

BACKGROUND BRIEFING GIVEN BY THE  
PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON,  
FOR HEADS OF BUREAUX IN THE PRESS  
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PRIME MINISTER : I think you have all had the list, gentlemen, under embargo. All I propose to do now in relation to this is to give non-attributable background so that you can write intelligently about this or anything you want to say about it. So I will answer any queries you have arising from it, and if I think there are some points which might be covered that you haven't asked, I'll mention those. But this is for background. It is not attributable.

Q. Prime Minister, I notice Mr Philip Lynch's name appears in the list. He is one of the newest of newcomers to the House. I was just wondering what special abilities he had that came to your eye?

PM: Well, he is a comparatively young man, but not too young, and I think he has had a long association with business and staffing problems and is a Member of the Association of Directors, or whatever it is, and a fairly long commercial experience of manpower management and work in business of various kinds. Also I have heard him make what seemed to me to be one or two good workmanlike speeches, and I thought I would like to give him a trial.

Q. Could you tell us, Sir, what has happened to your ideas of amalgamating certain Departments and streamlining various Administrative functions?

PM: Yes I can. We have been examining very carefully --- you are thinking of Social Services-Welfare proposition? --- we have been examining very carefully what is involved in what we were initially thinking of doing, and that is get the benefits side of Health moved across to Social Services. But there are very great difficulties indeed, there is no question of that, in moving the benefits of Health across to Social Services, and it looks almost certain that it would lead to a considerable duplication of public servants. For one thing, you can mesh in things like computers throwing up facts of doctors who prescribe a lot more than they should or make a lot more visits than you can ask them questions, but there has always been a requirement that judgments on these should be made by people who are qualified medical people in the Health Department. All right, you could move all those across, but at some policy-making levels further up, it looked as if you would have to duplicate them quite a bit. Then there are problems of what happens to something before it becomes a benefit. A pharmaceutical benefit is something which costs an awful lot of money by the time it becomes a benefit but an awful lot of stuff has gone beforehand before it is declared to be something which is a benefit. So there were some pretty considerable initial difficulties

PM (Contd.)

there which may possibly, on some more detailed examination be able to be overcome but which are there now. So I have left Health as it is and I wanted somebody to really dig in to the Social Services side and come up with some ideas on the application of Social Services -- to try and get away - I don't know if one can - from 75 cents or a dollar all round sort of thing. I will be telling both those Ministers that they will have to work together - submissions from one will need to be examined by the other to see if there were things they wished to say about it before it came to Cabinet. What one has in mind is a kind of Committee of Cabinet Ministers concerned with Social Services who would <sup>have to</sup> work much more closely than they do at present so that we can get some kind of integration in this where it is at all possible.

There is an alternative which no doubt might have occurred to some of you and that would have been to have the one Minister in charge of both Health and Social Services, but again, at this stage, the work load on one Minister in charge of those two Departments, both of which involve pretty detailed administration, ~~and~~ seem to me at this stage to be a bit too heavy for one man.

Q. You say "at this stage", Sir, does this mean it will be re-examined?

PM: I don't want to give the impression that this will be re-examined and therefore people are expecting something to happen from it. But clearly there is a need to get the Social Service things which touch a number of Departments more closely together. We examined a Ministry of Welfare. You know, all the others leading up to it. But at this time, again, that looks like a new Ministry, and more public servants. I would like to have a year or so just to see exactly how that sort of thing could be done. The end result what we are aiming for is there but there all sort of problems....

Q. I notice Mr Barnes is now Minister for External Territories. Can you explain that in relation to Interior and Northern Territory?

PM: Yes. This is all non-attributable and for background. I feel that the problems at present in Papua and New Guinea in particular and in the Northern Territory are problems which are different in kind. I feel that the end goal, the final conclusion for Papua and New Guinea is likely to be different from the final conclusion for the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory, without question, must be heading sometime in the future - I don't know when - towards statehood. There is no question that it is an integral part of Australia and must be an integral part of Australia just as much as Queensland is or Western Australia is. This is by no means necessary in the case of Papua and New Guinea. It seems likely to me that the development there - and I put no time limit on it - would be more towards a kind of self-government, and then at some time in the future if that self-governing country wished to enter into some kind of arrangement with the Australian Government on the basis of self-government, not on the basis of being told by Australia that it is the sort of thing it should enter into, then that would take place between the Governments existing at that time.

