Academic freedom and leadership

The University and the government

The academics gathered in Canberra for the Easter conferences in 1948 needed reassuring. Would the Australian National University degenerate into an arm of the federal government and bureaucracy? Public servants had been prominent among its makers, and it owed its existence to an Act of the federal parliament. If the circumstances of its birth were not sufficient liability, growing up in such close proximity to politicians and public servants surely would be.

The issue seemed most urgent at the Pacific Studies conference, where Paul Hasluck warned that political pressures might influence research planning. The government, he argued, might insist that the school show something for its money: ‘it would be essential to take care that no promises were made concerning the production of results’. Eggleston responded that the Interim Council was confident the University would not be used in this way, and that ‘heads of Government departments would not be allowed to ask the National University questions’. J.G. Crawford thought the anxieties were something of a phobia, warning that the school might be so keen to avoid work of use to the government that it might end up with research so pure and rarified as to be altogether pointless. But he was in a minority; whenever someone spoke of the dangers of government interference, the response was generally earnest nods.

The banner was academic freedom, and Copland was just the man to carry it. Writing from Nanjing just after he had accepted appointment as Vice-Chancellor, he told Menzies how he hoped to help build up a tradition of academic freedom at the University, adding that ‘the establishment and maintenance of academic freedom is more important than the actual research and teaching done inside the walls of a university’. Surely he was exaggerating; yet it is worth noting that a couple of years later a fellow vice-chancellor, A.P. Rowe at the University of Adelaide, placed the preservation of independence from external control at the top of his list of suggested aims for his institution.

Freedom was a tradition at the heart of the university, as defined by Cardinal Newman and others. In Australia, where all universities were creations of the state, the tradition was fragile, partly because it was largely untested. Copland was determined to give it strength. After his visit to universities in Britain and the United States in 1949, he reported: ‘The characteristic feature of a university is that its leading scholars become a corporate body with wide powers to determine academic policy and to promote the advancement of learning, but with the obligation to observe the responsibilities that attend the use of these powers’. A new institution should take
the advice of more experienced centres of learning and allow its faculty to establish a sound tradition of academic freedom. This might lead to ‘awkward incidents’ and bring the University into controversy. But in the long run, it would be better to put up with controversy than to impose restrictions on the activities of the staff.

‘Academic freedom’, as Copland and others used the term, had two meanings: the freedom of the individual scholar to pursue his or her own research; and the freedom of the university to conduct its own affairs without external interference, especially by government. Often the two meanings merged into one: but we will keep them apart, saving the liberty of the individual academic for later in this chapter, and focusing for the moment on the vexed issue of the University’s relationship with the government which paid its bills.

Copland was optimistic. He thought the constitution of the ANU—meaning the Act which had created the institution and which gave the Council sole control over its affairs—was very liberal and that the provision of a statutory grant, which might be reviewed and increased every three to four years, was the right way to go. In October 1949, at a ceremony to mark the laying of foundation stones for the John Curtin School, the Physical Sciences school and University House, he had reason to feel secure as he listened to John Dedman affirming his commitment to university autonomy. The University, Dedman declared, should be responsible for its own internal administration; there should be no intrusion of party politics; and there should be no strings attached to its income, apart from the one which outlined its purposes in broad terms. As the Minister sat down, Copland leaned across to the Prime Minister to say what a good speech it was. Yes, Chifley replied: ‘but the trouble is that he really believes in it’.

Chifley nevertheless helped establish the principle of autonomy in response to a question from Jack Lang, the former New South Wales Labor Premier and now a turbulent member of the House of Representatives. Lang attacked Copland for writing an article which he interpreted as critical of the working man. Was the Vice-Chancellor entitled to accept jobs writing for newspapers? Chifley replied that the matter was entirely between the Vice-Chancellor and the Interim Council, and thereafter the precedent was set: if politicians asked questions about the University, they would be told it was the University’s business.

Menzies, elected to office soon afterwards, accepted this convention. Like Dedman, he was committed to university tradition and, having been uplifted by Oxford’s dreaming spires, was probably more aware than Dedman of what that tradition meant. The new
Prime Minister, who had once declared that ‘the University must be a custodian of mental liberty, and the unfettered search for truth’, won a reputation as a defender of academic freedom, a reputation somewhat enhanced by comparison with the illiberal stands taken by a few of his colleagues. Two ministers in particular, Richard Casey and Wilfred Kent Hughes, made no secret of the fact that they regarded the ANU as a waste of government money and did their best to pull it into line. The social science schools were, by their origins and nature, as well as some of the people who inhabited them, apt to arouse conservative suspicions. And the very name of the John Curtin School of Medical Research was an affront, partly (so they said) because you could not have a medical school which did not train medical practitioners, but more because of the person whom the title remembered.

Menzies enjoyed playing honest broker between the academics demanding more and his Cabinet colleagues arguing for less. Under Copland, the academics generally seemed to get the better of the contest, as Sawyer recorded in verse: ‘when all other grants received a slash, Doug, and his A.N.U. were showered with cash’. When Labor supporters of the ANU attacked the government for parsimony, the Prime Minister was able to respond, correctly, that the Labor government’s original estimates had fallen far short of what was needed and that his own government was giving vastly more to higher education than had ever been given before.

With Copland vigilant and Menzies benign, the University remained fairly safe from ill-disposed politicians. A more formidable challenge to autonomy came from Commonwealth public servants and the bureaucratic structure they inhabited. Copland had not been six months in office when he noticed the public service encroaching on what he took to be the University’s domain. The offence occurred very close to home, as it related to the University’s provision of his own superannuation. Copland had put a proposition to the Interim Council, but this was resisted by H.J. Goode, who was Assistant Secretary at the Treasury. When the Interim Council’s Finance Committee prepared an alternative proposal, Goode submitted it to the acting head of his department.

Copland was incensed, complaining to Mills that Goode tended to regard himself as representative of the Treasury on the Interim Council. This was a matter of principle: if Goode were allowed to get his way, it would suggest that, contrary to the Act of Parliament, the Council was not independent of outside control. On this occasion, Goode did appear to get his way: Copland failed to get the superannuation arrangements he was after, and the principle remained unconfirmed.

Alarm bells rang again in 1950 when Goode asked that an item on Council’s agenda be deferred until he had discussed it with the Treasurer. Copland protested to Mills, who tried to reassure him: Goode had always been a warm friend to the University and had smoothed its relations with government; and as the University had been created by the government and was sustained by an annual grant, some measure of Treasury control was perhaps an inevitable growing pain. But Copland received support for his stand from another quarter. Rivett, lamenting a loss of autonomy at his old stamping ground (now called the CSIRO), urged him to stand firm against Treasury people who might mean well but whose machinery and techniques were simply inappropriate for universities and scientific bodies: ‘Whatever happens we
must keep the A.N.U. out of their clutches. In the atmosphere of Canberra, this means a big job—especially for the VC.’

There could be no avoiding the fact that the University was accountable to the taxpayer. While the Act may have affirmed the Council’s independence, it provided that the University’s finances should be audited in such a manner as the Commonwealth Treasurer should direct. So from the outset the Auditor-General was involved in the University’s affairs, and the Registrar and his staff tried to organise the University’s accounts to meet his requirements. These efforts ran directly counter to the more relaxed accounting procedures that Florey and Oliphant were used to in the older English universities. Oliphant, who was purchasing equipment and materials on a grand scale, thought all transactions could be covered by ‘two sheets of paper’, and objected vigorously to having to run to a clerk (meaning the Registrar) in order to get things done. Given these internal tensions, it is not surprising that the University’s financial arrangements attracted outside notice.

But nobody within the University expected the Auditor-General, James Brophy, to drop a bombshell. Late in 1953, without warning, he refused to certify as correct the balance sheet for the previous year, reporting to parliament that Council had failed to keep satisfactory stock and plant records or carry out regular stock takings. There were other charges: that contracts for building were let in an unsatisfactory manner, that the University allowed staff to rent premises it owned on privileged terms. Although there was no suggestion of wrongdoing, the report gave the impression that the University’s accounting procedures were sloppy and that, relative to other members of the Canberra community, its staff were looked after rather well.

Hohnen, as the officer formally responsible, was dismayed, and suggested that there was malice behind some of the Auditor-General’s comments. The University closed ranks to argue that everything was in order; and Hohnen and his staff set about implementing a stores system apparently more elaborate (and expensive) than that of any other university in the country.

While the controversy soon evaporated, it left a residue of wariness among members of the University who had anything to do with financial matters. They would have to watch their steps.

