of the pioneer educational psychologist Ethel Stoneman. But more often he was a champion of civil liberties, attacking political censorship and upholding the rights of unpopular minorities whose ideas were very different to his own, such as the Communist Party. It was good for Western Australia in those years that professors such as Murdoch, Fox, Beasley and Alexander were prepared to speak out.

I doubt if my own generation of academics in Western Australia has been outspoken enough. It is difficult to indulge in outspokenness when we are busy trying to attract the corporate dollar.

Murdoch's academic career finished with a term as chancellor of the University of Western Australia from 1943 to 1948. My first encounter with him was at his final matriculation ceremony. During his term the State government of the day set up a commission of inquiry into the university. Its recommendations, in Murdoch's eyes,
would have made the university 'just another government department, as wooden, unimaginative, and routine-ridden as the Education Department'. As his biographer John La Nauze comments: "Tact, some maneuvering, and various personal links and understandings between men in the university, the government, and the civil service meant that in the event Murdoch's apprehensions were not realized."

Consider that point. It is not that the politicians, public servants, and academics were necessarily wiser in 1944 than their equivalents today. It is rather that policy was made in Western Australia and the policymakers were accessible to those who would be affected by the outcome. The State premier of the day, J C Willcock, was not a better friend to the universities than the Commonwealth prime minister of today. Of Willcock Murdoch wrote that "he doesn't see what a university is for, and thinks it is a damned costly luxury, and would close it down if he' were not afraid of a public outcry", adding in characteristic Murdoch vein: "I don't think myself that the outcry would be very deafening; but I don't tell him that." But Willcock and the other politicians were advised by senior public servants with a lifetime's experience in the conduct of their departments, such as the under-treasurer, A J Reid, and the engineer-in-chief, Russell Dumas, and they had a surer sense of the value of university education.

Today we have abandoned that tradition of the career public servant, impartially advising governments of all sides in politics, accepting that eventually the minister takes - or should take - ultimate responsibility for the conduct of policy, but able to offer the benefits of the corporate memory. I am old enough to remember the 1949 federal election, when after eight years of Labor rule the coalition under Robert Menzies was swept to office. During the election campaign coalition spokesmen had damned the great public servant 'Nugget' Coombs as an instrument of socialism, but the morning after the results were in the incoming treasurer, Arthur Fadden, was on the phone with a reassuring message of. "That you, Nugget? You don't want to take any notice of all that bullshit I was talking during the election. We'll be needing you, you know." And Coombs went on to serve Fadden and other ministers in the Menzies government with great distinction.

Politicians today do not want impartial and experienced sources of advice. They want obedient clones, preferably 'advisers' on short-term contracts so that they can be dumped if their advice is insufficiently compliant. It has not been necessary to be either an educationist or a Western Australian to become director general of education in Western Australia, though the State government has now reverted to the older and more commendable tradition. With respect to tertiary education, however, control now lies
outside the State government. The making of policy is entrusted to the staff of the federal Department of Education, Training, and Youth Affairs, more conveniently known by the elegant acronym of DETYA. Even with all the advantages of modern communications technology it is not so easy for senior university personnel in Perth to work on close terms with a Canberra bureaucracy of uncertain tenure and limited knowledge of Western Australian conditions. By their fruits we must judge them.

DETYA among its responsibilities has to deal with four Western Australian universities, all of them with a main campus in the Perth metropolitan area and rural subsidiaries. Perth has four universities where the other Australian cities of similar population, Brisbane and Adelaide, make do with three. This is not the result of conscious planning. When Murdoch University was established in 1970 as the State's second university, the Western Australian Institute of Technology, ancestor of today's Curtin University, and the teachers colleges which would later make up Edith Cowan University were already in existence; but it was envisaged that they would continue as specialist tertiary institutions. The main question was whether Murdoch should develop as a completely autonomous university or whether it should remain in some way federated with the University of Western Australia.

There might have been two undergraduate programmes, with a common graduate school; or perhaps a systematic division of disciplinary responsibilities, so that agricultural science might have joined veterinary studies at Murdoch, or foreign languages been taught exclusively at Crawley. It seemed easiest to accept the advice of Professor Peter Karmel, who having begun as principal of the Bedford Park campus of the University of Adelaide, discovered the irresistibility of the attractions of separate growth and steered Flinders University into independence. In an era of optimism about the growth of the tertiary sector, when it was thought that by 1985 Murdoch would have 10,000 undergraduates, and another university and another institute of technology would be needed in the northern suburbs, Karmel's advice prevailed.

