

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, RT.  
HON. R.G. MENZIES, C.H., Q.C., M.P., AT CANBERRA  
ON THE 14TH OCTOBER, 1959 at 11 A.M.

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QUESTION: Sir, yesterday it was announced that the Commonwealth was financing a Grant to the Monash University of up to about £500,000 and referred to a report by the Universities Commission. I was wondering if we could have a copy of the Report.

PRIME MINISTER: When I had the application from Victoria for a very substantial increase in the amount that was being provided under the Murray Report for the Monash University, I told the Premier that I would get the Universities Commission to have a look at it because, after all, that is the kind of thing they are there for. They examined it and made a report to me and I sent it to him with an indication that we were prepared to act on the recommendations in the Report. There is no reason why the report shouldn't be published but I notice in the paper this morning that he's indicated, from his point of view, that the Report should not be published until after the Interim Council of Monash has had a chance to look at it. Well, I don't quarrel with that, but as soon as the Report has gone to the Interim Council I will have no objection to publishing the report: in fact, I think it ought to be made available. As a matter of fact I have got, I think, a supply of the necessary copies so that at a moment's notice they can go out.

QUESTION: Apart from the questions of Monash, Sir, does this Report deal in any general terms with University enrolments and extensions and so on, or any matters on Monash apart from what we have now?

PRIME MINISTER: No, this is a Report which relates to the Monash Application. It does not contain statistics in relation to the Melbourne University which are quite interesting. Yes, I'll be delighted to have the report made available, but I don't want to appear to be discourteous to the Council.

QUESTION: The Leader of the Labour Party in the Queensland Parliament, Mr Duggan, has described you as one of the outstanding public men Australia has ever had -

PRIME MINISTER: I bet there's a catch coming (Laughter)

- but he says that you are politically lazy, he said: "Mr. Menzies had done great dis-service to Australia because every International Mission with which he had been associated had been a colossal failure. Would you reply to his statement?"

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I wouldn't dream of sitting in judgment on Mr. Duggan; I doubt whether I'm equal to that task.

QUESTION: Any announcement yet, Sir, on the Governor-General?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: Could you say what stage has been reached on the appointment.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I'm in communication with the Palace about it.

QUESTION: Do you expect it to come soon, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. I hope so.

QUESTION: As a result of Dr. Subandrio's visit to China, Sir, and the agreement that has been reached between Indonesia and China for mutual support in respect of Territorial claims, Indonesia's support of China on Formosa and China's support of Indonesia on West New Guinea, have you thought about that?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I've read what has been published on the matter and we have no official information. But all those declarations, you know, may mean one of two things: they may simply mean 'Well, we give you moral support; we announce our beliefs that you are entitled to West New Guinea if you announce your belief that we're entitled to Quemoy or Matsui or Formosa' - I suppose there are a number of people who support the claim in that sense - but the alternative meaning that they are prepared to support the claim by force is a very different matter. Indeed, it will be remembered that Dr. Subandrio in Australia went on the record to the effect that Indonesia did not propose to establish its claim by force and there is no reason to assume that he has changed that ground, and therefore this mutual declaration is, no doubt, one of sentiment or opinion - it doesn't necessarily involve military support.

QUESTION: A Conference in Germany, Mr. Menzies, has asked all countries to co-operate in a world-wide survey on radio-active fall-out and the effects on food, etc. Will Australia co-operate in that survey?

PRIME MINISTER: But Australia has been doing a lot of work in that field already; we have a special committee, an expert committee which, quite recently, made a report. It's report showed that not only was the amount of fall-out in Australia insignificant as compared with some other countries, but that it didn't present any danger. You remember the report was published not long ago. Well, that's a highly competent committee.

QUESTION: I presume, Sir, that the information we obtain here is available for international - -

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes. Copies of our reports are made available, and, of course, we ourselves have had reports from the United Nations bodies which have gone into this kind of thing. It stands to reason that in Australia the amount of fall-out might be expected to be negligible. Perhaps the Soviet Union, for example, where there has been a great activity in these matters, the fall-out might be much more considerable.

QUESTION: Now that Mr MacMillan has been returned is there any suggestion of a Commonwealth Conference early next year. You did mention earlier in the year --

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, give them a chance.

QUESTION: Next April?

PRIME MINISTER: Well we've never had one in April, but keep on going; you know as much about it as I do. I haven't a clue.

QUESTION: Supplementary to that question, Sir, it has been reported that Mr. MacMillan is planning to create a Ministry of Science in his Government to bring it in line with the Technological Age. Have you contemplated such a Ministry here, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I can't say that I have. A good deal of our technical resources are dealt with by the Department of Supply and it's a little premature to know what he is going to do. It may be that he'll establish a Department of Science or a Ministry of Science, but the interesting thing will be what re-construction occurs in other Departments.

