RESEARCH CUTS ATTACKED AT CROWDED MEETING

About one thousand academics, scientists and research workers packed the Public Lecture Theatre and surrounding areas at the University of Melbourne last Wednesday night to protest against cuts in Australian Research Grants Committee funds.

(Details of the cuts have been published in recent issues of SOUND).

The Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Ministers for Science, Education and Health, as well as their Opposition counterparts, had been invited, but most were unable to come because of Parliamentary duties.

However, the Minister for Health, Dr. Everingham, represented the Prime Minister, and the shadow ministers for Science (Mr. Eric Robinson) and health (Mr. Bruce Lloyd) appeared on behalf of the Opposition.

The meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, Dr. David Myers, and the principal speakers were drawn from each of the three Victorian universities, representing the physical, biological, biomedical, engineering and social sciences.

Between them the speakers and contributors from the audience built up a massive case for a review of Government support for research and the meeting carried a series of motions deploiring the cuts.

Dr. Everingham read to the meeting the text of a telegram sent by the Prime Minister and undertook to discuss the issues with the Treasurer, Mr. Hayden, immediately on his return to Canberra.

THE PRIME MINISTER’S TELEGRAM

Mr. Whitlam’s telegram (58cm. long) was delivered to Professor Kevin Westfold during the meeting. This is what it said:

“I regret I am unable to attend the meeting in Melbourne this evening where Government support for research will be discussed. Dr. Everingham will be attending. I would be grateful if you would convey to the meeting my commitment to maintaining and where possible further developing research in Australian tertiary institutions and research institutes.

“In the first place I would like to correct the wrong assumptions being made about the funds that are likely to be available in the 1976 calendar year for the research program administered by the Australian Research Grants Committee (ARGC). It has been assumed in the representations made to the Government on this matter that the amount available to the ARGC for 1976 would be 3.3 million dollars, i.e. twice the amount of $1.65 million available for the first half of 1976.

“There has been no Cabinet decision on this question. The Government has decided that the triennial allocation for the research program administered by the ARGC should be maintained at twenty million, i.e. the figure that was the base level for the previous triennium.

“Budget Cabinet also approved an amount of $6.3 million for the financial year 1975-76. This comprised $4.65 million for the remainder of the 1973/75 triennium and $1.65 million for the first six months of the 1976-78 triennium.

“I would like to take this opportunity to assure universities and research institutions that contrary to their assumptions regarding funds for research in the calendar year 1976 an amount of $5.5 million will be available in that year. This will involve the provision of some $3.8 million in the second half of 1976 and an appropriation somewhat in excess of seven million in the 1976-77 Budget. The latter figure is broadly consistent with the rate of spending implied by the Government’s decision to make $20 million available for the 1976-78 triennium. This policy is also broadly similar to that adopted for the N.H. and M.R.C. program and is consistent with the stringent restraint which forms the basis for the 1975-76 Budget.

“The Government has increased medical research allocations from an original 13.5 million which escalated to actual expenditure of $17.7 million in the 1973-75 triennium to $24 million for 1976-78. This increase for the new triennium, although substantial, must be seen in the context of the Government’s overriding need to restrict the growth of its expenditure. 1976-78 compares favourably not only with 1973-75 but still more with 1970-72 when 6.9 million dollars was provided.

“As with the ARGC there has been some confusion as to the amount of money which will actually be available in the first year of the new triennium. The Government has assured the N.H. and M.R.C. of 6.3 million dollars – that is, 2.3 million dollars for the first six months of 1976 and 4 million dollars for the second six months. In both the case of the ARGC and N.H. and M.R.C. grants, additional funds will be made available in 1976-78 to cover salary increases.

E.G. Whitlam”

THE UNIVERSITIES’ REPLY

On Thursday, September 11, the following telegram was sent to the Prime Minister and the Ministers for Science and Health:

“My Dear Prime Minister

“Your long telegram was delivered after Dr. Everingham had read its contents from his copy to the meeting. It is apparent that you have failed to appreciate that the reduction in funds available to ARGC and N.H. and M.R.C. for the first half of 1976 will cause irreparable harm to research in Australia that cannot be remedied by further hypothetical subventions in the second half of 1976. We repeat that the triennial allocations of $20 million and $24 million, however distributed between years, still represent cuts far greater than those imposed on any other sector of the Australian community. The resolutions that follow were passed unanimously by the one thousand very concerned participants at the meeting.
"1. This meeting advises the Australian Government that its expenditure on research is inordinately low when compared with that of other developed countries.