As we know, it didn't work out that way. Murdoch grew more slowly than anticipated, sustained in its early years by the School of Veterinary Studies, by an imaginative venture into the neglected realm of external studies, and by the loyalty and enthusiasm of the mature-age students to whom Murdoch gave a second chance. The Western Australian Institute of Technology under energetic and entrepreneurial leadership blossomed into Curtin University. The teachers' colleges, after labouring for some years under the unfortunate acronym of WACAE, metamorphosed into Edith Cowan University. The State government set up a Post-Secondary Education Commission which might have
imposed some order and rationality into the division of functions between the four institutions; but although chaired by a succession of respected educationalists from Col Sanders to Gordon Stanley, the Commission had limited impact. Each university expanded in any direction which seemed to offer student numbers. If astrology had become respectable one year, there would have been four competing departments of zodiac studies in the following year. Before competition policy received the official blessing of the Keating and Howard governments it was already thriving and vigorous among the Western Australian campuses.

This competition took place against a background of gradually tightening resources. No federal government of either political complexion was courageous enough to signal that over a set period of years it was intended to reduce the government component of tertiary funding from over 80 per cent to under 50 per cent, so that the universities might adopt long-term strategies to cope with the shortfall. Instead the cuts have taken place incrementally, year by year, without any indication of the end. It is not a favourable environment for the shaping of coherent long-term policy.

The universities have been exhorted to exert themselves by increasing their incomes from three sources. First, income may be raised by imposing fees on students. Second, university courses may be exported to overseas markets. Third, wealthy benefactors may be persuaded to follow the example of Winthrop Hackett and bestow generous endowments on the universities. I propose to look at all three in turn, passing over the reflection that most university staff have been appointed because of excellence in scholarship rather than skill in fundraising, and that the federal authorities have possibly underestimated the cultural shift required to adapt to the new priorities.

The notion that students should pay fees for their university tuition is of ancient origin, and the University of Western Australia's practice in past years of imposing no fees may be thought a pleasing idiosyncrasy. Connoisseurs of the ironic may reflect on the role paid by non-fee-paying graduates of the University of Western Australia such as John Stone and John Dawkins in advocating and establishing tertiary fees; but it will always be good politics to assume that there are limits to the amount which the majority of taxpayers, who are not university graduates, are willing to contribute to the university education of other people. If fees are inevitable great care must be taken to ensure that no deserving student misses out on university education because of financial hardship. This should not need stressing, but it sometimes goes unnoticed amid the rhetoric of `user pays'.
My worry about the emphasis on fee-paying is that it cheapens the concept of university education to the level of a commercial transaction. It is understandable that young Mr Andrew Norton, formerly an employee of Dr David Kemp and now of the University of Melbourne, should proclaim that the sole business of universities is to train school leavers as quickly as possible in the arts of creating wealth. He is young enough to learn better. He may one day grow old enough and smart enough to become a mature-age student. But it is mildly outrageous when Dr Dale Spender, whose credentials rest on her record as a feminist challenging orthodoxy, should complacently assert that the business of universities is `selling information'. This is about as adequate as the phrase of the cynical Frenchman who defined love as `the interaction of two pieces of flesh'.

University research and teaching involves communications at various levels, often simultaneously. There is the accumulation of data, with its basic disciplines of accuracy and integrity. There is the organisation of those data into information, the communication of techniques and insights between one scholar who has mastered the relevant skills and another who is in the process of becoming aware of them. There is the further refinement of information into knowledge, information systematically structured; and occasionally there will develop that higher form of understanding which we term wisdom. The motto of the University of Western Australia, after all, is `Seek wisdom', not `Seek information'. This is why many practising academics are uneasy at the constant attempts by those in authority at DETYA to measure output and performance. The transmission of data may be measured and quantified; so, to a large extent, may the transmission of information; but in the interactions of teacher and student at their best there sometimes enter elements of knowledge, and even wisdom, which defy the measurers.

I think of that moving passage in the Wisdom of Solomon: "For wisdom, which is the worker of all things, taught me; for in her is an understanding spirit, holy, one only, manifold, subtil, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, Kind to humanity, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, pure and most subtil spirits. For wisdom is more moving than any motion; she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness... For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night; but vice shall not prevail against wisdom."

Two thousand years after those words were written, have we come no further than to prattle that the job of universities is selling information? We should not form an exaggerated view of what is possible. I would be content if every university graduate was capable of picking up,
in any issue of Scientific American and any issue of History Today, at least one article which she or he could read with understanding. I think this criterion remains valid whether the reader uses print or computer technology. But I don't believe every university graduate is capable of passing this test. I don't believe every university graduate wants to.

