

# University Tradition Defended

His Excellency Dr Davis McCaughey, the Governor of Victoria, defended the traditional role of the university when he presented the Walter Murdoch Lecture, entitled *Back To The Drawing Board*, last month.

The teaching and pursuit of truth were the major concerns of a university, regardless of political policies, he said. University education should enable the student to learn, train and think for themselves.

Such a stance was not always popular and the university had traditionally created its own community, often in tension with the State authorities, said Dr McCaughey.

"It is a characteristic of this institution that it enjoys a high degree of autonomy, and that it fosters a community life within which there can be a genuine meeting of mind with mind.

"The freedom, the high degree of autonomy, is indeed a privilege, a privilege which entails obligations, not to fulfil national objectives however worthy, but to teach truth.

## Knowledge

"Any discussion of accountability or of institutional management which does not take as its starting point the commitment of the university and all its part to the advancement of knowledge, and does not recognise that the criterion for that advancement is one which cannot be imposed by the political arm but has a universal perspective, has failed to understand what kind of society the university is."

The university had an important role to play in the general community, but on its own terms.

"It pursues traditional learning in a contemporary setting, moves out into the professions and provides for them at least some members who are learned men and women, and allows that truth will be discerned if it is all the time being questioned.

## Experience

"It will therefore want to draw on the experience of as wide a representation from within its own community, and from without, as is possible.

"We need to associate with us our benefactors and rulers so that they may appreciate from within, and not simply from without, what is being undertaken with the money which they have made available to us; we need to understand better the expectations of that world around us; and we need to hear from representatives of the community on whose goodwill we regularly depend."

As well as the ability to acquire more and more knowledge the university should instil 'Bildung', culture, in students.

"This liberalist humanist ideal is still part of the university's understanding of itself, both in the humanities and in the sciences.

"It should be as characteristic of the education of the engineer as of the philosopher, of the theologian as of the historian.

"What is really important is that universities should turn out into society men and women who have discovered the scholarly method, who have learned to ask the next right question, or to allow themselves fearlessly to be confronted by it — even though, or perhaps especially if, the area in which they have to operate is different from that in which they were originally educated."

## Character

"This can only happen if the character of university education is understood, if the high degree of autonomy of the university is protected and we self-consciously create the kind of community life in which it may flourish.

"That last will include staff clubs and student unions, subsidised student housing, whether in the forms of residential hall or colleges or otherwise.

"And we must resist composite campuses if that means the destruction of the community life of our universities. A sense of place has always been important."

*A copy of the full lecture will be made available through the University's Community Relations section later this year at a cost of \$2 plus postage.*

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