

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES AT KINGSFORD SMITH
AIRPORT, SYDNEY ON MONDAY 20TH JUNE, 1960, 9 AM

PRIME MINISTER: No doubt you want to ask me some questions but perhaps before you do that I might just say something quite briefly about the principal objects of my visit.

The Prime Ministers' Conference, as you probably know, ended up much more successfully than some of us had expected. It had all the makings of difficulty. There had been a number of statements made about the South African racial policies. Then the Prime Minister of South Africa couldn't come for reasons that we know of. He was represented by his deputy, Mr. Louw, who I thought was in a difficult position for that reason. We adopted our old rule that we don't engage in official discussions on internal policies, or, for that matter, on disputes between Commonwealth countries. We had, as you will remember, refused to discuss in open Conference the argument about Kashmir and so that rule was re-affirmed. But we then did have some private discussions, with his approval, with Mr. Louw. And in the end result, as you know, the communique which I hope will be the last communique - I'll say something about that in a moment - contains something on that problem which was acceptable all round, and which I think it will be admitted wasn't frightfully controversial. But the essence of that matter, that discussion, was not what its result was, but the temper in which it was conducted. I thought it was the best evidence of the liveliness and reality of the Commonwealth that such an explosive matter could have lent itself to discussion of a completely good-tempered, reasonable kind. That was to me, a wonderful thing. In the private discussions that I took part in Dr. Nkrumah the Prime Minister of Ghana, the President Ayub of Pakistan, the Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya, all of whom have very powerful views on this matter - and had expressed them - were, I thought, completely reasonable. They didn't put their criticisms in such a form as to render the position of the European people in South Africa intolerable. On the contrary they, I thought, recognised very well the problem of a minority of European people, people of European descent, who after all had largely made the economy of South Africa and had been responsible for its development. They recognised that. They made various suggestions - I won't endeavour to rehearse them here - but Mr. Louw undertook to report them to his Prime Minister, but I, naturally, on my travels, have not heard anything directly since.

I think on the whole a lot of good came out of the discussions. The ground was cleared a good deal. I think that these responsible leaders of one African and two Asian countries were much more reasoned in their approach than some of the more extravagant statements that I heard and read on this matter outside the conference.

I said just then that I hoped it would be the last communique. As the oldest inhabitant of these Prime Ministers' Conferences I'm famous for always objecting to having a communique; not because I object to communicating, but because in my experience these communiques are always such platitudinous documents. If anybody disagrees it doesn't go in and therefore you get what is universally agreed on, such as that we are all in favour of peace or that we are all resolutely opposed to sin, or whatever it may be. And although these things come to the journalistic ear with all the charm of novelty, I think they get a little uninteresting and

I've been saying, "Why have one, it doesn't matter". I think I'm getting a few converts on that matter for this reason - and this is a very interesting aspect of the Commonwealth.

Today we have what I'll call the old Crown Commonwealth countries - Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa - and we have the new ones - India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana and Malaya - and at any tick of the clock, now, Nigeria and, subject to wind and weather, the West Indies. It is estimated that there must be three or four more African countries, once colonial, or now colonial, which are going to, on achieving their independence, apply for membership of the Commonwealth. There might be 16 within two or three years, within five years conceivably 20 Commonwealth countries if every colony that becomes independent and self-governing chooses to remain in the Commonwealth or desires to remain in the Commonwealth. It is a very interesting thing that almost without exception they do. There are great Allelulias, very properly, about getting Independence, perhaps achieving the status of a republic, but almost invariably they say, "But we want to remain in the Commonwealth". And I think myself that that is largely because it's in Commonwealth Conferences they can have all this kind of frank exchange of opinion in an intimate way without all the gallery play that is involved in motions and amendments and lobbying and votes.

QUESTION: Sir, did you get that impression with South Africa, that they wish to remain in the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: Undoubtedly, yes, undoubtedly. And if we are going to have more and more new members of the Commonwealth, then I think that we are in grave danger of getting to a point where somebody will say: "I want to have a vote", you know, "The numbers are building up; how can we determine what anybody thinks unless we have a vote". And the day we have a vote we might as well wind up in my opinion, because we will then be indistinguishable from a major committee of the United Nations. If we are going to retain the character of the Commonwealth then no votes: we meet to meet, to talk, to exchange our ideas, to be perfectly frank with each other, to be rude to each other if you like in person - so much more decent than being rude in writing. That makes a special association and these people understand it. But we are having an official examination made of what rules, if any, ought to be applied to future admissions, because, quite obviously, you may have a present colony with 10 million people in it achieving independence, you may have another with half a million people or 300,000 and the question, "Should everybody just come in automatically?", well that's being looked at. But I believe, myself, that it is going to be very difficult to discriminate between countries now within the Empire and in future to be within the Commonwealth. It's very difficult to discriminate and to say, "Well, you are in the 1st Eleven and you are in the 2nd". And to my mind, if we are to preserve the character of it, we ought not to have these communiques so that people have to argue and argue and argue as to whether something should be said in a published document about a particular matter. What needs to happen is that we should say, "Well, we meet, we discuss, we don't issue a communique". We make it quite plain that we're here to exchange our views and we can agree or disagree. We will indicate from time to time what the subject under discussion was and if any Prime Minister wishes to explain to his own country what

his views are on a particular matter, well, so far as I know nothing has ever prevented him from doing so in the past and that will continue. I think that by increasing the informality of this matter we may get over the problem of numbers.