"2. This meeting deplores the severe reduction in funds provided for 1976 to the Australian Research Grants Committee and the National Health and Medical Research Council and the consequent reduction of university and institute research activity.

"3. This meeting requests the Australian Government to allocate additional funds to the ARGC and the N.H. and M.R.C. for 1976, sufficient to provide support to at least the level of 1975.

"4. This meeting requests the Australian Government immediately to initiate discussions, through its Australian Science and Technology Council, on the appropriate level of research funding in Australian universities and institutes. We urge you to reconsider the position taken by your Government and to take action as requested by the meeting.

D.M. Myers, Chairman
K.C. Westfold, Convener"

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Speaking in the House of Representatives on September 11, the Minister for Health, Dr. Everingham, criticised Opposition proposals for increased expenditure on research.

He called on the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Fraser, to detail exactly the amount of extra funds that would be committed in an alternative 1975-76 Budget proposed by the Opposition.

Dr. Everingham said that a logical step for the Opposition would be to give medical research some of the funds they would need to take from universities to achieve their proposed budget cuts of $1000 million. This, he said, was a conjuring trick or political sleight of hand.

Dr. Everingham was reported as adding:

"The Opposition's inevitable restrictions on the funds for tertiary education should also be borne in mind by the fraternity of academies in their hostility to Government research allocations."

VICE-CHANCELLOR WRITES TO P.M.

The Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Matheson, has written to the Prime Minister expressing the University's deep concern at the drastic reduction in funds available for research in the first six months of 1976.

Dr. Matheson pointed out that Monash had become increasingly dependent upon funds supplied by N.H. & M.R.C. and ARGC. Approximately 100 members of staff were employed in projects supported by these two bodies, and the cut in funds meant that the salaries of many of them would be no longer available.

"If the work and the employment of the people concerned is to continue, funds will have to be found from elsewhere; this will be difficult," Dr. Matheson said.

In accordance with a resolution of the University Council last Monday (see SOUND 32-75), the Vice-Chancellor asked Mr. Whitlam to set aside time to discuss the matter personally.

ALTERNATIVES FOR RESEARCH STAFF

A further resolution of Council last week requested the University Administration to consider immediately and report back to Council on possible redeployment of staff whose positions were jeopardised by the research cuts.

It asked the Administration to consider ways of "financing such redeployment within the University of staff whose services may be no longer needed for projects terminated or reduced as a result of the new measures."

NOT PRIVATE

In its report of the Monash Economics Lecture last week, SOUND erroneously referred to one of the sponsoring bodies as "the Institute of Private Secretaries and Administrators."

This should, of course, have read: "The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators."

SOCILOGY '76

1975 Arts students who wish to enrol in first year Sociology in 1976 must give formal notice to the office of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology as soon as possible and not later than October 31.

Sociology is subject to a strict quota, and only a limited number of places are available for existing Arts students.

Applicants must also attend personally during the re-enrolment period from December 11 - 17.

Existing students in the Faculties of Economics and Science should direct inquiries to their own Faculty office, as each of these Faculties has its own quota for first year Sociology.

COMPUTER COURSE

An introductory course in the BASIC Computer language will be conducted by the Computer Centre later this month.

The course follows the recent addition to the Computer Centre Educational Computing Systems of compilers for the BASIC programming language.

Four sessions from 6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m. will be held in the Mathematics Building on consecutive Wednesdays, beginning on September 24.

No prior programming knowledge will be required, although some acquaintance with elementary Fortran will be helpful.

Further inquiries and bookings may be made with Mrs. Annette Smith at the Computer Centre, ext. 2670.

ENGINEERING COLLOQUIUM

The second of two Engineering colloquia on plastic design and structural instability will be given this Thursday by Professor M.R. Horne of Manchester University.

Professor Horne recently served on the Merrison Committee on developing design rules for box girder bridges in the U.K.

He will speak on lower bound methods for the plastic design of frames at 4.15 p.m. in Room G15, Building 6, Engineering School.

TRAVEL FILM

AUS Travel will present a free film on travel in South America, Africa and India in R4 tomorrow between 1 p.m. and 2.15 p.m.

Aardvark tours manager Jim Bothwell will be present to answer travel enquiries.

Authorised by K.W. Bennetts, Information Officer.