‘No Melville, no money’

By this time the University had a new vice-chancellor. The search for a successor to Copland had begun a year earlier, when Council had appointed a committee to scour the English-speaking academic world. So much depended on finding the right man. As Florey had told Oliphant at the time, ‘If you make a mistake the place has had it’.

As in 1947, no one candidate stood out. Oliphant and Crocker pushed hard for Hancock, but Coombs was cool on the grounds that he had shown himself to be ‘an exceedingly difficult person’. The committee set its sights on Sir John Cockcroft at
Harwell, whose work on atomic energy made him especially appealing to the Menzies government. The Prime Minister, in company with two of the government’s nominees on Council, Allen Brown and Roland Wilson, wooed him, but to no avail. Oliphant then urged Coombs to take on the job and restore the vision of the founders, but he still said firmly no.

After much agonising, the committee was left with two front-runners. Coombs nominated Leslie Melville, as he had done at the time of Copland’s appointment. Melville, now an Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, was well known, at least by reputation, to everyone involved in making the appointment. The other contender was a complete outsider: Basil Schonland, a geophysicist from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, whom Wright had discovered through a South African colleague in Melbourne and Oliphant remembered from Cambridge days. Oliphant and Wright decided that Schonland was their man. Coombs, who was shortly due to leave for England, thought it would be worth flying him to London, where he and the Chancellor, Lord Bruce, who had already agreed to help with the selection process, could interview him and report back to the committee.

The interview took place over lunch and was a great success. Bruce was won over entirely, concluding that Schonland was ‘a gift from Heaven’. Coombs, initially sceptical about appointing an outsider, found him much more suitable than he had expected: quiet and pleasant, genuinely keen on the project, interested in the social as well as the natural sciences, and likely to fit in well. But the recommendation that Coombs sent back to Canberra on his own and Bruce’s behalf was equivocal. While he personally expressed ‘a slight preference for Melville’, he emphasised that Schonland would be very good; and while the Chancellor (in Bruce’s own words) ‘feels strongly Schonland is the man we are looking for’, he stressed that Melville, whom he had known many years earlier, might now be equally good.

This advice polarised the committee. Oliphant, supported by Wright and the Solicitor-General, K.H. Bailey, seized on it as endorsing their own view that Schonland should be appointed. Wilson, who strongly believed the University needed an administrator rather than an academic in the top job, put a brake on proceedings by insisting that Bruce be given the opportunity to talk to Melville before expressing a final preference. ‘The ball is now in your court’, Wilson warned Coombs. ‘I fear Oliphant’s machine will prevail unless you and Bruce can agree on L.G. Melville.’ We may wonder if Wilson intended ‘machine’ to have a double meaning.

Melville was duly flown across the Atlantic for the meeting with Bruce, who agreed that he had developed well since he had known him in the early 1930s, while holding to his view that Schonland was the better candidate. But this was not the advice received in Canberra nearly a fortnight later. Coombs, in a cable drafted in a Stockholm hotel and approved by Bruce in London, reiterated his personal preference for Melville before expressing Bruce’s considered conclusion: ‘the Chancellor wishes me to say that taking all aspects of the question into account he would concur with me in a joint recommendation for Melville’s appointment’.

This was enough for Wilson and the supporters of Melville to win the day, but only
just: at the next Council meeting, eight members voted for Melville and seven for Schonland. Oliphant accepted the decision with good grace, though he complained to Coombs that the ‘official’ members (meaning those nominated by government) had lined up against the ‘academic’ members to get their way.

What had caused Bruce to change his mind, in those days between the interview with Melville and the cable from Stockholm? The answer lies in a long and confidential cable that he received shortly after his interview with Melville. Though its author was probably Wilson, the sender was the Prime Minister himself. Menzies urged Bruce to consider the benefits of appointing an Australian citizen of Melville’s quality over ‘the supposed advantage’ of having an academic in the ‘high administrative position’ of vice-chancellor.

I feel strongly that the Institution’s interests would best be served by Melville particularly having in mind some opposition to National University expenditure in Cabinet circles. I need hardly add that a unanimous recommendation from yourself and Coombs would make Melville selection much more easy for the University Council.

The Prime Minister’s meaning was utterly clear. Nevertheless Bruce, with a confidence reminding us that as well as being Chancellor he had also been a Prime Minister, declined to take the hint, and cabled back for elaboration. Schonland, he told Menzies, was still the better man. But was the Prime Minister’s cable saying that, in the interests of the University, there were matters other than personal qualifications that had to be taken into account? If so, he would be prepared to yield and join with Coombs in a joint recommendation of Melville.

Menzies didn’t bother to reply. After waiting ten days for a response, Bruce gave in, leaving Coombs to draft the faintly equivocal despatch which came out in favour of Melville, while hinting that neither of them would be at all offended if Council opted for Schonland.

Bruce thought he had been blackmailed. (Although he did not use the word, he made it clear to Florey that he would have liked to.) It was a case, he told Hancock, of ‘No Melville, no money’. As Chancellor of the University with the interests of the University at heart, what else could he do? As he explained to Florey, if he were faced with choosing the best vice-chancellor in the world with the government refusing to provide finance, or a lesser vice-chancellor with a generous government, the latter would seem the better option.

Sympathising with Bruce’s predicament, Florey told Oliphant ‘in greatest confidence’ that there had been direct political interference, of the sort that they had always feared. But only a few people (apart from the perpetrators) knew about it, and they were not telling: so the University’s reputation as an autonomous body remained intact—and Menzies remained the honest broker.
Sober administration

Oliphant thought two economists in a row would be two too many. But he need not have worried: Copland and Melville were chalk and cheese. Where Copland was confident, self-important (in an amiable sort of way), and fond (perhaps to excess) of the high life, Melville was cautious, modest and abstemious. Copland got on easily with almost everyone; Melville often seemed anxious. Copland, who had a long chat with his successor in New York before he set out for Australia, commended his intellectual integrity, courage and honesty: ‘perhaps [he] is apt to be more suspicious than I would be, but he will think more before coming to a decision. Is that good or bad?’

Everyone agreed that Melville would be careful about money. His arrival in Canberra in November 1953, soon after the Auditor-General had submitted his critical report, helped reassure the government and diminish the report’s adverse impact. ‘I have some fear that the Auditor-General may wish the University to be run like a Government Department’, he told Bruce. Council might resist, though personally he would be prepared to go some distance to accommodate Brophy.

Coombs was especially pleased to see how things were falling into place under the new Vice-Chancellor. Copland’s seemingly careless administrative style and his fondness for delegation had worried him and, what was more, it had worried the government. It was important, he told Florey, that the government should have confidence not merely in the University’s scientific and professional capacity, but also in the soberness of its administration. Melville, he thought, was just the man to bring trust and certainty to the relationship. Eighteen months after Melville had taken office, Coombs was happier about the University’s future than at any time since the legislation that created it was first passed.

Oliphant, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly angry about what he took to be interference by Cabinet and the Treasury. In his view, the University was becoming ‘just a very minor government department’, ruled in effect by the public service members of Council, Brown, Goodes and Wilson, who were able to get their way by means of innuendo: all they had to do was hint at what the government wanted, and other Council members fell over backwards to oblige. As for Melville, Oliphant thought him earnest and decent, but more like a bank clerk than a Vice-Chancellor, even saying on one occasion that the University had to abide by the rules.

like any other government department. Relations became strained: Oliphant accused Melville of calling him a liar, and thought about resigning.

There was now an understanding with the government relating to financial matters. Soon after Melville’s arrival, he and Coombs had held a meeting with the Prime Minister, which was also attended by Goodes as representative of the Treasury. In the course of discussion it was pointed out that the University’s running costs, originally set at £325 000 a year, had now more than doubled, and that they were likely to be nearly three times that amount by the 1955–56 financial year. Even allowing for high inflation, expenditure appeared to be out of hand. Menzies proposed that the University put a stop on further increases in spending. Coombs and Melville responded that a complete halt to expansion would lead to a badly balanced structure. By the end of the meeting, the two parties had reached a compromise: the government would provide sufficient funds over the next few years to allow for modest expansion within the existing structure; and the University would consider the period as one of consolidation, embarking on no new projects, and aiming to demonstrate effectiveness within its original fields of research.

This understanding contributed to at least one lost opportunity. In 1954 Arthur Birch, Professor of Organic Chemistry at the University of Sydney and widely recognised as one of Australia’s foremost scientists, decided that he had had enough: of having to beg for Bunsen burners and test tubes and set his sights abroad. Oliphant intervened, and suggested that there might be a place for him in the Research School of Physical Sciences. After all, if part of the purpose of the ANU was to attract Australian scholars back home, it was equally important to try to hold onto those who were still here. Birch was ready to come, and Melville was keen to have him. But the timing was wrong: Melville and Coombs decided that, however much the University might benefit from this new venture, it would benefit more from demonstrating financial discretion. Birch accepted a chair at Manchester, and was there five years later when the ANU, in more affluent times, began to think about a research school of chemistry.