QUESTION: It has been suggested that - - - Supply Department may go.

PRIME MINISTER: Quite so. If it were merely a matter of taking over the Department of Supply it wouldn't be very radical, but there may be that other things that are done in other Departments there which could be aggregated under one Minister. It's only guess work at this stage. I'll be very interested myself to see the way that's dealt with.

QUESTION: At the moment, Sir, it is true that our chief scientific activities are under two Ministers, one from C.S.I. R.O. and the Department of Supply?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, that is quite right.

QUESTION: Do you see any advantage in the combination?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. I haven't given any thought to creating a new Department or an amalgamated one, but I'm always willing to learn and I'll be interested to see what goes on in England.

QUESTION: Can you tell us whether you have any specific programme for the Divorce Bill? Do you hope to have it through by Christmas?

PRIME MINISTER: I can't tell you. You had better ask the Attorney that.

QUESTION: Does that not raise the question - - -

PRIME MINISTER: Well, that's a genuine consideration, but I know that both the Attorney and I were hoping that this Bill would be disposed of this year, but whether anything that has happened affects that I don't know; he's just circulated a number of amendments. They may be much less formidable than they might appear on the surface and a great number of them will no doubt be quite verbal, but ask him. I think he's still hoping.

QUESTION: Have you given any thought as to whether there should be ---

PRIME MINISTER: None whatever. As a matter of fact one reason why I made it clear to my people that it mustn't be assumed that the Session was going to end on the date that rumour had originally mentioned, was that I had hopes of disposing of the Divorce Bill; it's had a very long airing and the Attorney's done a phenomenal amount of work in relation to it, you know, in dealing with groups of people and organizations.

QUESTION; There doesn't seem to have been a great deal of opposition -

PRIME MINISTER: Not so far as I can see.

QUESTION: Didn't Mr. Holt make it clear, Sir, that the Government's programme was in future always to prorogue the Parliament and have an opening once a year at the beginning of the year?

PRIME MINISTER: Frankly, I've forgotten whether he did.

QUESTION: Would the question of pro-rogation be contingent on the date of arrival of the new Governor-General.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I suppose if we were to - plenty of "ifs" in this question - if we prorogued, which I don't know, and if the new Governor-General can't be here at a time when the house would normally meet, then no doubt we would then consider whether the meeting of the new Session after the pro-rogation would occur after his arrival. All this is very elementary, my dear Watson, and highly conditional.

QUESTION: There is no occasion that I can remember of an Administrator having opened Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I can't recall one.

QUESTION: A rather interesting situation?

PRIME MINISTER: Mm.

QUESTION: - - you mentioned in an article that communications were taking place between you and the Queensland Premier on Mount Isa. Are there any new developments on that? Could you say whether the visit of Sir Roland Wilson and Mr Holt overseas may have any results?

PRIME MINISTER: The last communication I made to the Premier was that as Holt and Wilson were investigating certain matters and they would be back fairly shortly, perhaps it would be more satisfactory and save time in the long run, if we had a further discussion after their return. Well they come back, tomorrow isn't it?

PRESSMAN: Due tomorrow in Sydney - -

PRIME MINISTER: They won't be here; well Holt won't be here, but they will at once bring us up to date on this matter and then I'll ask him to get in touch with Mr Nicklin.

QUESTION: Mr. Menzies, do you hope to announce the Government's new 3-year Defence Plan before the Parliament rises for the year?

PRIME MINISTER: That's a difficult question to answer. I certainly intend that it will be determined and announceable some time in November because I have to go away at the beginning of December and I want this matter to be fixed before I go. Whether that means actually while the House is still sitting or just afterwards, I don't know; it will be done as soon as it can be, but it certainly will have to be done in November.

QUESTION: Have you had any final judgments from the Technical people?

PRIME MINISTER: Don't ask me; I'm having a Conference with Mr. Townley about it today. A lot of work, I know, has been done on this.

QUESTION: Could you tell us anything, now, following Mr McElroy's visit Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: No. There is nothing really.

QUESTION: It was more a goodwill visit, was it?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes, we didn't discuss any of the techniques of the business with him.

QUESTION: Now that it is in retrospect, Sir, do you think that we have learned anything from Princess Alexandra's visit that can be useful in future? It seems to have been extraordinarily successful.

