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South Africa  
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PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES, AT MASCOT ON THE  
30TH MARCH, 1961

PRIME MINISTER: Anything I say that isn't right must be regarded as talking in my sleep of which I have had very little. Shoot me! (Laughter) I'd pay a handsome reward to a man who would shoot me and finish it.

Well what do you want to know about?

QUESTION: First of all, Sir, could you tell us what SEATO means by "appropriate action" if the fighting in Laos doesn't stop, as reported in this morning's papers?

PRIME MINISTER: You mean you want me to speculate about what may happen in Laos and what might be done if so-and-so happens, or something else happens. Oh, no! Not for me! Not for me! The whole point about the SEATO Conference was that it reaffirmed the determination to take whatever action might be needed under SEATO. There had been a few doubts, I think, in some minds as to whether it meant business. I think this Conference resolved those doubts. But as to what might need to be done under any given circumstances, whether military or para-military, or economic, or whatever it may be, these are matters that will be determined from time to time by the Governments concerned on advice from the Council representatives who sit constantly in Bangkok. It is not just theoretical, it's right.

QUESTION: Would you care to comment, Mr. Menzies, on the difference in view between yourself and Mr. Macmillan?

PRIME MINISTER: What are they? Do tell me; do help me by telling me. All I have had is echoes of leading articles in Australia. And as I was unaware of these differences I would be delighted if you would tell me what they are. Because Mr. Macmillan and I, who are great friends and who have seen a lot of each other over these matters, still don't know what they are. Could you tell me? Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Macmillan's statement about South Africa differs from your statement which we have received in Australia.

PRIME MINISTER: Does it? In what way?

QUESTION: Your attack on the exclusion of South Africa was quite fiery at the Australia Club.

PRIME MINISTER: And you thought his was less fiery did you? Well this is a very odd kind of difference of opinion. He sounded less fiery than I did. Well if that is the only difference between us you can put it down to my passionate Celtic temperament.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Sir, Lord Casey, before he left here said that he considered that it was a good thing that South Africa had left the Commonwealth of Nations. Do you think it is a good thing .. ?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't hear what he said. I doubt whether he said it.

QUESTION: Would you care to comment on South Africa's withdrawal ... ?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is a great misfortune, a great misfortune. I have said that repeatedly. I hope it has reached here. I think it is a great pity that one of the foundation members of the Commonwealth should be out. And I think it is an even greater pity that a foundation member of the Commonwealth whose citizens have fought alongside our citizens in two wars should be out on an issue which is primarily, whatever else you may say about it, a matter of internal policy. Quite frankly I don't like this idea that we are to question each other's internal policies and on the strength of our views about the internal policies of another country, either nudge each other out or beckon each other in. This is not my idea of the Commonwealth.

QUESTION: Do you think it is a dangerous principle?

PRIME MINISTER: I do, I do. Undoubtedly.

QUESTION: Do you have any feelings, Sir, about Sir Roy Welensky's statement regarding Australia's white Australia Policy?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't hear him make a statement on Australia's white-Australia policy. Sorry.

QUESTION: It was suggested that the white-Australia policy of Australia and the apartheid policy were one and the same thing.

PRIME MINISTER: Who suggested this?

PRESSMAN: Welensky and also some commentators ...

PRIME MINISTER: Welensky? Did he really? Well I didn't hear him say it.

QUESTION: But what do you think about ... ?

PRIME MINISTER: But I didn't hear Sir Roy Welensky say it.

QUESTION: Some of the papers have said it ...

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, of course! The papers have said something! Oh, dear now, come, come! What haven't they said? Really, you mustn't take advantage of me in this way. I am an innocent fellow.

QUESTION: Do you think things will be easier now in the British Commonwealth of Nations now that South Africa has left?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't, no.

QUESTION: You don't think there will be less embarrassment now?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't. Indeed it is very interesting. There will be some people who will now, as they have indicated, attack South Africa in the United Nations. A few people have offered to move to expel South Africa from the United Nations because of South Africa's racial policy. But, oddly enough, the very same people want to import into the United Nations Communist China, which apparently doesn't deny human rights. All this is too much for me. I don't understand it.

QUESTION: But Mr. Menzies was South Africa edged out of the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think that Dr. Verwoerd had the slightest option on the final day. I will be making a full statement about this in Parliament when Parliament resumes. I will be delighted to. And people, so far as I am concerned, will be completely at liberty, in Parliament as well as out, to agree or disagree. But I shall make the whole of my own views quite plain. But if there is one thing that is quite certain - and after all I was there and no newspaper reporter was - it is that Dr. Verwoerd had no option but to withdraw his application.