**Freedom with discretion**

Cold war politics gave a sharp edge to relations between University and government. As early as 1946, when the bill to create the University was before parliament, a Country Party member warned against including a school of social sciences which was likely to be ‘fairly red’; and, even before the first academics arrived, Hohnen was treading carefully to avoid ‘the Opposition zeal for witch-hunting’. Soon the Opposition became the Government, China fell to the Communists, war erupted on the Korean peninsula, and Senator Joseph McCarthy tried to purge the United States administration of alleged communists and fellow travellers. In Australia too, anti-communists looked for a fifth column.

Some thought they had found evidence of one at the ANU. Richard Casey remarked privately that the social science schools were full of long-haired communists. In
parliament the Chief Government Whip, Henry (‘Jo’) Gullett, suggested that the University was becoming more famous for its left-wing politics than its research and made pointed comments about taxpayers having to pay the salaries of communist sympathisers. From the Opposition benches, S.M. Keon, one of the Victorian right-wingers who would soon split from Labor to form the Democratic Labor Party, declared that the ANU had become, according to a planned scheme, a nest of communists who were dedicated to destroying the country’s institutions.

Allegations usually took the form of questions. From Gullett:

1. How many members of the professorial or administrative staff of the Australian National University or the Canberra University College are known to have or to have had Communist affiliations?
2. Who are they?
3. How many of these were the subjects of adverse security reports from their countries of origin?

And again:

1. What are Lord Lindsay’s duties at the Australian National University?
2. Was he previously an officer in the Chinese Communist Army?
3. Is it considered that he is a person capable of giving to Australian students a disinterested picture of affairs in China?

Gullett had the wrong target. Although Lindsay had accompanied Mao Zedong on the Long March and had once been a committed Marxist, he was now, according to Copland, no more a communist than he was. But however misinformed such allegations may have been, their tenor, from the University’s point of view, was disturbing. At least the Prime Minister’s position was reassuring. In response to questions about the appointment or employment of academic staff, he consistently replied that such matters were the University’s business.

While Menzies took the high ground, in the suburbs of Canberra academic freedom lived more precariously. Officers of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) kept a close watch on staff and students with alleged communist sympathies, such as R.A. Gollan, whom we met as an ANU Overseas Scholar and who was appointed a Research Fellow in History in 1953. ASIO officers correctly described him as ‘one of the leading Communists in Canberra’ and therefore kept his house in O’Connor under surveillance. The Gollans and their friends were aware of this and not much disturbed, drawing some amusement from ASIO’s excessive diligence, which led on one occasion to the Solicitor-General’s allegiances being called into question after his son had driven to a party at the Gollans’ in his father’s car.

In later years, Gollan reflected that the activities of the political right had no significant effect on his work as an ANU academic (although later it stood in the way of his appointment to a chair at the University of New South Wales). He continued to pursue his chosen research on radical and working-class movements in nineteenth-
century Australia, allowing Marxist theory to inform his approach. Yet, for those academics and students
with past or present left-wing allegiances, it was hard
to escape the knowledge that while anti-communism
did not at the moment stand in the way of their
research or career prospects, it might one day do so.

Members of the Research School of Pacific Studies
had most to fear. In 1952 Spate, who had carried the
communist card in Cambridge many years earlier, had
a bitter taste of McCarthyism when Casey, after a
security check, stopped his projected appointment as
First Commissioner of the South Pacific Commission.
What worried Spate most was that Paul Hasluck, who
was now Minister for Territories, might prevent him
from pursuing his research interests in Papua and New
Guinea. Hasluck reassured him, but there was no room
for complacency. Just a few months earlier Hasluck had
refused entry to Papua and New Guinea to a research
student in Anthropology, Peter Worsley, who intended to study social systems in the
Highlands. The reason Hasluck gave in parliament was Worsley’s ‘political affiliations’.
Exactly what that meant was never made clear, but it was sufficient to enable Gullett to
ask threatening questions. The ANU Students’ Association took up the case on
Worsley’s behalf, arguing that the Minister’s action was a serious threat to academic
freedom. Hasluck responded that his decision was based on principles which would
apply to anyone wishing to enter the Territory, and that academic freedom had nothing
to do with the case. Copland agreed: the University could not claim special privileges for
its own members. Hasluck refused to budge, the students remained unhappy, and
Worsley shifted his research interests to Groote Eylandt.

Within the University, opinions differed widely on how questions relating to
academic freedom and communism should be handled. At least in regard to academic
appointments, the issue should have been straightforward: either you took into
account a person’s political, religious and ideological beliefs or you did not. But it was
rarely so simple. The first awkward staff question arose in 1951, when Oliphant
wanted to appoint Ken Inall, who had been a key member of his team in Birmingham,
to the position of Research Fellow. Inall was not a member of the British Communist
Party, but he was known to have strong left-wing sympathies. As a member of the
Department of Nuclear Physics, he would be working on a project with defence and
security implications. Copland wondered whether the University should take the risk.
Crocker, who leaned to the right, urged caution: why buy into this sort of trouble,
especially in Physics? Sawyer, who leaned to the left, agreed: ‘An ignoble policy’, he told
his diary, ‘but I’m afraid the only possible one’. The problem was solved with a
compromise: Inall was placed on one year’s probation and required to give an
assurance that he would have nothing to do with politics. Copland, currently in
England, was relieved, though he expected ‘some backchat among the comrades here’.

That was part of the problem: the University’s policy-makers and appointment committee members knew they were being watched from quite different perspectives by the nearby government and by the academic world outside Australia. Certainly Florey was quick to notice an alleged incursion on academic freedom at the University of Tasmania (the Orr case), and to warn Oliphant of the sort of publicity Australian universities could get if they put a foot wrong. From the vantage point of Canberra, Oxford and Cambridge set absolute standards of academic freedom. But the government paid the bills; and, however much Menzies might defend academic freedom against parliamentary snipers, in the midst of the Cold War there was not much doubt that, if put to the test, the government’s definition of freedom would be measured.

Two proposed appointments in 1955 tested the University’s mettle. In March Council was asked to confirm the appointment of an American scholar, Sigmund Diamond, as Research Fellow in History. Nobody disputed Diamond’s credentials; but one of his referees had let slip that he was ‘one of the victims of McCarthyism in American academic life’. Further inquiry revealed that he had been a member of the Communist Party until 1950, though he was no longer associated with the left. The debate on Council was stormy. Two members, the Queensland Liberal Donald Cameron (appointed by the House of Representatives) and the Victorian retail mogul Sir Frank Richardson (appointed by the Governor-General) objected fiercely to the University taking on communists or ex-communists and pressed for an official security check. But other members stood firm on the principle of academic freedom, and Diamond’s appointment was confirmed. Melville supported the decision but was fearful of the consequences: not without cause, since Cameron and Richardson took their case to the Acting Prime Minister, Arthur Fadden. Coombs smoothed things over and the government declined to intervene: but a few members of the University were left wondering what would happen next time. In the event, Diamond stayed in the United States, becoming in due course a professor of history and sociology at the Columbia University and a long-term editor of the Political Science Quarterly.

The next controversy was already brewing in the John Curtin School. Since 1953 Stephen Mason had been a Research Fellow in the Department of Medical Chemistry, where Albert considered him an outstanding success. With the department’s impending move from London to Canberra, Albert proposed that he be given security by promoting him, in effect, to the position of Fellow.

There was a problem. Word had got around that Mason had been and probably still was a communist, and according to the Vice-Chancellor at Oxford University, he showed a tendency to allow his political opinions to flow into his university work. Melville and Hohnen, anticipating trouble on Council, tried to find out more. ‘This is a proper concern with standards’, said Hohnen, ‘and not to be misinterpreted as a security check’. The evidence they gathered was conflicting. Mason’s referees were uniformly supportive, pointing out that while he had once shown left-wing sympathies, he was now a conscientious scholar of unquestionable integrity. Albert was convinced that he was not and had never been a member of the Communist
Party. On the other hand he had written a book on the history of science which had provoked some controversy over what one reviewer called his ‘unusually lenient views of Marxism and Soviet science’. Melville was told by ‘a very responsible academic source’ that there was little doubt that Mason was still a communist, and that he had recently attended at least two conferences that were communist-inspired.

