

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE  
RT. HON. SIR ROBERT MENZIES AT LENNONS HOTEL,  
BRISBANE, ON 22ND APRIL, 1963.

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QUESTION:

I was wondering, Sir, whether you felt satisfied that the special assistance in loans and the grants for public works given to Queensland in the past year or two are bearing fruit. Do you feel they are having the desired effect?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh, I think there are plenty of signs of improvement in the result, because when it came to the non-repayable grants to stimulate employment, as you know we weighted it a bit in favour of Queensland - very properly because the incidence of such unemployment as there is, is heavier in Queensland than elsewhere. I think, on the whole, that there are signs of improvement and in fact it is very interesting to note that the Arbitration Commission made the improvement in the country's economy the principal reason for granting a ten per cent. increase in margins in the recent judgment and the three weeks' leave. I don't think anybody doubts that there is a marked improvement all round. That doesn't mean to say that the position doesn't have to be watched. There is to be another Loan Council - of course the regular one in June as a rule - and it is at that time that we discuss the Loan programme for the States including the housing component. The tax reimbursement, as we used to call it, is, of course, the subject of a current agreement and it increases each year in accordance with the factors that the formula provides for, such as increase in population and children of school age and so on. I can't anticipate what will happen at the June meeting but Loan Council meetings tend to produce an improving result each time from the point of view of the States.

Q.

Has the success of the last Loan made it easier, Sir, to go to the Loan Council?

P.M.

Well, you can't answer that with a simple "Yes" or "No". There is no doubt about it that the success of the last Loan has improved the Commonwealth's cash position for 1962-63. We were budgeting for a pretty substantial cash deficit. That will, of course, be very much smaller than we anticipated because of the success of the last Loan and I think there is reason to believe that the Loan market will continue to be healthy in the next financial year. I don't mean to say that we will have £60M. loans doubly subscribed. That is an uncommon event, but I think we can look forward to a pretty healthy Loan market in 1963/64 and, of course, one of the great effects of that from the Commonwealth's point of view is that instead of supplementing the Loan market as we have for many years out of the Budget so that the States will get their full money, we can reduce that drain on the Budget and to that extent, it improves our Budgetary position.

- Q. There is an active movement in North Queensland now Sir, called "People the North". I understand that the Queensland and Western Australian Governments are joining together to make an approach to the Federal Government.
- P.M. Well, that hadn't reached me when I left Canberra. I don't recall getting anything yet.
- Q. The Premier was writing first to the Premier of Western Australia and then they were going to write to the Commonwealth.
- P.M. Anyhow, I am having lunch with the Queensland Cabinet tomorrow and if there is something like this in the wind no doubt Mr. Nicklin will take the opportunity of raising it. But I wouldn't comment on it because I don't know what it is yet.
- Q. Sir, there is no particular project you would be discussing with Cabinet tomorrow is there?
- P.M. No, I have no agenda. When I come up here, I usually like to see them and sit around and talk about our problems. They are probably at the moment fairly concentrated on their own because of an election coming. Not a Federal election, but a State one. It is a good thing to have contacts. As a matter of fact, in the past our contacts were not sufficiently good with perhaps some unhappy results but we have greatly improved that position in the last eighteen months, both by meeting each other in Canberra and here.
- Q. Sir, what do you think of the suggestion that has been made that the Snowy Mountains Authority shouldn't be wound up as an organization when the Snowy job is over but should perhaps use the accumulated talents and techniques ----
- P.M. Well, at the moment, that is nothing but an idea. Needless to say, it is one that we have had in our own minds because we don't want to see a great, skilful, technical organization like the Snowy Mountains Authority just fade away. It is much too experienced and competent for that, but exactly what you do with it in the future is a matter that can't be solved by a few rhetorical phrases. It requires a close study. The Minister for National Development has not only been going into this matter himself very closely but has several times discussed it with me and with other Ministers. There is no doubt about it that it would be a very good thing if you could use a body of that kind. You have to remember that all these works projects in Australia are, in a prime sense, State works. We have, ourselves, come to the party on a number of them, but it is not just a simple case of the Commonwealth saying, "This is what we will do in such and such a place and we will use the Snowy Mountains people for it." These things require a lot of negotiation with State Governments, just indeed as the Snowy Mountains Scheme did. It took years to get the legislation through, to give the thing complete Constitutional validity by having an agreement between Victoria and New South Wales and the Commonwealth. That took a long, long time. It is quite true that we went ahead with the job but we were going ahead on a very precarious Constitutional foundation until the agreement

P.M. (Contd.) was signed and ratified by the Parliament. When I say that, I am not contemplating that it is going to take years to evolve some other scheme. I don't know what the schemes are; what there might be. Certainly you can take it that we are interested in getting full benefit of the Snowy Mountains set-up.