If university education is simply that commercial transaction of selling information then we shall recruit students whose only aim is to acquire the know-how which will enable them to make a lot of money quickly. They will not want to be bothered with philosophy, or history, or the bases of scientific thought, because they or their parents are not paying for it. And if the universities, because of the financial pressures to which they are subjected by governments, fall too much under the pressure to mount demand-driven courses, then we should not be too surprised if we end up producing a generation of credentialled oafs. Now I am not for one minute suggesting that we should ignore the factor of demand.

The universities have always existed to provide the authorities of the day with the skilled practitioners required to serve society and its economy. Five hundred years ago the demand was for theologians. Two hundred years ago the Greek and Latin classics, the major mode of international communication, were in demand. Fifty years ago the physical and biological sciences came to the fore, and it comes as an unpleasant shock to find today that universities, not only in Australia, but in the United Kingdom, are axing courses in chemistry and physics because of the lack of demand. But at any period in history, although good university teachers and researchers have conscientiously served the society of their day, they have also given their students - given, not sold - that little bit extra from which the getting of wisdom may originate.

In any case, universities should be free to assess demand with greater caniness than is always available to the seventeen-year old school leaver. Thirty years ago when Western Australia was undergoing a mineral boom it suddenly seemed that half the student intake wanted to enroll in geology. At the same time there was a drought and a temporary downturn in primary production prices, and hardly anyone wanted to enroll in agricultural science. Three years later at a time of rural recovery all the agricultural science graduates secured work easily. Meanwhile the mineral boom was over. Most of the vacancies for geologists had been filled by Englishmen and North Americans from Libya or Iraq, happy to move to a country where the climate was no worse, the locals spoke English, and the dominant religion permitted alcohol. It was not a good year for geology graduates; it would have been worse if the universities had been required to meet the entire student demand.
Take a different example. In 1975 when Murdoch University began teaching it seemed a good idea to include Chinese studies in the curriculum. Relations with Mao Zhe-Dong's China were thawing. Official policy with generally bipartisan support took the view that China would be a significant power in the East Asia-Pacific region and it would be sensible for Australians to understand a potential super-power. Other Australian universities were also entering the field. But the Chinese language is difficult, and the rewards of Chinese expertise were not always immediate. The field has never attracted wide student demand. On a visit to China in 1985 I found more Chinese universities teaching Australian studies than Australian universities teaching Chinese studies.

Since that date Australian studies has gone on increasing in China - though of course it is still pretty small potatoes in the general academic system- and Chinese studies have dwindled in Australia. Courses are terminated, and staff are not replaced. In a time of financial stringency it is hard for a university to keep the books open for a discipline with low student demand. Yet few would deny that China will be a powerful presence in our region in the 21st century. Shall we be content to negotiate with the Chinese from a basis of ignorance of their society and culture, accepting that they may be better informed about Australia? Or should we be pressing the government to provide the maintenance for disciplines which are in the national interest but which unfortunately don't possess the same immediate attraction as law or commerce?

I have travelled some way from the theme of fee-paying, and should address the second source of income, the export of university education to overseas fee-paying students. This has been a useful lifeline for Australian universities, though academic problems have arisen. In some Asian cultures the relationship between student and teacher is rather like that of disciple and master, so that good results follow from the ability to reproduce information faithfully. Many, though not all, Australian academics encourage a spirit of criticism in their students and are delighted to encounter well argued challenge. The simple replication of course materials, however thoroughly presented, is not the road to a first-class result. The temptation arises to judge the overseas student by subtly different criteria than apply to Australians. This in turn can lead to pressures to lower the pass standard. No university will admit to lowering standards for the benefit of overseas fee-paying students, but anecdotal evidence from trustworthy sources suggests that course controllers are sometimes put under pressure to pass weak examinees. Bad practice drives out good. I hasten to add that this is not the situation at Murdoch University.

It matters that the quality of Australian degrees remains high and is perceived to remain high. The academic traffic between Australia and its northern neighbours will not long remain a
one-way thoroughfare. The Republic of Singapore, that model of a capitalist economy, makes proportionately a much greater investment in tertiary education than the Australian Commonwealth. Any year now it must be expected to enter whole-heartedly into the export of tertiary education, providing formidable competition for Australian providers. Are we preparing sufficiently for this onset of competition?