Albert remained unconvinced and pressed for action; Florey warned that the University was doing itself great harm; even Ennor, who was certainly no friend to left-wingers, decided to stand firm on principle. But Melville, with Sir Frank Richardson telling him ‘the risks are too great’ and the government seeming to watch his every move, continued to agonise and delayed matters until a forthcoming visit to Britain, where he would be able to gather information in person.

It was becoming clear that Mason had enemies. Gradually it emerged who they were. His offence was not so much sympathising with communism as speaking against Catholicism during his time at Oxford, where he had fallen foul of an organisation called ‘The Sword of the Spirit’, whose members were dedicated to opposing anti-Catholicism. Their agent on the Board of Graduate Studies was Patrick Moran, who had resisted Mason’s original appointment as a Research Fellow and who remained implacably opposed to his appointment to the permanent staff. At Oxford Moran had crossed swords with Mason at meetings of student societies, notably the Socratic Club under the presidency of C.S. Lewis, and Moran was alleged to have kept a black-list of left-wing academics who should not be appointed to the ANU. Here was Melville’s ‘very responsible academic source’. After visiting Oxford, the Vice-Chancellor yielded to the majority opinion that Mason’s political views were above reproach, and the appointment was allowed to proceed. Albert was relieved: it was good to know that the ANU was not to be ‘a McCarthy university’ after all.

But the Board’s decision came too late. Mason, having been told by Florey that political considerations were involved in his appointment, decided what the ANU could do with its position and accepted instead a tenured appointment at Exeter. Time showed that the University had lost heavily: Mason became an eminent physical chemist, ending his career as Professor of Chemistry at King’s College, London.

The other main ingredient in the debate on academic freedom was the right of academics to express opinions that might be contrary to government policy. In 1954 Jim Davidson and Patrick FitzGerald, along with Manning Clark from the Canberra University College and Anglican Bishop Burgmann, had upset the conservative side of politics by referring to the nationalist origins of the Viet Minh movement in Vietnam and suggesting that the Australian government should think twice before following American policy in Indochina. That debate was interrupted by Menzies’ dramatic announcement that a Soviet diplomat and spy, Vladimir Petrov, had defected to Australia, bringing with him evidence of systematic espionage and subversive activities.

A year later FitzGerald came under fire for attending a conference of Afro-Asian nations at Bandung in Indonesia and issuing a statement jointly with John Burton, head of External Affairs under Evatt in the previous government and a particular source of irritation to the current one. The content of their statement seemed, by later
standards, completely innocuous: Australia, they said, was a part of Asia, and should be represented at such conferences. But Menzies, led on and misled by a journalist, reacted sharply, denouncing the comments as ‘an impertinence of the first order’ and referring caustically to ‘an itch for political pronouncements in academic circles’.

FitzGerald, having made his point, might have been prepared to leave it at that; but not Davidson, who responded immediately by defending the duty of academics and other citizens to express their views, telling Menzies in effect to mind his own business, and adding for good measure a few words critical of government policy.

The issue split the University. Hugh Ennor and Ernest Titterton (who was then Acting Head of Physical Sciences) thought FitzGerald was undermining their negotiations for more money, and urged the Vice-Chancellor to take him in hand. Melville responded by calling a special meeting of the Board of Graduate Studies. Eccles framed a motion to censure Davidson and FitzGerald. Davidson, eager for battle, prepared to put ‘the enemy’ to rout: ‘At the moment, I hope to beat Melville by frightening him’, he told his friend Brian Fitzpatrick. ‘That is I have said publicly that I shan’t budge an inch. FitzGerald also intends to do the same.’ If Melville resisted there would be a public scandal, and he would be doing himself and the University harm.

Davidson, while no doubt committed to the principle he was defending, revelled in the game. Over thirty years later Spate remembered the ensuing meeting for the most brilliant display of tactics he had ever seen. But there was no outright winner. Melville made his point that older universities such as Oxford and Cambridge were protected by centuries of tradition (not to mention large independent funds), and that what was possible there might not be so in Canberra; and he hinted that the government might withhold funds for salary increases. Davidson made his point that the acceptance of restrictions could lead to further restrictions. Moran said the real question was about academic responsibility, not academic freedom; and Spate warned against a heresy hunt. Most agreed that there had been errors of judgement and that Davidson had overplayed his hand. But the final resolution censured no-one, merely confirming the right of University members to freedom of expression on any matter of public interest, while urging them to take account of the University’s interests. Everyone present could agree to this without having to change their opinions, so matters remained much as they were before. If nothing else, the debate demonstrated that academic freedom meant different things to different people.
Melville remained anxious, reminding Florey that the University would have to keep the government on side if it wanted more money: ‘I am not at all happy about the way we are going about this at the moment’. Or as Sawer had wryly put it after the previous year’s run-in with the government:

... The A.N.U. must prosper and get fat—
Unless its Dons insist on staying thin
By writing notes in praise of Ho Chi Minh.

Return of the native

Melville thought the University might have been spared most of these embarrassments if firm hands were in charge of the social science schools. Although administration by deans seemed to be working well enough, these arrangements had always been regarded as interim. Only directors could provide the prestige, protection and inspiration (not to mention the discipline)—in short, the leadership—that the schools appeared to need.

For a long time Copland and some other members of the Council clung to the hope that Firth would come permanently to Canberra, an impression confirmed by his frequent visits to Australia and participation in University field trips. Eventually, having decided once and for all that his heart lay in Europe, he resigned as Adviser and Acting Director of the Pacific Studies school in 1952. As there was no obvious candidate for the position of director, Nadel was then appointed Dean. Although he was widely regarded as intellectually preeminent, he was also seen as something of a martinet; and while the staff of the school might be prepared to work with him as dean, there was no way they would have him as director. After his death and an interregnum, he was succeeded by Davidson, who brought quite different qualities to the deanship. But Davidson was considered unsuitable to fill the office of director, even if he had wanted it.

Life was easier in the Social Sciences school. The (provisional) faculty, at one of its earliest meetings, discussed whether the school should have a director and decided it would be best to wait. Sawer recorded the gist of the debate in verse:

_The (Acting) Chairman._

Let’s get us a Director,  
Who’ll hark to people’s woes;  
Someone the Vice can hector,  
Someone to fight our foes.

_The (Provisional) Faculty._

A Director? Don’t be crazy;  
The bastards cost a lot,  
They’re a waste of dough if lazy,  
And a menace if they’re not.
Chairman.

But have you no respect
For the wishes of the Founders
Who said someone must direct
You anarchic lot of bounders? ...

Once a formal faculty structure had been set up, Sawyer was appointed dean and filled the office more or less to everyone's satisfaction.

Whenever anyone spoke of a director for Social Sciences, there was a strong chance that Hancock's name would be mentioned. If Hancock was in bad odour with several members of Council, he also had strong supporters, especially Crocker and Oliphant, who tried their hardest to persuade him to join them, and the rest of the University to have him. First they put his name forward as warden of University House, and then as vice-chancellor, but neither proposal made much headway. On being told that the warden's position had been filled when he thought he was still in the running, Hancock urged his friends (through the historian John La Nauze in Melbourne) not to bother him with hypothetical approaches:

When I played cricket, there were grounds which I felt put a hoodoo on me:
I was certain to make a duck there. And I have always made a duck on the
Canberra ground. But then, there have always been grubbers bowled to me!
It seems to me most unlikely that I shall ever bat at Canberra.

Nevertheless, some friends remained confident that he would respond to the captain's call.

Hancock at this time was writing Country and Calling, which was published late in 1954. Like any autobiography, the work had many objectives. One of them, inspired by his falling out with Copland and the ANU, was to set the record straight about where his loyalties lay, and to deny any suggestion that his conduct had been in some way 'un-Australian'. Wright mischievously suggested another, joking to Coombs that the book was the longest job application ever written. Whatever might have been Hancock's intentions, Country and Calling certainly attracted plenty of attention in Australia and, in relation to the episode on the park bench, managed to convey the impression that he had been hard done by.

Who Froze Out This Brilliant Australian? Canberra Lost A Brilliant Brain

No Job Here For This Historian

Copland, in Canada, damned the account as misleading, grossly unfair to the ANU and unjust to himself. But Hancock's version of events made the headlines: the craftsman had had the final say.
About the time *Country and Calling* appeared, Melville received messages from England that Hancock might now be receptive to an invitation to come to Canberra. Melville had already decided that the Social Sciences school needed Hancock as director. The University, conceded its Vice-Chancellor, had problems of standards and staffing. Somehow these managed to be resolved, but more as a result of divergent forces than through conscious policy. Hancock, he thought, could change this in the Social Sciences school through guidance and persuasion. Casey, writing to Hancock, gave another reason: ‘Although there are a number of good people there, there are a number of others who create considerable apprehension in my mind. I know that Melville is quite aware of this—and it is no doubt for this reason that he is making efforts to get you.’