Q. Has Senator Spooner expressed any ideas on this?

P.M. No, well, we haven't got to concrete proposals. We have been rather talking about the general principle. No, I am not in a position to mention any particular schemes. Anyhow, if I knew, I wouldn't say because you get headlines - "So and So is to be done by the Snowy Mountains Authority". I am too old a horse for that.

Q. Decimal currency, Sir. Views have been expressed up here that the actual changeover could lead to some inflation; for example where things are close, they will just up it a bit to get on to the new currency, the new coin.

P.M. Well, that can't apply to the main unit because that is to be the precise equivalent of 10/- today. One thing is that 1/100th part of 10/- is 1.2d. so perhaps you might find that 19/1d. might become 19/1.2d. I can't say that I think that it has got serious inflationary possibilities.

Q. This matter has been deferred once, Mr. Prime Minister. Do you think that this time it will definitely be introduced?

P.M. Oh, yes. You are wrong in saying it has been deferred. We first of all said that we were greatly interested. We appointed a Committee to investigate it. You know, this outside Committee. Then, when we got their report, we said we adopted it in principle and since then a lot of investigations have been going on as to the mechanics of the changeover. It is no use announcing a date for the changeover unless you know that you can live up to it. Well, they have introduced it into South Africa and our experts learnt a good deal from South African's experience. Then, we are in process of establishing the Mint at Canberra. The site is at present being cleared and the Mint, of course, will need to be so created as to deal with the new coinage and finally, for the first time we fixed a date, and this is a firm date, for it to come in, because we are now satisfied that all the mechanical problems can be overcome in that time. There will have to be a great deal of changing, you know - accounting machines and all this kind of thing; this will cost the Government, of course, a lot of money.

Q. Is there any room for the Government to pay compensation?

P.M. Compensation to whom?

Q. To the people who are grossly affected, who have machines.

P.M. Oh, there is going to be a provision that the Government will meet certain costs of the changeover. I don't carry the details around but I know that it amounts to a very considerable liability on the Government, running into what .... £30M or £40M.

Q. Would it be any great advantage to Australia, Sir, if New Zealand converts to decimal currency at the same time?

P.M. Well, it would simplify transactions between the two countries but, of course, they are on a different rate of exchange anyhow because New Zealand is on par with sterling. I don't disguise from myself the fact that when it ultimately comes in there will be a great deal of hullabaloo - you know - housewives won't be very pleased. They will say we have got used to the old business of pounds, shillings and pence. But I have no doubt that within a few weeks the complete simplicity of this will recommend itself. You only have to be able to do a long addition of three or four figures and you have got it. The great fun is going to be getting a name for the unit.

Q. Have you any preferences, Sir?

P.M. Dear me, no, but I have seen some very funny ones. Somebody wants to call it a ming. I think that's rather ... .... (Laughter) Somebody recommended that we call it a "dinar". These are not Ministers; these are people who have written in to the Treasury. It makes pretty amusing reading.

Q. Have you formed your own opinion, Sir?

P.M. No.

Q. There have been movements lately through local Government associations on the State and Federal level, pressing for representation on the Loan Council. Are they likely to get anywhere with that, Sir?

P.M. I wouldn't think so. You see, municipal bodies are dealt with by the States. They are created by the State Parliaments and they deal with the State Parliaments. What happens in the Loan Council is that the amount of the Government Loan programme is fixed direct by resolution of the Loan Council and then under what they call "the gentlemen's agreement", an arrangement is made as to the volume of borrowing on semi-government and local government account and as a rule, everything that doesn't exceed £100,000 is regarded as local even though it is by a semi-government authority and everything above £100,000 is treated as being a semi-government borrowing. And so, they have been along once a year to say, "Could you increase under the 'gentlemen's agreement' the amount that local governing bodies can borrow?" and we did it this last time, increased it by some millions because their market was pretty fertile. In that sense and only in that sense, we deal with local governing bodies in their borrowing, but they make their representations through their State Governments which, I must say in justice to them, are usually pretty vigorous on behalf of the local governing bodies. I don't think their case loses anything in its presentation.

Q. Sir, it has been announced recently that several large industrial enterprises are being established in various parts of Queensland. This will, of course, put a fair strain, I should imagine, on the State's ability to provide housing. Is there any likelihood of the Federal Government making a special grant to the State for housing?