Q. This is just a hurrying up of that emphasis, Sir - getting towards self-government?

PM: No, it's not, but it is an indication that the two will probably be going on different courses.

Q. So that the Northern Territory now goes to Interior?

PM: Yes, and we will be continuing to carry out Public Service Board investigations and discussions with the Administrator up there for some aspects which in the past in the Northern Territory have been the responsibility of the Department of Territories but which might not necessarily be transferred to the Department of the Interior.

Q. You are thinking of Northern Development?

PM: Yes, that kind of thing - but national kind of development as distinct from state kind of development.

Q. Will this mean more public servants, Sir?

PM: I don't think so.

Q. Aboriginal Affairs. Has that become a separate Department?

PM: No. It is going to remain ---- you know there is an Office of Aboriginal Affairs at the moment. That office will remain with the Prime Minister's Department. There won't be set up a Permanent Head and that sort of thing. But Mr Wentworth will be Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Welfare and Development in the same way as I was Minister in Charge of Education and Science when that remained with the Prime Minister's Department.

Q. Does this mean, Mr Prime Minister, that Mr Wentworth will work very closely under your eye - I mean with Aboriginal Affairs?

PM: Yes, but I would expect to leave most of it to him, except some really significant policy.

Q. It has been speculated that <sup>going a</sup> / You are ~~expecting~~ to make ~~some~~ big change in the Head of your Department, Sir, is that correct?

PM: No. It is not. We are examining the work load in the Prime Minister's Department, whether there should at some stage be a Cabinet Secretariat as well as the Department, which again, would mean more public servants, but there is no hurry about that.

Q. Sir, are there going to be any changes in the PM's Department - you mentioned Aboriginal Affairs - but is there anything like cultural affairs or anything like this going into another Department?

PM: I expect they will. You can get a list of those probably from somebody outside. But there is a thing called the International Radiation Advisory Committee or something of the kind and that will go to Education and Science. There's the Commonwealth Liaison Office which is still there on the

PM (Contd)

paper. It is to do with Australia's liaison with countries of the British Commonwealth in education. That is already being done by Education. It will be just wiped off the paper. Aboriginal Affairs will remain but will have a Minister in Charge of it. The smaller things I want to get other people looking after.

Q. What about responsibility for High Commissioner posts abroad? It is that going to remain technically vested in your Department or be moved to External Affairs?

PM: Well, I think Australia House is the only one in our Department. The other High Commissioner posts abroad they come under External Affairs now.

Q. I thought they were technically under your Department?

PM: Well, you have thrown me a bit, but I would be surprised. I think it is only the UK that is still under PM's, and it will stay there.

Q. Prime Minister, who is going to be the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate?

PM: Well, we went on for a long time there without a Deputy Leader.

Q. When Senator Anderson is absent, who would be the replacement?

PM: I imagine the next most senior, probably, but this is different from at this stage designating a Deputy Leader.

Q. You are deliberately not designating one?

PM : No. Not at the moment.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, do you expect this Ministry to last for a very long period or are you envisaging further changes in the next twelve months or two years?

PM: I think it likely that it would continue, up until the next election anyway. Education in the ACT is to become the responsibility of the Department of Education, and elements of education in the Northern Territory are to become the responsibility of the Education Department. The Northern Territory is pretty mixed up - you know there are mission schools, aboriginal schools and schools which are part-aboriginal and part-white and they are run in different ways, but elements of that.

Q. You would take it right out of Interior?

PM: We would take them both out.

Q. It is all the ones that Interior are doing - not the ANU?

PM: No. It is the Education ones that Interior is now doing in the ACT.

Q. This wouldn't involve any alterations in the present arrangements with New South Wales?

PM: No. It doesn't involve any alteration at all. At the present moment people are supplied by the Department of New South Wales through the Department of the Interior and this could happen through the new Department. I think if one wanted to have pilot experiments and that kind of thing run, it would enable that to happen more easily. And of course the Department of Education deals with all the other State Governments - put it that way - and it seems reasonable that it might deal with it here. We would probably need to talk to the Council here - you know, the local Council. They might want to have an Education Department officer with them because at the moment they have an Interior Department man with them to answer all their questions and give them information, and we wouldn't want to cut them out in any way from that.