Now, given the hint that Hancock might be willing, Melville wanted to make an offer without delay. But some members of Council had long memories and were not at all charmed by *Country and Calling*, Wilson going so far as to describe the relevant passages as unwise, mischievous and childish. To counter the expected opposition, Melville prepared a long and confidential memorandum which set out what he knew of the University’s relationship with Hancock and suggested that he would no longer give the University trouble. His case was balanced and perceptive, although Florey, fulminating in Oxford, said it read like ‘an eminent headmaster dealing with a sixth form boy who has developed surprisingly well during the last few years’. But it did the trick; after a stormy meeting, Council approved the match and Melville posted an offer the next day.

Hancock was delighted to receive it; but it was not within him to give a quick response. Rather there followed a long period of agonising over whether people in the University still wanted him, whether his own research and writing would suffer, whether the University was genuinely free of government interference, and above all whether his wife, who was still susceptible to depression, would be able to cope. At his request, Melville flew to London at the end of 1955 and, over four days extending into the new year, the two men approached the question from every conceivable angle. Towards the end of February a letter of acceptance was in the post. But before it had time to reach Australia, he got cold feet and sent a cable to Melville asking him to put his acceptance on hold. He had received new evidence, relating to a case at the University of Technology (now the University of New South Wales) in Sydney, that McCarthyism might be rife in Australia, and he wanted to be reassured about the outcome of the Mason case. Also Theaden, who had lately suffered a relapse, was now recovered enough to discuss the decision. Several cables passed between Canberra and London before he was satisfied there was nothing sinister in the Mason affair and felt he could safely cable Melville ‘Ready if you are ...’. ‘I’m hired’, he wrote exuberantly to Florey. The decision, once made, came as an enormous relief.

And not just to Hancock. John La Nauze told Melville that he ‘must have been caused almost as much trouble over the negotiations with a single person as with the whole Medical School’. As we will shortly discover, that was not quite true; but certainly the protracted negotiations with Hancock suggested how much the University, through its Vice-Chancellor, was prepared to invest in the potential contribution of an individual scholar, and how much weight it assigned to academic
leadership. Hancock might not have been seen as representing the social sciences’ salvation (though Oliphant and some of the natural scientists saw him as nothing less than a saviour) but he was universally seen as showing the way ahead.

Melville deserved congratulations and he got them. The *Sydney Morning Herald* announced the decision in an article headed ‘The return of the native’ (which Hancock liked and used to describe his homecoming in a later book), and reported that ‘Mr Melville has succeeded where Sir Douglas Copland failed’. And within the University there was a widespread sense of elation. When the Vice-Chancellor announced the appointment to a meeting of the Research School of Social Sciences, everyone stood and burst into spontaneous applause—everyone, that is, except Noel Butlin who, having looked to America rather than England for inspiration, didn’t know much about Hancock, hadn’t liked the little of his work he had read, and didn’t know what all the fuss was about. Yet Butlin’s abstention did not detract from what was for Melville a rare moment of popularity and triumph.

Melville achieved another coup in 1960 when he recruited J.G. Crawford, by now Sir John Crawford, to head the Research School of Pacific Studies, as Professor of Economics. Aged 50, Crawford was one of Australia’s best-known and highly esteemed economists, enjoying the respect of both sides of politics. Educated in Sydney, he had taught rural economics at the University of Sydney from 1934 to 1941, before joining the Commonwealth public service, where he rose to prominence, alongside Coombs, as one of Arthur Fadden’s ‘seven dwarfs’. As Director of Research in the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, he had participated in discussions about the ANU when the original legislation was being drafted; then, as head of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, he had attended the Easter conferences in 1948. At the time of his appointment to the ANU he had reached what he regarded as the pinnacle of his public service career as Secretary of the Department of Trade. Now he required, as he later put it, ‘new fields to conquer’.

Had Eggleston been alive, he would have rejoiced at the appointment. Crawford was his kind of academic, someone who believed that scholars should help understand and overcome the urgent problems confronting the world. He was well acquainted with the Pacific region, especially Japan, and had wide contacts among academics and practising economists in other Commonwealth countries and the United States. As a bonus, his close relations with government promised to serve the University well. With Crawford in charge of Pacific Studies and Hancock of Social Sciences, the futures of both schools seemed assured.
Hancock at the crease

‘I am grooming myself as a Father figure’, Hancock told Florey shortly after his arrival in Canberra in March 1957. Soon he was hard at work pulling his ‘rabble’ into shape, applying himself with an intellectual and physical energy that belied his 59 years. In his own department, he encouraged (by what means nobody ever knew) Laurie Fitzhardinge, who had a reputation for what he called ‘frittering, pottering and gadding’, to get a move on with his biography of Billy Hughes: the first volume, That Fiery Particle, covering Hughes’s life to 1914, was published in 1964 to widespread acclaim. Aware of Manning Clark’s sensitivities, he brought together the historians in the University and the College into what he called ‘The History Consortium’. Contemptuous of parochialism in historical research, he appointed Anthony Low to open up the field of South Asian history: the result was a series of lively seminars, known as the ‘Sepoy seminar’, and a steady flow of publications. He wanted to do the same for the Americas, but Melville said no.

One of his main aims was to get people from different disciplines talking to one another. He achieved this through what became known as ‘The Wool Seminar’, which was one of the first major multidisciplinary undertakings in the University. Every fortnight during term for three years people met to talk about the development of the wool industry in Australia. About half came from the social sciences and half from the natural sciences, including a significant representation from CSIRO. The eventual outcome was a book of essays, edited by Alan Barnard in the Department of Economic History, entitled The Simple Fleece. Hancock encouraged Ann Mozley (later Moyal) to talk to people in the Academy of Science: she did, and became in due course a pioneering historian of Australian science.

Aside from his own publications, his greatest achievement at the ANU was the foundation of the Australian Dictionary of Biography. The idea for such an enterprise was not new: Percival Serle had published a two-volume dictionary in 1949, and there were many overseas models. Fitzhardinge was already compiling a card index of names, with brief biographical details, which he saw as laying the foundations for a future dictionary on a grand scale. Hancock took up the idea as a project immensely valuable in itself and appropriate to the University’s national status. With Ross Hohnen’s help, he convinced the University to fund it, and at a conference he convened soon after his arrival, he persuaded historians throughout Australia to support it. Before long working parties in every state were nominating people for inclusion, and in 1962 Douglas Pike, who held the chair of History at the University of Tasmania, was appointed foundation General Editor. The first volume, published in 1966, was enthusiastically received.

In relations with students, whether in his own department or others, Hancock was a great encourager, always stimulating, always concerned. His comments in seminars were searching, demanding, constructive. He drove himself, and others followed his example. Often he could be seen with a ‘pupil’ or staff member pacing backwards and forwards on the lawns in front of the old hospital building, a substitute perhaps for the Great Quadrangle at All Souls. When occasion demanded it, he took a turn around the
racecourse, then situated in the valley west of Acton ridge and now immersed beneath the lake. He nurtured a genuine community of scholars, many of whom later found themselves in senior academic positions throughout Australia, where they applied the Hancock brand of intellectual rigour to their own teaching and research.

With a puckish, self-deprecating sense of humour, he sought to bridge the gulf between Oxford (or more recently, London) and Canberra. Cricket offered metaphors for communication with people high and low. Late in 1958, as the cricket season was getting under way, he wrote jovially to the Prime Minister, a famous cricket-lover, proposing the formation of a Department of the History of the Art of Cricket, with Jack Fingleton, former test batsman and journalist, as professor and Menzies and Hancock as readers. The expense will be enormous, since all three members of staff will be expected to pursue continuous field work in the Australian States, the English Counties, the South African Provinces, the West Indian Islands and elsewhere. The Prime Minister responded with equal good humour, rebuking Hancock for listing as recreations in Who’s Who ‘swimming, walking, fishing’ where he himself had proudly proclaimed a commitment to ‘watching first-class cricket’. Menzies later arranged Hancock’s elevation to the rank of KBE.