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. She did a lot to make it extraordinarily successful herself, of course, because she is a natural person. I think the thing we have to do more and more in Australia is to get away from the idea of long, formal, royal tours, you know, every State - committees and organizations - all that. They are all right, and you can have one or two of those occasionally, but I much prefer to think that we occasionally have a Royal Visit, that's a very different thing - a Royal Visit from a Royal Tour. Somebody might come out and visit one State for some particular purpose; somebody might come out and actually have a few weeks' holiday, but if it is to be every State for every visitor, then we certainly won't have as many visits. There people would say "Oh, this is becoming too much". I'm hoping to encourage the idea of the occasional, informal, easy visit. This Princess went to three States. I don't think there was any really bitter complaint from the other three. The next visitor might go to two or one. Let's get the formality out of it. By formality I don't necessarily mean that they have to shake hands with Prime Ministers and Premiers, because they'll do that in any case, but that they won't have these great programmes in which every day brings forth its visit to so-and-so and its this or that, in some other locality. There is no escape from those when you have a first visit from the Queen, for example, a visit from the Queen Mother which has some particular historic and personal interest for Australia. But I'm hoping that in future we'll be able to eliminate some of the aspects of a highly organised tour and substitute some of the aspects of a personal visit.

QUESTION: Did the military advisers of SEATO, actually, at the time of their meeting, recently, get some actual concrete schemes agreed on to intervene militarily if the situation required it in Laos?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, you wouldn't expect me to answer a question like that would you?

QUESTION: Well, did they just "waffle", or did they have anything-

PRIME MINISTER: I've no statement to make.

QUESTION: Senator Spooner said in the Senate the other day, Mr. Menzies, that he would confer with you on Members' privileges. I was wondering if he had spoken to you about it yet?

PRIME MINISTER: Senator Spooner, unfortunately, is on the Sick List. He's in hospital.

QUESTION: Senator Aylett said that he wanted the Parliament and Government to protect him from the criticisms of the kind that he has been getting. Have you any comment to make on Senator Aylett's position?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, we've all felt that way occasionally.

QUESTION: Were you surprised, Sir, when you heard of the Christmas Island rackets?

PRIME MINISTER: I concurred with the action taken by the Minister very swiftly. Yes.

QUESTION: Do you think, Sir, that it's likely that there will be any amendment to the rules relating to the Secretaries and Offices to require they be in the State of a member?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. We are going to have a discussion on this business and it would be premature to be speculating about it. I don't seem to be very well informed on a lot of these things because there are people around here who are far more familiar with these things than I am and the first thing I had to do was to say: "Can somebody give me a list of all these things". And I'm getting that, and then we'll have a go at it, in a perfectly reasonable spirit, I'm not being unpleasant about it.

QUESTION: Sir, when you say "We" do you mean the Cabinet or --

PRIME MINISTER: Well, one or two Ministers and myself, at any rate.

QUESTION: When you say "it" Sir, do you mean the whole range of Members' amenities?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. I haven't seen the list yet so I don't know which ones I want to have a look at. It's really in transit.

QUESTION; Does that include the question of residence, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: You fellows are asking me questions about a matter on which I am the worst informed man in Parliament, you see, so I'm taking steps to inform myself.

QUESTION: Will you consider this point then, Sir, that -

PRIME MINISTER: I'll consider anything you care to put to me, but I'll make no statement about it.

QUESTION; Well, where the Parliament is in recess for less than 14 days Members who remain in Canberra are entitled to £4. a day allowance. Do you think that's a fair thing?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm making no statement about any of these matters.

QUESTION: Will you consider that point, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I've told you I'm making no statement about that matter. I'm in the process of informing my mind.

QUESTION: Can you give us details of the Superannuation Scheme that has been mentioned a couple of times in the House.

PRESSMAN: You answered a question on that.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, but he wants some details of a Bill.

QUESTION; Well could you say when it might be brought down?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I can't tell you precisely because I don't know off hand whether it's been through the Legislation, the scrutiny of the Committee, but I would take it for granted that it would come down in this Session and be passed in this Session.

QUESTION; Sir, have you yet received the proposals from the Academy of Science on Space Research?

PRIME MINISTER: No I haven't.

QUESTION: On Space Research, Sir, it has been suggested that the United States may undertake work of that nature at Woomera in a bigger way than was already indulged in during the Geophysical Year. Could you tell us anything of that Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know.

QUESTION: Do you expect any Government Legislation arising out of the Hursey case, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I couldn't tell you.

QUESTION: Have you any comment to make on the decision by the United Order of Oddfellows which provides that Australia's first Dental Benefit Scheme within the next few weeks in New South Wales should cover children and teen-agers from the age of 3 to 17 and further, has there been any discussions at Government level to encourage or embrace such a scheme in the National Health Scheme?

PRIME MINISTER: There have been no discussions to which I am a party. Whether the Minister for Health has given it any thought or had any discussion, I wouldn't know, but it hasn't come to me.

QUESTION: Does the removal of this hill outside Parliament House indicate that there is a move towards a new Parliament House at all? It's gradually been disappearing.

