

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA  
THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES, AT MEDAN MERDEKA BARAT  
15, DJAKARTA, SUNDAY, 6th DECEMBER, 1959

Ladies and Gentlemen I want to introduce to you the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I suppose, ladies and gentlemen, you would like to ask me questions. Do that. I may be able to answer one or two of them, but in the meantime I hope you will let me say that though it has been a very strenuous journey - you people have the habit of starting the day frightfully early and it has been very hot - still it has been a journey full of interest. We have seen something of your country; we have seen something of the industry and cheerfulness of your people. I have at any rate learned something of your problems, administratively and economically, and of course I have had the inestimable advantage of talks with your leading men, culminating this morning in a long talk with your famous President. I think perhaps you all realise that I did not come here with a bag full of proposals to negotiate about trade or transport, or anything for that matter. I came really as a means of improving our contact with Indonesia and of learning at first hand something of your problems and of your point of view, and I think that I can say quite accurately that I am going away tomorrow very much better informed on many matters than I was when I came here.

Now, if there is some particular question, perhaps somebody would put it.

QUESTION: Sir, after your talks with Indonesian leaders, is Australia going to change her decision with regard to West Irian?

PRIME MINISTER: I had a discussion this morning with your leader in which we, as I think he himself said, had a full and frank exchange of views. I explained the Australian attitude in substantially the terms in which I explained it in Parliament in Canberra after the visit of Dr. Subandrio. Your President explained, with elaboration, the reasons for his point of view and your point of view. What he said was supplemented by the Chief Minister and by Dr. Subandrio. I think the one thing that was quite common ground, and it is very important, was that the problem was one that should be solved by peaceful discussion and not by resort to force, and that statement made by the President following on one made by Dr. Subandrio will, I think, do much to improve the atmosphere in which this problem may be discussed in the future. I shall merely report back to my own Government any added material that I have, and the impressions that I have as a result of this journey. What will be the result of that, I don't know.

QUESTION: Sir, you have said that this should be settled peacefully. Did you, in your talks with Indonesian leaders, advance any proposals from the Australian point of view for a settlement by peaceful means?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I have not. I have not. This is a matter which exists as between the Netherlands and Indonesia.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister .... your discussion with

President Sukarno this morning, is there still any doubt of the Indonesian policies towards West Irian?

PRIME MINISTER: 'Is there any doubt about the policy?' In other words, do I think that there has been any change in the approach of the Indonesian Government towards that problem?

QUESTION: .... from the Australian side, because the President said this morning that the Government of Indonesia has made clear to your Excellency the view of the Indonesian Government as issued earlier, that this West Irian question will be settled by peaceful means.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

QUESTION: Is there any doubt now with your Government about this policy?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sorry, I don't understand.

QUESTION: Before this, all this misunderstanding between Australia and Indonesia about the policy, about the Indonesian policy for settling the question of West Irian - after this discussion - is there still any doubt from your side?

PRIME MINISTER: Any doubt about the problem being settled peacefully, you mean.

QUESTION: Yes.

PRIME MINISTER: No, I accept that: I think it will be settled peacefully. But when and how I do not know.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, our President has said and always says that Indonesia is still in evolution and the West Irian question is a colonial problem, and that is why it is always possible that in the future Indonesia might use armed forces to release Irian Barat. Therefore, will Australia remain passive if Indonesia uses armed forces to release West Irian?

PRIME MINISTER: You know that is rather like the old question: 'If you had a brother would he like cheese'. (Laughter). I am much too old, though, in this business to be answering hypothetical questions. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister .. arises then out of your statement just now that in discussions on the West Irian problem ... is going better?

PRIME MINISTER: Not that I know of. I am the prime Minister of Australia, not the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. You fall into an error if you think that this is an argument between Indonesia and Australia. We make no claim to that portion of New Guinea. Never have. We have a bit of our own which occupies us pretty busily and costs a great deal of money and effort and skill to develop.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister will you kindly tell us, after your visit, will the Australian nation .. give more understanding to Indonesia's claim for West Irian?

PRIME MINISTER: Sorry, I did not hear him.

QUESTION: (repeated by Mr. Heydon)

PRIME MINISTER: Well, as I said just now, I have learned a little myself and when I go back I will convey my impressions of what I have learned to my colleagues in the Australian Government.

QUESTION: Will you be successful in this?

PRIME MINISTER: I beg your pardon. I hope I will be successful in making them understand me, but if you want to know what the result of that will be, or if you want to build up some expectation that it will be exciting, I don't know.

QUESTION: Is your Government, Sir, still committed to handing over West Irian as a trust territory to the United Nations?

PRIME MINISTER: Is my Government what?

QUESTION: .. still committed to changing West Irian into a United Nations trust territory. There was a report some months ago in the Indonesian press that the Australian Government wants to turn the West Irian territory as a United Nations trust territory.

PRIME MINISTER: I am sorry, I did not see that report.