Q. Are you planning a Cabinet, Sir, between now and the meeting of the House?

PM: Yes. We will have the ordinary Ministry meeting after the swearing-in, but we will be going on to Cabinet on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday.

Q. Prime Minister, could you tell us what prompted you to promote Senator Wright to the Ministry? After his record of debating against the Government?

PM: Well, I wanted to get some significant debating strength on the front benches of the Senate. I wanted to get legal capacity to present a legal case and to tear a legal case to pieces on the front benches of the Senate. We haven't got forceful people there but looking around for reinforcing a forceful sort of a person, he seemed to fit the bill. And I think that is the answer. You want somebody there who can fight and who knows the law and can cope with legal arguments, and so many of the discussions in the Senate do turn around legal interpretations and whether something is against the law of 1863 or something - you know, that kind of thing.

Q. The fact that you have to look around and find somebody 63 years old to promote to the front bench for the first time in his career seems to underline the dearth of talent in the Senate, especially on this legalistic side.

PM: Well, I don't know of any other lawyers in the Senate on our side. I can't think of one offhand - at the moment. In the next Senate there will be. Two new ones.

Q. Laught was one.

PM: Keith Laught. Yes, that's right.

Q. Do you think he will rock the boat any more now - Senator Wright?

PM: No.

- Q. Will this be a part of your ruling off the ledger, Sir?
- PM: Oh, I hadn't thought of it in that way. I think if any of you had been sitting around and thinking of how you could increase the debating strength of the front bench you would have come to the same conclusion, a lot of you.
- Q. How do you feel about leaving South Australia and Tasmania out of the Cabinet? This doesn't concern you?
- PM: South Australia hasn't been in the Cabinet for a long, long, time.
- Q. No, but Tasmania was.
- PM: Tasmania isn't in the Cabinet, but it is in the Ministry now. I'm not leaving South Australia out. . . It hasn't been in.
- Q. You don't really feel, apparently, that the Cabinet should reflect a Federal body, all States should be represented?
- PM: I think if that is possible to attain, within the framework of the other requirements, that would be something to aim for, but I don't think it is an overriding necessity that this should happen. In the past if something that concerns South Australia has been the subject of discussion, then Jim Forbes has always said, "I would like to come along and speak on this," and without question, he always has. And, similarly, that would apply in the case of Tasmania. They get the submissions, they know what is being talked about.
- Q. Will Senator McKellar be in this Health group who have to exchange submissions for Cabinet?
- PM: Yes, I would want him to be, yes.
- Q. When will the swearing-in of the new Ministry be, Sir?
- PM: Wednesday.
- Q. At what time?
- PM: Midday.
- Q. Sir, to come back to the Northern Territory. I take it that Interior wouldn't handle the general development - I am not talking about civic development, but the general development. Is this more likely to be handled by Mr Fairbairn's Department? Is that what you had in mind?
- PM: Yes. This is the objective that one has in mind. There are different kinds of development and it is not going to be easy to draw a precise line, but clearly there are some schemes where development

PM (Contd.)

taking place say in Queensland would affect development taking place in the Northern Territory. Now at the present moment in that kind of development, the Minister for National Development has got to make arrangements with the Government of Queensland and then make arrangements with the Department of Territories. That kind of thing. Now this would be an endeavour to see that the Commonwealth Department~~s~~ who had this overall development responsibility would just have to make arrangements with the one/<sup>other</sup> authority.

Q. Shipping and Transport have gone up into Cabinet, Sir. Does this presage any development of their activities, Sir - in the international sphere?

PM: No, but I felt this that the present Minister for Social Services is extraordinarily competent. He also had a great deal of work to do as the Minister assisting the Minister assisting the Minister for Trade and Industry which took up a lot of his time, and he went abroad and so on, and I felt this Department was so significant, it really ought to have a full-time Minister, a Minister looking after it, and so Mr Sinclair ceased to be the Minister for Social Services and we had a full-time Minister instead.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, you have dropped Mr Howson and Mr Chipp. Rightly or wrongly, people are going to get the impression Mr Howson has been dropped for his role in the VIP affair. Could you tell us what motivated in dropping these two?