PRIME MINISTER: I think it's sort of an embodiment of the Scriptures - 'If you have sufficient faith you can move mountains' - and this is very encouraging to Members of Parliament; when everything seems black, when the Press have turned them down, when the Mirror's bought out the Sydney Morning Herald and all these terrible things have occurred I lock out and there's the embodiment of faith.

QUESTION: Could you give us any indication, Mr Menzies, of whether there is any prospect at all as to the results of Mr Holt's and Sir Roland Wilson's activities overseas of getting a loan -

PRIME MINISTER: No, look don't ask me to say any more than that because I'll be much better informed on that in two or three days.

QUESTION: Could you give us any background, Sir, to the Government's delay in the appointment of a Committee of Enquiry into the Taxation Laws which you mentioned in your Policy Speech?

PRIME MINISTER: Well the delay is on the side of getting the membership established and as we want to have the very best kind of committee, after a long examination of a lot of names we decided that I, myself, would have a chat with a couple of representative bodies, particularly in the Accountancy and Business world, in order to see that we were getting somebody who carried weight all round. I expect to have those discussions in the next few days and the moment that has been done we'll be in a position to go ahead.

QUESTION: To announce the names?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, and the terms of reference.

QUESTION: And the Post Office committee?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm having a meeting this afternoon with bearing on that matter and therefore we'll be able to announce something in the next few days on that.

QUESTION: Could you give us any guidance before that comes out, Sir, as to the terms of reference of the Post Office committee? Are they likely to be geared to the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee Report on the Post Office?

PRIME MINISTER: The terms of reference have not been settled. They are not very easy to work out. It's very easy to say in a broad way: "Well what capital is engaged in the Post Office in real terms?" and you start to elaborate the terms of reference to see how that gets worked out, well it's a very very different matter, but I'm having a discussion about it this afternoon.

QUESTION: The enquiry will be confined to the - (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

QUESTION: It won't be extended, as some Members have asked for, to cover the whole functioning of the Post Office?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, dear, No. I should have to appoint an entirely different kind of committee.

QUESTION: Sir, has the Government got any programme in mind for shifting more Government Departments from Melbourne to Canberra?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that, you know, the process of digesting the last move will take a little time, but that's not really a question that I can answer. I think you had better ask the Minister for the Interior because they may be working out with the Canberra Commission a sort of future time-table on this matter, but I wouldn't know about that. Ask him; if he's got any knowledge on that I'm sure he would be glad to tell you.

QUESTION: On present indications, Mr Menzies, it looks as if it will be anything up to two years before television services are operating in country areas. Has the Government anything in mind to speed up this enquiry that's taking place, and for the applications for licences or to -

PRIME MINISTER: You had better ask the Postmaster General that. You see there appears to be a mass of applicants. Well I suppose if you have lots of applicants they all have to be heard, they all have to have a chance to put their case; all have to have questions put to them; it's very difficult to speed up a thing like that.

QUESTION: The Board is proposing to make all its recommendations in one piece rather than deal with the applications for one area and one State and then make recommendations. Would you consider getting them to deal with them in States or in areas?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know what the Board is proposing to do on that. That's a matter on which you really ought to ask the P.M.G. I have been concerned only with overall policy on that.

QUESTION: In view of recent reports that Russia is willing to sell oil to Australia, do you feel that it would be advantageous for Australia to take up any further trade with Russia or its satellites to promote peaceful co-existence or trade ties?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know that I understand that. We have a certain amount of trade with them - the Minister for Trade has been asked questions about this repeatedly - and I see no reason to alter what has been our approach in the past.

QUESTION: Have you any new views on Summit talks, Mr Menzies, following Mr. MacMillan's return and the visit to -

PRIME MINISTER: No. My views remain the same and therefore what you are really asking me to do is to make a prophecy, a very uninformed prophecy. I think there will be one; I'll be very surprised and disappointed if there isn't.

QUESTION: Has the Cabinet considered the Draft Trade Treaty with Indonesia, Sir, prepared by officials in the two Governments earlier this year yet?

PRIME MINISTER: A Draft Trade Treaty? I haven't seen it, but then I was away at the relevant time.

QUESTION: Have you any views on your own future Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I should think my future is very murky. Are you speaking now in terms of the "hereafter" or in this world?

PRESSMAN: The immediate and near future.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, no, I've got plenty of occupation thanks. I'm just going along, living my idle life.

QUESTION: When will you appoint an Ambassador to Moscow, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. You had better ask External Affairs about that. They deal with that.

QUESTION: Do you consider any extension, Sir, to your own trip to Indonesia and Malaya?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: How long do you expect to be away, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Only about 14 days altogether - five or six days in Indonesia and five or six days in Malaya - plus travel. I might come back through Cocos Island, if that is an extension.

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With the compliments of:  
Hugh Dash,  
Press Secretary to the Prime Minister.