QUESTION: It came from Canberra.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, but that does not necessarily mean it was true. (Laughter) My Government has not put forward such a proposal.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, would you please say whether Australia would be interested in using her good offices in settling this issue peacefully.

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I think I've said all I can say on this matter and I am not going to engage in a series of speculations about it. This is a problem of considerable importance and some delicacy, and I don't propose to add to what I have just said about it.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, Sir, in discussing international problems, was anything said about the attitudes of Indonesia and Australia to the summit conference between East and West?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, no, no. I had no discussions about a summit conference, no. My own views on that matter, I think are probably pretty well known. I had no discussion.

QUESTION: Was there any discussion about the action of Communist China during the past year in your talks with the President this morning?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: To return to the question of West Irian again. You said that it was a matter between the Dutch and Indonesia. Dr. Subandrio yesterday said that the passive attitude of Australia would constitute a step forward. By saying that this is a matter to be discussed between the Netherlands and Indonesia, are you saying that Australia will remain passive?

PRIME MINISTER: I have said all I propose to say on that subject.

QUESTION:

Mr. Prime Minister there has been a report that the possibility of President Sukarno visiting Australia has been discussed at Merdeka Palace.

PRIME MINISTER:

I think that is a matter really which we ought to leave to the President himself. I have certainly made it quite clear that should he find it possible to visit Australia, he would be warmly welcomed and the visit could do nothing but good; but of course he is a very busy man with enormous responsibilities and it is very difficult in those circumstances for anybody to say off-hand and quickly, if and when, but you may take it that the invitation is open.

QUESTION:

May I ask your impressions of President Sukarno?

PRIME MINISTER:

That's rather a 'curly' one, as we say. As a matter of fact I have never met your President before and, if it is of any interest, and I can say it without impertinence, I have been very greatly impressed by him. I think he is a man of remarkable personality and he has a superb place in the history of your country, and therefore I felt it was a great honour to meet him and I got nothing but benefit from my discussions with him.

QUESTION:

Mr. Prime Minister, after having discussed friendly with our Government and explained your attitude to the press, I do not want to argue with you but to learn your views. Now permit me to ask you this question. What are the real reasons that Australia still recognises the Dutch sovereignty of West Irian - the real reasons?

PRIME MINISTER:

You didn't hear what I said before, did you?  
(laughter)

QUESTION:

It has been announced in the local press that you and the authorities of Indonesia would be discussing the problem of security. Is it true, or is it false, and what kind of security, what country and from what?

PRIME MINISTER:

It has been said we would be discussing the problem of security?

QUESTION:

Yes, that was the report.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we had no discussions about the problem of security. I have some views on it myself. The one kind of security that is needed in the free world is security against Communist aggression.

QUESTION:

Do you mean Communism as an ideology or some particular country?

PRIME MINISTER:

Communism as a specific modern form of treason, eating into every country, trying to undermine its capacity, trying to spread its power as a result. We have very strong views on this matter. I imagine a number of people here have too.

QUESTION:

Did you discuss any question of economic aid, Western economic aid ...?

PRIME MINISTER:

Our discussions on the economic field were fairly general. We had no specific ideas. I think I can say that we, on both sides, we felt that there would be

enormous advantages in what is called "technical aid" in the receipt and training of students, in the providing, wherever we can, of experts, as we have indeed done in the past, in order to help in economic development. That is, I think, one of the most fruitful aspects of economic co-operation that has been devised and I would like to see it extended. But I had no specific discussions as to how and where.

QUESTION: There is just one question left. Mr. Prime Minister, can you tell us what your talk with General Nasution was yesterday because I heard that you had discussed ... abroad ... talk yesterday with General Nasution, the Chief of our Army.

PRIME MINISTER: I had a very interesting talk with the General. He was giving me an account of the various limited campaigns that are going on in various parts of Indonesia and we discussed that kind of thing.

QUESTION: But what else? Did you offer anything for training, for army training, in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I made no offer. I made some enquiries, got some answers and said that I would discuss those matters when I returned home. But there was no offer on either side.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, after you have talked with our leaders .. you would mind telling us your views on Indonesia's position as towards the question of peace .. Asia .. also .. the security of Australia.

PRIME MINISTER: I think that Australia has a very profound interest in the prosperity and peaceful living of Indonesia. It is entirely putting it from a quite selfish point of view. It is entirely in our interests that that country should develop a first-class administrative system and great economic stability because, of course, I believe among other things, that if Indonesia can establish herself in that way, and I am sure she can, with work and thought, then of course the whole attitude of the people will be in the direction of peace. They won't be themselves tempted by doctrines which are of a more aggressive kind. They will in fact grow as a large and powerful and peaceful neighbour, a close neighbour of Australia on our north. From our point of view, everything that will make Indonesia peaceful and prosperous is a good thing.

Last question please.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, may we hear your formula for success during your trip to Indonesia?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know that I have a formula. (Laughter) I just said "Good day" to people in a genial fashion, and they said "Good day" to me. (Laughter) It is not a bad formula after all.