One day in the early 1960s Bill Gammage, one of Manning Clark’s bright young history students, was having a hit at the University nets with several other undergraduates when Hancock, in company with a new lecturer in Clark’s department, Bruce Kent, strolled across the oval towards them. Instead of pausing at a respectful distance to watch the play, Hancock walked up to Gammage and took the bat from him, saying ‘Here, let me show you how it’s done’. ‘Who’s this old coot?’ thought Gammage. Hancock then proceeded to face half a dozen balls, calling each one in his pukka (to Australian standards) English accent, ‘york-er!’ (with an upward inflection), or such as the ball demanded. Gammage and his mates decided that the ‘old coot’ knew his cricket. Despite Hancock’s earlier predictions, there could be no doubt that he had come to bat in Canberra, and that he was captain of the team.

Hancock was at his best when everybody played the game as it should be played. He believed that the university world, in Canberra as well as Oxford and London, was indeed a community of scholars, inhabited by ‘chaps’ who shared a commitment to learning. Although in London he had warned Adrien Albert against the risks of appointing a communist to his department, he now learned from Gollan, for whom he had great affection and respect, that a communist could be a competent and trustworthy academic colleague.

‘Chapdom’, said Clark, was Hancock’s ‘great delusion’. He believed that if the circumstances of a particular issue were fully and honestly presented to intelligent people, then reason would prevail. He failed to realise until it was too late that not
everybody reasoned as he did. There were ‘wreckers’ in the academy, most of whom were ‘careerists, pedants or idiots’.

Malcolm Ellis was a wrecker from outside the academy, which was part of his problem. A journalist by profession, he had written lively and acclaimed biographies of three leading figures in the early history of New South Wales: Governor Lachlan Macquarie, the ex-convict architect Francis Greenway and the pastoralist and entrepreneur John Macarthur. He was widely acknowledged (and he regarded himself) as an expert on sources in the Mitchell Library. It was therefore reasonable that Hancock should approach him to be a member of the national committee to set up the proposed dictionary of biography.

Everybody who knew anything of Ellis warned Hancock to stay clear of him. As well as being an extreme individualist, he was prominent as a Cold War warrior, ready to rush into battle at the least provocation. When he realised that he would be sharing the limelight with Manning Clark, whom he regarded as an emissary of Stalin, he attacked him personally and seemed about to sabotage the whole project. There were heated arguments, generally in the form of Ellis versus the rest, about the choice of publisher and who was to do what. Hancock tried to save the situation and Ellis, after ‘resigning’ no fewer than six times, eventually withdrew, publicly denouncing the project as ‘an amateur effort’. The dictionary survived the turmoil, but it was a close run thing. ‘I judge myself severely for the immense mistakes I made with Ellis’, Hancock later confided to Ann Mozley, the Research Fellow who kept the project going while the battle raged. ‘... and I have little excuse, for I had made similar mistakes a little earlier in my dealings with a similar person: too much optimism and tolerance at the beginning leading to head-on conflict at the end.’

The ‘similar person’ was Lord Lindsay. When Hancock arrived in Canberra, he found Lindsay agitated about the impending appointment of Martin Wight as Professor of International Relations. Assuming that he was troubled about how Wight would regard the type of research he was undertaking, Hancock encouraged him to write to Wight setting out his concerns. Lindsay took the advice and wrote the letter which convinced Wight that he would do better to remain in London.

By this time, Hancock had concluded that Lindsay was mentally unbalanced and that he considered the chair his by right. Hancock was equally certain that he was neither qualified for the chair nor entitled to it. As Lindsay spread his grievances far and wide, Hancock determined to save him from himself. ‘If I were not so sorry for Lindsay’, he told Wight, ‘I should enjoy the whole affair as a little and quite amusing comedy’. When Lindsay demanded a full inquiry, Hancock discouraged him, suggesting that everything would turn out for the best if he played by the rules. But Lindsay became increasingly testy, especially after Hancock arranged for International Relations to be subsumed under Political Science in his own school and postponed further consideration of the chair. Eventually Hancock agreed to investigate his grievances, but it was too late.

By mid-1959 the case was being reported at length in the press and beamed to every household with a television receiver. Lindsay now announced that he had accepted the offer of a full chair by the American University in Washington, which seemed to confirm
that the ANU had made a bad mistake. Before he left in September, he delivered the University a parting insult in the form of a cheque for one penny, which he deemed sufficient compensation for his not giving the standard six months’ notice of impending resignation. The University duly banked it and hoped the saga was at an end.

But Lindsay continued to agitate from abroad. Two years later a draft of a book arrived from Washington, entitled ‘A study of academic standards’, which detailed the ways in which he thought he had been unreasonably treated and argued that the ANU was destined to become a second-rate institution. The University might have chosen to ignore the draft but it had not been for the Orr case in Tasmania a few years earlier (involving the dismissal of a professor of philosophy for improper conduct towards a female student), which showed how much trouble a university could get into if it failed to follow correct procedures. So Council set up a committee of seven chaired by Coombs to enquire into the case. Two of its members, Gollan and Swan, drafted a 50-page report which analysed Lindsay’s charges, leaned wherever they could in his favour, but concluded that no significant injustice had been done.

Then, to make absolutely sure it was on safe ground, Council asked John Anderson, recently retired as Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University, to go over the committee’s work as an independent adviser. Suggested by Swan, this was a brilliant stratagem, as Anderson was famous as a champion of the underdog and of liberty. His conclusion was emphatic: there was no charge for the ANU to answer. In fact, wrote Anderson, the University had been too conciliatory towards Lindsay, and it would be unworthy of the University to yield another inch to his pressure tactics.

Lindsay would have presented a formidable challenge to the most capable administrator. Whether in relation to Mao’s China or the University administration, he knew no shades of grey. Nevertheless, Hancock had exacerbated the problem, first by encouraging him, and then by refusing to enquire into his grievances. Overall he gave the impression of inconsistency: it was little wonder that Lindsay christened him ‘Sir Fox’, or that Coombs and Anderson blamed him in part for Wight’s withdrawal. After a great deal of anguish and effort, the University’s reputation was saved. J.D.B. Miller was appointed to the vacant chair, and under his guidance International Relations became a department of distinction. Lindsay failed to find a publisher for his book and his case receded in the corporate memory, though it served as a reminder, when comparable cases arose in later years, of how an individual could undermine the orderly procedures of academic life.

Hancock regarded the Lindsay problem as part of larger troubles with the Research School of Pacific Studies, whose existence had been an irritant ever since Copland and the Interim Council had refused his offer to act initially as director of both schools. When he arrived in Canberra he found that the two schools were linked by joint faculty meetings. Within a few weeks he decided that his ‘rabble’ had become a ‘band of brothers’, and that the ‘Pacificos’ were the rabble. He therefore abruptly severed the connection, in a manner he later had cause to regret; though he described the act of separation as ‘in every way liberating’.

The schools remained linked by physical proximity in the old hospital building
which, by the end of the decade, had become uncomfortably crowded. A new building was in prospect: but planning was complicated by the need to satisfy both schools, including their respective Director and Dean. In order to obtain ‘a design of distinction’, the University approached several architects. The specifications required rooms where users could enjoy ‘scholarly seclusion’ and places where they could discuss their problems with colleagues or hold small classes. ‘At all cost the feeling of traversing interminable corridors should be avoided ...’ The architects were provided with exact details of the sizes of rooms for every category of staff, from professors to secretaries, and the numbers of each type of room required by each department. If the academic structure of the schools was not already fixed in concrete, these specifications ensured that they soon would be.

In assessing the designs, the selectors were to consider ‘convenience, economy and delight’ (a phrase which could only have come from Hancock). Davidson, a noted aesthete, had no doubts about what he wanted. His friend Roy Grounds sketched a series of buildings which reflected (literally, in a lagoon) an Asian-Pacific theme. Hancock favoured a design by Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell based on three hexagons connected by covered ways. At first it seemed that Davidson had won the day; but Hancock, who could be ruthless when he wanted to be, undermined his case at a Council meeting and got the hexagonal plan accepted. Economy, though, was the final victor: as the plan proved to be too expensive, the architects introduced major changes, including joining the hexagon together like Siamese triplets, reducing the size of the stair halls, situating rooms on both sides of the corridors and making the corridors narrower. Later visitors, disorientated by enclosed corridors which changed direction every twenty or so metres, might well have wondered if the corridors were indeed interminable.

The first two hexagons were opened in 1962 and named after Coombs, a departure from the previous policy of naming buildings only after the deceased. Coombs was uncomfortable about the honour, but thought it would be churlish not to accept. It was, of course, quite appropriate that the person who had done more than anybody else to bring the schools into being should be honoured by having the building named after him. On the other hand, as he later implied, the H.C. Coombs Building, with its many small rooms facing outwards towards lawns and shrubbery, contradicted the original conception of the schools. ‘Scholarly seclusion’ was far removed from the
university of the post-war reconstructionists, as far removed, in fact, as Oxford. The building for Social Sciences and Pacific Studies may have carried Coombs’s name, but it was Hancock’s building.