PM: Well, I don't think that I could or should embark on saying anything about people who are not in - individuals who are not in or individuals who are in. I think that would be a bad thing for me to do. I selected the people I thought could do the job.

Q. You said, Sir, that you thought this could stay there until the next election? Is this quite irrevocable - you will not want to change?

PM: Oh, no. No, no. It is not irrevocable at all, but I think the implication of the question was I going to turn this over in a few months' time sort of thing. It is not that.

Q. You mean there won't be a ruthless change, a great blitz before the election?

PM: No. I don't see that happening. I just don't see it.

Q. You said there was no hurry about the changes in the Prime Minister's Department. Can you give us an outline of your thinking of what you are after with the policy secretariat?

PM : Well, there has been a very heavy work load on the Head of the Prime Minister's Department because at the same time he has been the Secretary to Cabinet. There has been, and are, an awful lot of Cabinet Meetings, and they go on late, and he has to sit in the room all the time; he has to prepare for them beforehand. He has to spend a day afterwards looking after them. This really leaves with the other --- you know, with the policy things that keep coming in to the Prime Minister's Department and they tend to be growing --- this has, and I think has for some time, led to a sort of feeling that it was not efficient for one man to try and do both.

Q. So you are looking at splitting the functions?

PM: Yes . That's right.

Q. You say there is no hurry, so I take it that at the moment Mr Hewitt stays in the Universities Commission?

PM: I just said there was no hurry, didn't I?

Q. Do you envisage having a full-time Secretary to Cabinet?

PM: I would think this seems to be the kind of thing that is developing, yes; preparing submissions, indicating to me - because they keep coming in - which ones seem suitable for a Cabinet Committee to deal with because I would - I am going to try - I don't know if it is possible - but I am going to try to use Cabinet Committees a lot more instead of full Cabinets because we were spending a really terrific lot of time, we have been for years, and it has been growing the amount of time one spends. It may well be possible that some of that load can be removed by the use of Cabinet Committees. This is the sort of thing that a Cabinet Secretariat would look into, and it would serve us, and it would suggest how these things could be done - record the sitting, record the decisions, follow up the decisions after they are made with the various Departments, this kind of thing.

Q. Would this also mean that junior Ministers might be appointed to some of these Cabinet Committees? You mentioned difficulties with the States. Might the same thing also happen where specific submissions from them to Cabinet might mean they would be on a Committee of Cabinet? So in effect there is a breaking down of a strict 12-man Cabinet?

PM: Well, it would depend. What is in my mind is that Cabinet deals with the higher policy matters, and a number of things aren't - such as whether you build a building here or whether you build a building there or matters of that kind. There are quite a lot of those. As it is now, there are Committees on which junior Ministers sit - the General Administrative Committee, for example. On this there is a mixture of Cabinet Ministers and Junior Ministers. The Legislation Committee is a mixture of junior and senior. That kind of thing might be able to be extended, or we get something of the Social Services sort of Committee <sup>or</sup> with the Ministers concerned with myself for a nominee, and we go through it. After that it is possible it might go to a full Cabinet, but that confines discussion for a start.



Q. On the machinery of this, Sir, does this mean the Permanent Head of the Department - the way you are thinking at the moment - wouldn't be Secretary to Cabinet and wouldn't attend Cabinet meetings, but you would have a separate Cabinet Secretariat.....

PM: Well, these are the things we are working out. We are discussing them at the moment. There are problems arising....

Q. Sir, is there any particular reason for switching tourism to go with the Work portfolio?

PM: No, but I thought Senator Wright does come from a State in which tourism bulks very largely. Of course it does in Queensland too, but Tasmania.....

Q. Mr Bury seems to have dropped down - he's No. 9.

PM: Well he was No. 10 or No. 11 before.

Q. Sir, could you tell us about the "Voyager" report. Has Cabinet had a look at it yet or will it look at it this week? Will it look at Captain Robertson's position?

PM: We must discuss it this week. Yes.

Q. Will the question of the payment of compensation to Captain Robertson be considered by Cabinet?

PM: I think the report will go to Cabinet and we <sup>should</sup> ~~will~~ wait until Cabinet has considered it....