The third source of university funding is seen as the private sector. Universities are urged to do more to attract the corporate dollar. Unfortunately this presents particular difficulty for us in Western Australia. In the first place, as Sir Alfred Langler noted eighty years ago, Australia has not the same tradition of philanthropy as the United States. We don't seem to breed the Carnegie spirit. Lang Hancock, who in his day was tolerably well heeled, used to refuse all applications for financial help on the grounds that if he gave to one he would have to give to them all. The poverty of this reasoning is self-evident, but I suppose the old man was preoccupied with providing a roof over his head, just as Kerry Packer gives a lower priority to the needs of Australia's universities than to propping up the economy of Las Vegas. But in the United States even the moderately wealthy, especially if they are alumni, give generously to their local university and are rewarded by seeing their name affixed to a laboratory or a sports ground. Few examples may be found in Western Australia. Even those who imagine spaciously may not show local loyalty. Alan Bond wanted to have a university named after him, but he established it on Queensland's Gold Coast.

Globalisation increases the difficulty. To take an example almost at random, a locally owned company exporting woodchips might wish to rescue its character as a good corporate citizen by acts of philanthropy; a foreign-owned company with interests in many countries would not have the same motive for singling out a Western Australian university for its gifts. The number of seriously wealthy Western Australian individuals and companies is limited. Their names are well known, and they are subject to many appeals for support. Confronted with four different universities competing for their attention - five, including Notre Dame - it does not require the tough hide of Lang Hancock to decide that it is all too difficult to determine whose case is most deserving.

The quest for support from the private sector bears hardest on the research and postgraduate sector. Here the record of DETYA in providing guidance and support has been particularly abysmal. For the whole of the 1990s Murdoch University was urged to increase its postgraduate numbers, to compete vigorously for the best recruits in its particular areas of strength. We were assured that appropriate funding would follow. We increased our postgraduate numbers to over four hundred. Then, without sufficient consultation, DETYA changed the rules. We are now told to reduce our postgraduates by twenty per cent by 2002.
Australia needs trained postgraduates, and Murdoch's contribution has not been faulted, but
the mandarins have decided that two kinds of university should be favoured. One category is
regional universities. Melbourne's La Trobe counts as a regional university because it has a
campus at Bendigo. Even Macquarie University, set entirely in the wide open spaces of
Sydney's north-western suburbs counts as a regional university. But Murdoch, despite its
campus at Rockingham, is not a regional university. We are too far from Canberra for them to
notice.

The other category of university favoured for postgraduate growth covers the members of the
'Group of Eight'; that alliance of mainly older universities chosen not by the vote of all
Australia's vice-chancellors, nor even by the laying on of hands by DETYA, but simply and
sublimely by themselves. In claiming for themselves the lion's share of excellence in research
and postgraduate training, the Group of Eight draw partly on their superior resources, but also
on the tendency of older members of the professional classes to favour the long-established
universities which they themselves have attended. But the plain fact is that nearly all
Australian universities, and certainly all Western Australian universities contain staff of first-
class capacity in research and postgraduate supervision. During the last thirty years
academics have had to seek their opportunities wherever jobs have been available; at the
same time the older universities have been more likely to contain patches of deadwood left
over from the years of growth and easy appointments.

In the case of Western Australia the universities have started under uneven handicaps.
Several years before the establishment of the University of Western Australia the State
government of the day set aside substantial endowments of land for university purposes.
Following North American experience the expectation was that as the city of Perth expanded
over the decades the land would increase in value and the university would possess an
appreciating asset. This has indeed happened, so that the University of Western Australia is
by far the best endowed of our state universities. Murdoch University benefited to the extent
that its grounds were carved out of the older university's endowment lands, but when the
State government was asked to allocate a similar land grant to Murdoch we were given no
encouragement. Nor were Curtin and Edith Cowan favoured. Then, when Notre Dame
appeared on the scene, the State government proposed to award the newcomer a land grant at
Alkimos. Murdoch, Curtin, and Edith Cowan, the labourers in the vineyard who had borne
the burden and the heat of the day, grumbled at this anomaly, and eventually the government
was shamed into admitting that perhaps they too should be endowed; but shortly afterwards
Richard Court won the election, and all commitments were off. So the discrepancy remains
between the resources of the four state universities.
Thus we in Western Australia confront the 21st century without a coherent university system. Effort is fragmented between four different universities. Policy is controlled by a bureaucracy without sympathy or insight for Western Australian conditions, its interventions frequently intrusive and seldom constructive. The advancement or cutting back of academic disciplines often occurs as a reaction to short-term economic pressures rather than as a coherent response to long-term goals and strategies. This is not good enough for a Western Australia facing the challenges of globalisation and the revolution in information technology. It is not good enough for a State which at present produces more than a quarter of Australia's export income, but which must adapt and broaden beyond a resource-based economy if it is to continue to prosper. It is not good enough for a community with a long involvement in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region in general and with a need to understand the cultures and societies of this region. It is not good enough for a people who, whether indigenous for many generations or only a few, have shown considerable artistic and scientific creativity in responding to their sense of place. The time has come when we should take charge of our own intellectual destinies, because DETYA won't do it for us.