By the time of the opening, Hancock had also imposed much of his personality on his own school. He liked to see it as having evolved from the ‘growing points’ he had talked about in 1948. In fact, for most of the 1950s the departments had simply grown, without significant reference to his earlier ideas. But his coming imposed on the school a sort of retrospective coherence and gave the impression that it was now as he and others had always intended it to be.

After the death of his wife from cancer in 1960, Hancock handed over the office of Director to P.H. Partridge. He remained Professor of History until 1965, when on retirement he was created the first University Fellow. Although his time at the crease was shorter than most people expected, it was an impressive innings, distinguished by some powerful straight drives and elegant glances: but he never did learn to play the googlies.

** Florey’s decision **

Administrative arrangements in the John Curtin School continued as they had been from 1953, with Ennor as Dean and Florey as Adviser, though Florey was often regarded and sometimes described as ‘de facto absentee director’. So long as the two men remained on friendly terms and retained confidence in one another, the system worked well enough. They corresponded frequently, sometimes two or three times a week, Ennor addressing Florey deferentially as ‘Dear Sir Howard’, and Florey responding in a paternal, occasionally admonitory tone, ‘My dear Ennor’. They also shouted at one another by means of Emidicta cylinders, a precursor to tape recordings, which allowed Florey in particular to let off the powerful head of steam he built up in his study at Oxford whenever he thought about the ANU.

Many people in the University still hoped that one day Florey would come to Canberra permanently to lead the school he had founded. He was the obvious director, and nobody else in Britain or Australia seemed an appropriate substitute. Better to have Florey as ‘Potential Director’ than someone inferior as the real thing. Within the school he was a source of inspiration and guidance; outside the University, his name could be invoked to command respect. Yet his status was ambiguous: while the University’s decision-makers were keen to cite him as Adviser, they did not invariably heed his advice, partly because they realised, in Copland’s words, that it was impossible to administer the medical school from Oxford, but also because his advice often seemed wide of the mark.

Florey remained torn. He felt the pull of his own country and a desire to contribute to its scientific development, and perhaps he looked forward to being feted as a favourite son. Yet Oxford had been good to him; and he enjoyed his place as a respected and influential member of the British scientific establishment. As for the John Curtin School, he was eager to nurture his creation and he felt a responsibility, if not to the University, then at least to the people he had encouraged to go there. On the other hand,
he wanted to break with what he once described as 'Florey's Folly'. As Copland shrewdly
perceived, he wanted a distinctive monument to his own enterprise, and this made him
suspicious of change. All this was complicated by domestic concerns quite different
from but almost as powerful as those which sustained Hancock's indecision.

This inner turmoil led to a barrage of complaints, most fired privately to Ennor and
Oliphant: about architects who couldn't design and builders who wouldn't get on and
build; about interfering politicians; about a University Council which had no
understanding of the needs of medical scientists; about vice-chancellors who would
not do what they were supposed to do; about social scientists who were not worth a
crummet; and above all, about narrow-minded administrators, who should have been
there, unseen, to do the scientists' bidding but who were constantly getting in the way.
His outlook improved each time he came to visit Canberra; but then distance, Oxford
gossip and disheartened letters from Canberra helped keep his wrath warm. At times
he seemed to be itching for a brawl: after detecting in Melville 'a slight resistance' to
his visiting Canberra in 1954, he told Oliphant to let him know if the Vice-Chancellor
wanted to sack him 'so that I can give him a damn good excuse to do so'.

In late 1955 Florey finally decided that he had had enough and submitted his
resignation as Adviser, offering the formal reason that he could no longer shoulder
the burden of running a large department in Oxford while taking a close interest in
the ANU. This was no doubt true, although it was equally true that he had come to
recognise that he could no longer do what he had originally set out to do. For the
benefit of his friends, he gave a subsidiary reason: that the institution had lost its way.

According to the experimental pathologist George Mackaness, a member of Council,
this news had 'a horrifying effect' on councillors, who regarded it as the biggest blow the
University had ever sustained. Melville, genuinely dismayed, urged Florey to set out
'with the greatest frankness' his concerns about the University. Florey accepted the
challenge and, encouraged by Oliphant and Ennor, set about preparing a long
memorandum which amounted to a forthright and sometimes angry criticism of how
he had been treated and how the University was going about its business. His own
school, he claimed, had achieved the highest standards of research. The University,
however, had sunk into an administrative morass. Some of his complaints were specific:
the failure to retain the services of his protégé Bunker, the laboratory manager whom he
regarded as crucial in building the school; the cumbersome stores system (part of the
Auditor-General's legacy); Copland's attitude that departments were 'like sausage
machines, spewing out graduates in a steady stream'. Then there was the problem of
'political and civil service considerations' influencing University appointments, by which
he meant Melville's appointment and the case of Stephen Mason, which was a subject
of high table gossip just as Florey was preparing his brief. In a separate memorandum
intended for the Prime Minister, he recommended that the Council be restructured to
get rid of the public service influence, and that the University be reorganised to give the
research schools more or less complete autonomy.

All this was delivered with the attitude he expressed to Ennor: 'I don't care whether I
am right or wrong'. He told Hancock that he was letting people in Canberra know that he
did not want to be worried any more about the ANU after December 31st 1955, midnight!

Melville had got more than he had bargained for. But Florey achieved less than he had intended, partly because his document included errors that were obvious to people on the spot; partly because it dealt unfairly with matters that were patently trivial; but mostly because Melville was able to show that he was asking for things which were inconsistent, such as a rapidly expanding budget but no government influence, and a move towards autonomous research institutes while retaining the freedoms normally associated only with universities.

Wright concluded that there was a campaign on Council to demonstrate that the document was inaccurate. But a campaign was hardly necessary. When Oliphant told Florey that he might have got the Bunker story wrong, he responded, 'I am really not in a position to judge', without seeming to realise that this admission could have been applied to the whole document.

Accuracy aside, the report might have done the University considerable harm had anyone leaked it to the press. Although Wright and Oliphant tried to keep it on Council’s agenda, it was effectively suppressed until a Director of the John Curtin School resurrected and made use of it for his own purposes some 25 years later.

When it became clear that Florey was intent on going, the members of the school started thinking about what life would be like without him. The four professors, along with Mackaness, decided that the school should develop along the lines set down by Florey, with some minor recasting in relation to Experimental Pathology. After pondering briefly whether they should look for a director, they decided to continue with Ennor as Dean; and on Melville’s suggestion, the meeting of heads of departments was formally constituted into what was called the School Committee.

Before this committee had a chance to meet, Florey dropped a hint that he might yet be willing to come as Director. This was less than nine months after he had submitted his damming report. What could have caused this sudden change of heart? Had he never really lost the desire to come? Did preparing the report purge him of his irritations? Or was he influenced, as Wright suggested, by a letter from the relevant authorities in Oxford notifying him that his house was to be demolished to make way for a highway? Whatever the reasons, he seemed keener to come than at any time since those early discussions with Wright and Conlon. And despite some feeling about his memorandum, Melville and his colleagues were keen to have him, especially since Menzies expressed delight at the prospect and promised to support a substantial development of the school.

Inevitably there were complications. In order to maintain his research momentum, Florey expected to bring with him a small team from the Dunn School. The University and the government were agreeable, but Florey’s colleagues turned out to be not as enthusiastic as he was about coming to Australia. He therefore suggested that he should come as Acting Director on a trial basis, along with those of his team who wished to accompany him. From the University’s point of view, this was a far less appealing proposition, as the increased government funding was conditional on his coming as permanent Director. Several members of Council and the school began to
have second thoughts. Eccles stated bluntly that Florey had ‘ratted’ on his previous proposal, and that the school could not put up with another year of uncertainty. Ennor suggested that he simply could not make up his mind whether or not to come, and that he would be in no better position to do so after twelve months as Acting Director. Behind these views lay the assumption that the school had now established its own strong credentials, and so did not need Florey as it had done in the past.

Council decided to put an end to Florey’s indecision. It concluded that he should be offered once again the position of Director, and that if he said no, he and his team should be invited to visit Australia for a year, with the ANU paying most of the costs. But the position would not be left open for him: on the offer of the directorship, Council wanted ‘an immediate decision’. Ennor, as Dean, was sent to Oxford with instructions to explain to Florey why Council could not leave the position open indefinitely and to urge him to make up his mind about a long-term commitment.