Of course, there is another aspect that we considered, that we will have to think about a good deal in Australia, and that is the problem of Africa as a whole. We have got all taken up with South Africa but Africa as a whole with over 200 million people is made up of a series of communities who are literally galloping towards Independence. This is not just a nice stately process - they are galloping towards independence. The United Nations expects to have about 10 or 12 I think, new African communities asking for membership of the United Nations inside the next 12 months.

QUESTION: Do you think it likely that any areas now under non-British administration may seek admittance to the Commonwealth when they gain Independence?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I don't at the moment, no. No, I don't. But one can't tell, but I would think not. Certainly they are going to seek admittance to the United Nations and that gives rise to two matters that we in Australia will have to do some thinking about.

The first of them is that these communities will for the most part not be economically independent. This is one of the current problems of the world: how to reconcile political independence with unquestioned economic dependence on other people. People attach such importance to political independence that they are a bit inclined to overlook the other aspect of the matter and therefore most of these countries, most probably all of these countries, will be in a state of considerable confusion unless they get economic aid from somewhere. The Soviet Union will be very happy to extend it on terms. I discovered in the United States in discussions there, that there is an increasing awareness in the United States of this African problem, taking Africa as a whole. Whether that involves some new plan on the lines of the Colombo Plan or some extension of what we call the Colombo Plan is a matter that we have all agreed to study. Nobody has committed himself to anything; but we've all realised that there is every possibility of the most tremendous duplicated and re-duplicated political turmoil in the Continent of Africa, unless these emerging countries can achieve some kind of economic stability, or at any rate go along some portion of the road towards it.

QUESTION: Mr. Menzies could you tell us about SEATO; whether you think SEATO can restrain Communism in Asia?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, but before I got to that I was just wondering whether I had missed some aspect.

PRESSMAN: You started off, Sir, by saying there were two points, but you have only mentioned the first ...

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, the second. I really intended that my first point should have been this, that whereas at one time many of us might have thought that it was better to go slowly in granting independence so that all the conditions existed for a wise exercise of self-government, I think the prevailing school of thought today is that if in doubt you should go sooner, not later. I belong to that school of thought myself now, though I didn't once.

But I have seen enough in recent years to satisfy me that even though some Independences may have been premature, where they have been a little premature, they have at least been achieved with goodwill. And when people have to wait too long for independence, then they achieve it with ill-will, and that perhaps is the difference between the British colonial policy of this century and that of some other countries.

QUESTION: Would you apply that view to New Guinea, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I would apply that to any country.

QUESTION: Continuing with New Guinea, Sir, did you discuss anything about the New Guinea area with the Dutch?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no I didn't go there. Mr. Hasluck went to the Hague. When you say "apply that to New Guinea", yes, but that doesn't mean I belong to this fancy school of thought that you write a timetable out and say, "In 10 years' time so and so, and in 20 years' time so and so". That's just silly. But we are doing a faithful job of work in New Guinea and Papua. We will go on doing it. We will get to the point where the standard of living of the indigenous inhabitants has risen, as we think, pretty well. We may get to a point, or my successors may get to a point, where they say, "Well, maybe if we allow them to determine their future now, it is a little premature". I would sooner take that risk at that time than leave it too long so that the demand for self-determination became explosive and produced hostility. It's the contrast between Indonesia and Malaya. You can't get a better example of the two things.

The SEATO Conference was very interesting. I had never attended one before. I was impressed by it. I was rather sceptical when I went there about some aspects of the matter. I was rather pleased with it. I thought that the countries represented took it seriously; the speeches that were made both in the General Sessions and in the confidential sessions were very good, very direct, intelligent, reasonable. I think that there is no doubt about it that SEATO has had the effect of inducing for the first time some sense of community, of common danger and of the need for common association, in the SEATO countries. But I thought, and I said when I was there, that one of the great dangers was that we should regard the South East Asian Treaty Organisation as a place on the map just as we talk about South East Asia, as if it were a geographical expression. Whereas if it is to mean anything it has to be a community of Nations with a sense of community, and they won't develop a sense of community while they continue to have niggling little disputes, one with the other. Cambodia and Thailand have a dispute about a Temple. Well, with very great respect to the Temple, this dispute doesn't seem to justify bedevilling the whole of the relations between the one country and another, both of whom stand equally at risk. And there are other disputes about a few islands and this and that and I urged that every step should be taken to get rid of these little inter-necine arguments, because the Communists, the Chinese Communists principally in this case, would of course do their best to exacerbate these problems, create ill-will and thus internally to destroy the value of SEATO. That point was well understood. I am very impressed by the serious approach that all these representatives took of the matter. We had the military planners there. As is well known nobody has some concrete commitment of a military kind, but the military planning has been seriously

attended to! We have just sent over to be the Chief Military planner, Major General Wilton who, as you know, is one of the most brilliant of our younger Generals in Australia.