From time to time some have suggested that the way forward lies in amalgamation. Amateurs shuffle the pieces of the jigsaw: Murdoch should go with Curtin, UWA should combine with Edith Cowan - no year goes by without some bright idea. Experience suggests that a merger is a brutal piece of surgery, and in many cases the operation fails. Yet the need for agreed cooperation is obvious. The University of Western Australia and Murdoch University have joined forces in education, and although the partnership is not without its tensions, the advantages so far have been greater. Western Australia and the Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan, after a period of wrangling, have also negotiated a barrier treaty, to the benefit of studies in music generally. Such initiatives set a hopeful precedent, but more is required. In particular the future of research and postgraduate studies in this State depends on the capacity of our universities to share their resources and to negotiate an agreed strategy under which each builds up its areas of strength.

It is partly a matter of economies of scale. None of our universities, not even the University of Western Australia, is big enough or strong enough in all departments to achieve excellence alone. Drawing on the resources of all four universities we shall have a better chance of achieving excellence. We shall also have a much better chance of convincing the private sector - as well as our federal paymasters - that our research and development effort and our training of postgraduates deserves stronger support. As a whole Australia is well down the international league table in terms of both private and public support for advanced research and study. It would be a fine thing if Western Australia, not for the first time, were to take the lead.
Let me be specific. The universities of this state should negotiate to form a consortium for co-operative effort in research, development, and postgraduate studies. This consortium should be entered into voluntarily; it should not be a structure imposed from outside by official action, though it may be hoped and expected that the State government would approve and support the initiative. If all the universities cannot be persuaded to join it will be sufficient at the start if two or three are gathered together. Among its first tasks the consortium should compile a register of research currently undertaken or planned at our universities. In this way we can identify the gaps and the opportunities in our State's research effort. We can plan more effectively our approaches to the private sector and the federal authorities for funding. Perhaps in the future the consortium might serve as an umbrella organisation for co-operation at the honours and undergraduate level, but for the present it should concentrate on advanced education and research.

Some may contend that a co-operative approach of this kind flies in the face of national competition policy. In reply I would steal a phrase from Australia's first prime minister, Edmund Barton. When asked how he reconciled his advocacy of federation with the contemporary division of political parties into tariff protectionist and free trade, he replied: "Free trade within Australia, and protection against the world." In the same spirit, I say: "Co-operation within Western Australia, and competition against the rest of the world."

I don't underestimate the difficulties. In recent years universities have been subjected to so much ill-thought-out change that morale has suffered, and further change is resisted. It will be necessary for all parties to negotiate in a spirit of generosity, and sometimes to be prepared to sacrifice advantages for the sake of the greater good. But I believe that the Western Australian community is ready for a show of initiative on the part of the universities. I believe that there is a reservoir of goodwill to be tapped, and even a capacity for philanthropy to be evoked, provided that the universities show that they are not merely self-serving and eager to secure petty advantages over their neighbours.

Speaking with the unusual authority of one who has held chairs at Western Australia, Murdoch, and Edith Cowan and is currently an adjunct professor at Curtin, I can assert that the values we hold in common and the qualities which inspire our staff are much stronger than the factors which divide us. So many of those factors are the result of historical accidents, of decisions which had to be taken without awareness of the long-term consequences. We can stay stuck with those legacies of the past, or we can try co-operation; each university retaining its own distinctive and vigorous character, but all combining for the advancement of scholarship in Western Australia. As Benjamin Franklin put it to his fellow American revolutionaries "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang
separately - or at least have our futures determined by the intrusive and uncaring decision-makers in Canberra. At least, instead of waiting passively for the next word from on high, we can try to provide our community with something better.

Walter Murdoch wrote in his ninetieth year: "We serve the purposes of the day, and if we have served that purpose faithfully, we must be content to be forgotten tomorrow.' At this twenty-fifth anniversary of Murdoch University we should celebrate the life and work of all those, some now dead but many happily still living, who have put their energies and effort into the making of this university; and we should look forward resolutely to the next assignment.