Ennor’s visit to Oxford became a talking point at the Lamb & Flag, the pub just down the road from the Dunn School, for many months afterwards. In delivering Council’s message, he managed over several days to give Florey the impression that he and his team were definitely not wanted. He allowed Florey no room for manoeuvre and made it clear that, if he came, he would not be allowed to interfere in the management of the school. In pub chat with other members of the Dunn School, he let slip that the great man was wanted only as a figurehead and a source of funds, and inferred that he was scientifically finished. All this was reported back to Florey, word for word. Henry Harris, another Australian in the Dunn School who, until now, had intended to come to Canberra as part of the team, suspected that Ennor wanted the director’s position for himself. That might
not have been true, though it is likely that he was keen to retain the deanship, and that his fellow professors in the John Curtin School were happy to leave things as they were.

Whatever his private intentions, Ennor had handled the negotiations badly. Although he was a capable administrator, he had a tendency, as Coombs put it, to rush fences, and his loud and self-important manner was the last thing Florey needed during a period of personal anguish. On the other hand, if not in the spirit, at least in the substance, Ennor had followed Council’s instructions. And for his part, Florey had tested the patience of Council and the John Curtin School once too often. He had also given Ennor rough treatment, failing to recognise that he could no longer be regarded as ‘Temporary Assistant Director’. Ennor, he told Wright, was like a faithful watchdog that had turned on its master. Perhaps he should have realised long before that Ennor had outgrown watchdog status.

Henry Harris told Wright that he had never seen Florey more desperate or upset. Oliphant, who was visiting Oxford at the time, noticed tears in Florey’s eyes and said he himself could have murdered Ennor. Florey, after his initial feeling of rejection, was angry, complaining to Wright that Ennor’s ‘knowledge of medicine is nil & his ideas on the future of J.C.S. left me aghast because of their inadequacy’.

On his return to Canberra, Ennor reported to Council that the discussions had been conducted on the most friendly basis, and that he had made various offers to Florey, none of which proved workable. Prompted by Titterton, he conceded that the school had doubts about Florey’s coming: ‘Nobody wants someone who cannot make up his mind’. Coombs, reading between the lines of Ennor’s blow by blow report, concluded that it was a distressing story. But Ennor had at least forced the issue, and there was now no prospect that Florey would ever come as Director.

Nevertheless, his influence on the ANU and the medical school persisted long after this altercation. Relieved of his uncertainty, he came to view the school more benignly and continued to offer advice as it was sought. A year after the final breach he visited

Canberra to open the building for the John Curtin School, where he expressed appreciation of the roles played by various people, including Ennor and (with more enthusiasm) Bunker. On that occasion he delivered an exhortation to excellence that was repeated often in later years: the John Curtin School 'need not only to be good but it must be superlatively good'. In 1965 his election to the office of Chancellor served as due recognition of his role in the early years of the University and the school, as well as a balm to heal past wounds entirely. Even after his death in 1968 he remained a sort of posthumous patron, whose name could be invoked when the interests of the school or the University were under threat.

His influence could also be seen in the shape and culture of the John Curtin School. The departmental structure which he had set out in the late 1940s proved as sturdy as the building he had helped design; and largely as a result of his own ideas about the role of directors and heads of departments, and his own prolonged indecision, the departments emerged as he had warned that they would: as 'independent little kingdoms', resistant to change and jealous of their own autonomy. The structure he built sustained conservatism; and as a result, John Curtin remained Florey's school for many years to come.

\*\* Two cultures? \*

'I repudiate the much publicised theory of The Two Cultures', wrote Hancock in 1976: no university which accepted that notion was worthy of its name. Olibphant shared this opinion, telling an audience at the University of Melbourne in 1970 that the natural scientist and the social scientist should work together, each drawing strength from the other.

The idea that members of these two groups held opposing world views was centuries old. In the late 1950s it was given new currency by the English physicist and novelist C.P. Snow, who coined the term 'Two Cultures' to describe what he called the 'gulf of mutual incomprehension' between literary intellectuals and scientists, especially physical scientists. 'They have a curious distorted view of one another', Snow told an audience at Cambridge. 'Their attitudes are so different that, even on the level of emotion, they can't find much common ground.'

The ANU had been conceived as one university with one culture. Coombs, Wright, Conlon and their colleagues had expected that it would be bound together by the single purpose of serving national needs. The Academic Advisory Committee had expected that natural and social scientists would meet freely to exchange ideas and draw insights from each other's research, just as they did (or were supposed to do) in the senior common rooms at Oxbridge. Firth, at the Easter 1948 conferences, imagined the two social science schools linked to the medical research school by a covered way, along which medical men would come to collect maps and talk with the social scientists. Olibphant, expressing the supreme confidence of post-war science, declared that physics, as 'the most highly developed of all the sciences', could help bring order to 'the less highly
Sir Mark Oliphant in 1959, the year he was created KBE. The artist, Noel Counihan, captures the confident image of post-war Science.
organised sciences'. Florey thought the medical school would benefit through association with the other schools as part of an intellectual community.

Nevertheless, from the outset there was a tacit understanding that the natural and social scientists had different interests, which had to be balanced, on Council for example, or in the selection of vice-chancellors, so that neither group was seen to have the upper hand. There were irritations; and within a few years these had grown to an extent that Florey, in his caustic report to the Council, could point to a deep schism which threatened academic life in the new institution.

Although distance, as usual, magnified the problem, it was certainly there, especially among Florey's chief informants, Oliphant and Ennor. Oliphant himself personified the 'scientific culture' as depicted by Snow, his old friend from Cavendish days: 'expansive, not restrictive, confident at the roots ..., certain that history is on its side, impatient, intolerant, creative rather than critical, good-natured and brash'. And if Snow wanted extra evidence to support this side of his proposition, he need only have listened to Oliphant railing about the unbelievable irresponsibility and immaturity of many (not all) of the social scientists and lamenting his own sense of isolation:

Outside my own School I find that I cannot even communicate with colleagues other than Eccles and Ennor (Fenner is just not interested in anything but his work), Trendall & Stanner. All others live in a strange world in which I have no part & with which I can find no point of contact.

Best therefore to keep them at a distance: when it was suggested that some social scientists might move into the new medical building, Oliphant warned Florey against it 'unless you have the most complete safeguards & the power to throw them out at any moment, without notice'. On the other side of Snow's dichotomy, the social scientists were not defensive or hostile, as Snow would have them, though occasionally they seemed faintly contemptuous of their scientific colleagues and sceptical of their naivety.

Part of the problem was money. At the time when the government was urging restraint, the natural scientists in particular tended to see 'the Schools on the hill' as competitors. What was worse, the behaviour of some social scientists—Davidson and FitzGerald in particular—was seen as turning the government against the University as a whole and standing in the way of additional funding. Ennor sought to compensate by forming close associations with Menzies and other ministers (a task which he found congenial) and persuading them that the University was not full of reds. But many of the natural scientists remained fearful of guilt by association.

The natural sciences, said Florey, were different: their ultimate authority was the experiment, and this clearly distinguished them from other disciplines. Too few people at the ANU, he argued, understood the outlook of scientific researchers or the means of achieving results. And the natural sciences were being burdened with administrative arrangements which might have worked for the social sciences, but which were quite inappropriate for experimental research. 'The Natural Scientist', he declared, 'is usually loath to spend his time on University matters not directly concerned with research.
When he does have to give up time, better spent in research, he becomes irritated.'

Oliphant came close to proposing that the natural science schools secede and set themselves up as independent research institutes. Yet he was reluctant to forgo the association with a university or to surrender the traditional advantages of being part of an academic community. He told Hancock: 'we are a collection of technicians without the guidance of or the atmosphere created by the true humanities in a full university'. That was Oliphant's dilemma: he recognised that the University was dependent on the social scientists to be worthy of its name; but at the same time, he thought the behaviour of the social scientists was dragging the ANU down.

That was why Hancock had so much to offer. Appalled by the stories he was hearing from Oliphant and Florey, Hancock thought he could heal the 'accursed feud' between the two cultures; and in his short period as Director of Research School of Social Sciences he helped bring the two sides of the University closer than they had been since research work had begun in the early 1950s. Part of his contribution was to identify areas of interest to natural and social scientists alike, especially through the Wool Seminar. But equally significant was his capacity to reassure the natural scientists that representatives of 'the literary culture' could comprehend and appreciate their endeavours, and to demonstrate to the University as a whole that they could work in common pursuit of knowledge and understanding. In Oliphant's terms, Hancock's leadership helped give the University a soul.