QUESTION: Sir, you told us before you left Canberra you were going to form some opinions in your mind in London on the problem generally of South Africa. Have you any recent views. Did you change your thoughts about the South African situation when you got to London and had these talks?

PRIME MINISTER: Change what position?

QUESTION: Well you were going to form some opinions about South Africa.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes. I don't feel anymore disposed than I did then to make a speech about South Africa's internal policies, but I have views about them, yes.

QUESTION: You were speaking about other countries in which you said the position generally "might become explosive". Does that apply too, would you say to South Africa?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, yes. I am very glad I don't have the responsibility of government in South Africa, because I think that there are certain ideas that are there current and practised, the workability of which I gravely doubt. That is an understatement. I don't think they will work. But I'm not going to preach to them. Too much preaching to the South Africans has been done. It is the best possible way in which to harden them in, perhaps, an inflexible application of their policies.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything about the situation in Tokyo?

PRIME MINISTER: Well it happened when I was in mid-air, so to speak, but I don't feel very happy about it. We might as well face up to it. This is, from a public point of view, however it may be explained, an admission that the Government of Japan doesn't feel able to control unruly elements at a time when there is a proposed visit from the President of the United States - Japan's most powerful friend since the war. Well, that I think, is a most unhappy event. Once again nobody would envy Prime Minister Kishi the choice that he had to make. He might very well say, "Well I am not going to put my distinguished visitor at any risk", but the end result of it all is that the Communists have scored a notable propaganda victory and Communist minorities in non-Communist countries will be encouraged to believe that they can push Governments around. Well, that is a pretty serious weakening of the position. We have, well all of us have looked to Japan in this sense that Japan was to be encouraged to stay out of the Communist orbit, that we in Australia, for example, would increase our trade with Japan, our economic contacts, because we realised that a Japan that wasn't economically sound was much more likely to pass into the control of the Communist powers. The United States has adopted the same view and the result has been that a good deal of the specific concept both of the United States and of our own country and others around these parts, has been based on, at any rate, a stable non-Communist orderly Japan, repenting of the past and learning to live in a civilised fashion with the world, and in it. And under those circumstances this great concession to the capacity of a relatively few people to do mischief is, I think well very unhappy, perhaps unavoidable, I don't know.

markedly different from one or two other bowlers I've seen, nor were either of the three balls for which he was called markedly different from any of the others that he bowled that day. However, who am I to say?

QUESTION: Did you find any interest in the Australian economy while you were over there?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, well I was very interested to find both in Great Britain and in the United States that there is a very great concentration of interest, economically, on Australia. The disposition in the United Kingdom is to move rather more and more in the direction of Australia for the purposes of investment on the ground, apart from the fact that we are a stable community, as we are, that there are all sorts of enormous possibilities of future development. And in the United States, particularly in financial circles in the United States, it is really quite exciting to discover the attitude that men who are engaged in dealing with investable funds, - find what their attitude is towards Australia. I have come back a complete optimist about the attitude of these great countries overseas to us and to our development and I would confidently expect that unless we do something pretty silly or are hit by some strange catastrophe, we will find, year by year, an increasing interest expressed in practical terms.

QUESTION: On the local political situation, Sir will you be taking part in the Bendigo and Balaclava by-elections?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't a clue, though I strongly suspect.

QUESTION: I thought you had probably received cables ...

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, no. I've been too interested in reading all the side-play about Bendigo.

QUESTION: Would you comment on that.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I've heard a few "rumbles" (Laughter)

QUESTION: Did your economic talks in England and America embrace questions of monopoly and restrictive practices, Mr. Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: No, Sir. Not as far as I was concerned, no.

QUESTION: Did you reach any understanding, Sir, about the future of missile tests and the Woomera Range?

PRIME MINISTER: Nothing more than you know. They believe there that the Woomera programme, in total, won't be very materially affected. They are still working on the question as to whether they ought to go in for space research, in which case Woomera, of course, would have further application. But so far we have had no report, unless it's come within the last day or two. But they were working on that when I was there. I think they are interested in the problem of space research myself, but of course it is a very large financial consideration.

QUESTION: Could you tell us, Sir, if you think the world has moved in the time you've been away? Do you think the situation has improved?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it's moved a little eccentrically. But now that I'm back, no doubt all that will change.

With the compliments of:

Hugh Dash, Press Secretary to the Prime Minister.