- P.M. Well, we did last year, not at the annual Loan Council but in a subsequent one and I don't know what the possibilities are on that. I can remember when the overall Loan programme was fixed, say at £250M - to take a figure out of the air - the States have always named how much they want of that. We have never dictated that bit at all. They say, "We want £40M of that for housing, or £42M." Well, £40M or £42M it is. That is their business from our point of view. Of course there is a great deal of activity on the housing front. You know the savings bank provision for housing has gone up very considerably in recent months. That is all the savings banks. The current rate of building in Australia is just about an all-time record, something over 90,000 houses. If special problems arise in respect to any particular area, I have no doubt we will hear about that from the relevant State Government. It is a very good thing to see some of these industrial shows moving in here. I noticed this morning the B.H.P. is going to establish something. That's very good.
- Q. Have you any thoughts on retirement, Sir?
- P.M. Whose retirement - yours?
- Q. I wish it was.
- P.M. The last fellow who raised this had me in the House of Lords as an Earl. I will announce my retirement some day, I hope. It may be that my executors will have to announce it.
- Q. Do you expect to see another election, Sir?
- P.M. Oh, yes, I hope so, but you never know. The one person who is not interested in this problem is myself.
- Q. Sir, do you anticipate spending any time in the Queensland election campaign yourself?
- P.M. Oh, I don't know what arrangements they are making. I wouldn't have thought I had much chance. I am here today and tomorrow and I have a by-election in Grey at which I have agreed to make two or three speeches and the House sits until May 25th. When is your polling date?
- Q. 1st June.
- P.M. 1st June is the polling date in Grey. So I wouldn't have thought it likely. But as for the other Ministers, don't ask me. Have they delivered their policy speech yet?
- Q. No.
- P.M. How long do you run a State election campaign here?
- Q. The policy speeches are due to be given on the 7th and the 9th May.
- P.M. Then it is about three and a half weeks. Long enough too.
- Q. Officially, it started on Friday with the issuing of the writs.

P.M. Still it is a while before they do the policy speeches. It doesn't get going until then.

Q. Are you satisfied with your own coalition relationships over this Electoral Act and Redistribution?

P.M. Oh, yes, I am not upset. There are differences of opinion about the redistribution but if you got hold of twenty people in politics, you would have twenty different opinions on redistribution .... I am not crying myself to sleep about it. I hope we will be able to get a fair redistribution.

Q. Will the Liberal Party stand firm, Sir, for fairly equal Federal electorates?

P.M. You mustn't ask me what the Liberal Party is going to stand firm about. There never have been equal electorates. The law has been the same ever since we had an Electoral Act. The Commissioners can allow twenty per cent. up and twenty per cent. down with the quota and this is a recognition that electorates are not just to be mechanically equal, that circumstances vary between one electorate and another. It would be pretty odd if Kalgoorlie - to take a gross example - had the same number of voters as Kooyong which you can travel around in an afternoon. And it never has. As to what the differences ought to be or how they ought to be achieved, these are problems that excite differences of opinion. We are not to think of them as purely along party lines because I daresay there are as many different opinions on that matter in my Party as there are on any other. We were ready to accept the last redistribution on the principle that the Commissioners had been appointed, that they had gone through the processes and that as a matter of principle we ought to accept what they did, though some of our Members didn't like it very much because a man looks at his own electorate and says, "What's happened here?"; but we, as a Party, decided that we would accept them on the principles which I have described. That wasn't acceptable and so they are all in the suspense account at present and of course if they remain in the suspense account, Queensland doesn't lose a seat.

What's this Festival Hall like? The only time I ever spoke in a stadium in Sydney - a famous occasion, I think it was in 1949, wasn't it? - and a boxing ring was in the middle and they had a microphone in the middle of it - an all-ways microphone - and all the Comms. had got in the first three or four rows round the hall of this place; you had your back to half the audience and your front to the other half and I walked around this microphone like a teetotum and from first to last I didn't hear a word I said. I had to go back to the pub afterwards and listen in to see what had happened. You can't hear yourself think when you have got an organised show. You can't look your audience in the eye - only a bit of it at a time and you don't know whether you are beginning your sentences or ending your sentences. This is really an appalling attitude. When I got back to the hotel, they were rebroadcasting it and I said to my wife, "By Jove, this fellow's not bad. Who is he?" And she said, "That's you." "Well," I said, "wonders will never cease." I wouldn't want another of those if I wanted to get a message over to the public. For an evening's fun, there is a good deal to be said for it, but not if you want to convert people.

Q. What do you expect to speak on tomorrow night, Sir?

P.M. Oh, I don't know. I have prepared my mind on a number of matters but which ones I will decide on I don't know yet.

Q. You haven't got a big upstairs gallery at this place, Sir. Right at the back of the hall, there is just a little one. It is not like the City Hall which comes all round. So most of the audience is on the floor.

P.M. What are the acoustics like? Have they got a public address system?

Q. I think it is quite all right.

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