Q. Can we have that bit on the record, Sir?

PM: What?

Q. That it will go up to Cabinet?

PM: Yes.

Q. This is on Wednesday afternoon?

PM: Yes, or Thursday.

Q. When is the debate likely to be in the House, Sir? There will be a debate?

PM: Oh, we will table the report in the House. I hadn't thought whether we would initiate a debate or we would leave it to the Opposition to initiate a debate on it.

Q. At the same time as you <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ looking at the possibility of amalgamating the Health group of Departments, did you look at the Defence group?

PM: No, I didn't. I know a lot of people think they should be amalgamated. I have heard it argued: "Look at what Mr McNamara could do over in the United States as a strong Secretary of Defence" but I think we have got to remember that they also have a Secretary of the Navy and a Secretary of the Army and a Secretary of the Air Force under Mr McNamara as a strong Secretary of Defence. It is the same set-up. People point to it as if it were a different one.

Q. What is the chance of integration as in Canada, Sir?

PM: In Canada they have had integration. Well some people like it and some people don't. In England, they set up the Defence thing -- this is not attributable; entirely off the record -- it seems to have resulted mostly in a very considerable increase in the number of civilian public servants and very little else.

The course it seems to me one follows here... because I think if there is just one Minister for Defence, I think an awful lot of <sup>significant</sup> decisions are not going to be made by Ministers, they are going to be made by civil servants. They must be. Nobody would be capable of doing otherwise. But there are things through the three Services which can be integrated with advantage. Medical services is one that springs to mind. Certain, but not all, methods of supply; intelligence. There are a number of things which have grown up separately in Departments which could be integrated, but I am not enamoured of the idea of wiping out Service Ministers. I know there are an awful lot of them there, but there is an awful lot of money being spent too. And it is being spent in a way involving constant decisions. Social Services, for example, spends a great deal of money, but by and large it is according to the book, with a discretion not necessarily to go along with the book. You know - pension rates are set, and whether a chap is competent or not to get it is set. It is more of a routing thing. So there it is. No, I didn't look closely at that.

Q. So as long as you are Prime Minister, then Sir, . . . .

PM: Oh, come off it. I was asked did I look at it, and I didn't. I have expressed a sort of approach to it but I am not to be regarded as saying as long as I am Prime Minister something is immutable. . . .

Q. You gave a pretty good argument why they should stay as they are.

PM: Well, somebody might come up with a better argument as to why they shouldn't. I can't fore see that.

Q. Did you have a look at self-government for the Post Office, Sir?

PM: Well that's not down here anywhere. . . . I think no comment on that one.

Q. Sir, could you just clarify one thing more in relation to the "Voyager". Cabinet on Thursday will look at the report or will look at the report in relation to any injustice that may have been done to Captain Robertson?

PM: At this stage, I am just saying that the report is here. I haven't discussed it, any aspect of it, with my colleagues at all, but it will be before us and the whole report will be discussed. I can't say anything - even non-attributable or off the record which would tend to bind somebody when I haven't spoken to them.

Q. Coming back to the new Army Minister, Sir, you don't feel that the Army fighting in Viet Nam requires a more experienced Minister than a total newcomer?

PM: Well, that is something that was in my own mind, or that I have turned over in my own mind. But I think a Minister in regard to any sort of military operations depends on his <sup>military</sup> advisers, and the military advisers are there. I have considered it but I can't see any way in which the effectiveness or efficiency of the Army would be hurt by this.

Q. Sir, will Mr Howson and Mr Chipp go to the back benches? Are they going to resign - either one of them, or anything like this?

PM: They will be private Members of Parliament.

Q. There is no suggestion of overseas diplomatic appointments?

PM: Not now.....

(Interjection - Not in the near future!)

PM: No!

Q. One name not on the list is Mr Erwin's. Anything contemplated at all for him?

PM: He's the Chief Whip.

Q. Will there be a Whip appointed in the Senate?

PM: The Whip is always elected in the Senate.

MR EGGLETON : Except for that one small point made, everything was not for attribution today.

Q. We can quote the PM as saying Cabinet will discuss the "Voyager" report and <sup>he</sup> will not anticipate whether the question of compensation for Captain Robertson will arise?

MR EGGLETON. Yes.

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