QUESTION: Can you explain why?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course I can explain why. Suppose you, having agreed to a form of communique which stated the criticisms quite fairly and the answer quite concisely, suppose you had agreed to that, and then you were told by Prime Minister after Prime Minister that he would never let up until he had got rid of you, would you remain? Of course not! I must say that I thought the gentleman was very patient - I would have left about two rounds earlier. Of course he had no option but to go. And if what is said leaves you with no option but to withdraw your application, well you can use whatever headlines you like about that, but we all know what it means.

There was a fantastic story circulating in a section of the English Sunday press to the effect that after everybody else had agreed to the communique Dr. Verwoerd attacked the other members. That is completely untrue. Dr. Verwoerd had agreed to the communique. I thought the whole problem was over. So did Mr. Macmillan, with whom I am supposed to have great disagreement. I remember after that adjournment he said to me, "It is all right; Verwoerd has agreed to the communique." "Well," I said, "this is splendid. Then our problem is over." And when Verwoerd had indicated that he agreed, and Mr. Macmillan had confirmed that and announced it, then it was - and then only - that certain other Prime Ministers indicated that this was no good and it was then, for the first time, that Dr. Verwoerd said, "Well I must consider my position," withdrew for a little while, considered his position, came back and said - I thought most courteously, because he is a man of outstanding courtesy and dignity, whatever you think about his policies he is that kind of man - he came back and said, "Well, all things considered I must withdraw my application."

Now that was the fact of it. This story ... I wish people did not publish stories that can only be got from lying sources. Because this happened to be a private meeting, therefore no story could be got with honour from anybody. But that story was completely untrue.

QUESTION: If this principle is carried to its logical conclusion, could it wreck the conference if members were asked to sit in judgment on one another?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think I have made this clear. I think it would be a terrible thing were meetings of Prime Ministers to become courts either of morals or of justice or of whatever it may be, sitting in judgment on each other. We have lived for many years by not sitting

in judgment on each other. Nobody supposes that I am responsible for the political policies of Ghana or the racial policies of some other country in the Commonwealth. Of course not - until this time. I think it is a great pity, I think it alters the character of the Commonwealth. Perhaps I am out of date. Perhaps this is a better kind of Commonwealth. Well that is a matter of opinion, but it is not my idea.

QUESTION: Do you think this could lead to Prime Ministers' censure at future meetings about our role in New Guinea?

PRIME MINISTER: Why not? Once the door is opened, how do you close it? And if the door remains open, then are we to understand that our policies, enlightened as they no doubt are in Papua and New Guinea, won't be exposed to examination in a Commonwealth meeting. Our immigration policy - a policy designed to save Australia from the South African problem, don't forget, and therefore a great policy for Australia - is this to be brought up? I don't know. All I know is that if these matters .. if this becomes the practice, then the Commonwealth will convert itself into a debating society, into a rather strange forum of judgment and decision and, under those circumstances - well, you may tell me that it will endure, but it won't be the Commonwealth that I have ever thought about, or known.

QUESTION: Do you think that by South Africa going from the Commonwealth this will put us into a more difficult position with Asia than if they stayed in?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, that is all a matter of opinion. Look you say "a difficulty with Asia". There is a great disposition to assume that all Asian countries think the same. They don't, any more than all European countries think the same. Don't fall into that error. I would not undertake to say that there was an Asian opinion on the matter of our immigration policy. Tunjku Abdul Rahman has repeatedly said, publicly, that he thinks it is all right; it is our business, we have the right to do it. Others may have another view. Not one of them has ever criticised the policy to me. The criticism of our immigration policy is chiefly confined to a few itinerant Australians and a few gentlemen in Australia, including one or two on the press.

QUESTION: If that be so, Sir, why was it necessary to raise the possibility that it may be criticised in the future?

PRIME MINISTER: But isn't it obvious? Isn't it obvious? If you can criticise the racial policy of one country - the internal racial policy - and put such pressure on that country that it leaves, why can't you criticise the racial policy of another country? I mean these are very fine distinctions. Nobody raised that matter, but I did myself. I did myself. I said: "Where does this process end?" because I feel very strongly about this business of butting in on the domestic policy of another country. And I would like you all to remember this. Apartheid, separate development - there is the choice, you develop the races separately or you develop them by a process of integration. Integration is a pretty new doctrine, don't forget, pretty new - this is post-colonial integration. But that is a choice of statesmanship and this has been the policy. I don't agree with the policy. Now that it is all out, I've said so. I didn't make public comments before. I don't agree because I think that the more it

succeeds in raising the level of the Bantu the more disastrously will it fail in the long run because he won't be treated as a second-rate citizen, he won't be pushed off the footpath, and I think that the end of this policy is disaster. But that is a problem of judgment. All I know is that I have attended as many Prime Ministers' Conferences as anybody else in history and until last year I had never heard it mentioned, although the policy began with Jan Smuts.

QUESTION: Surely, Sir, it isn't so much apartheid being directly criticised as the administration, things like Sharpeville ...

PRIME MINISTER: 'Things like Sharpeville!' Is that the only incident that you know of in which people have been killed? Of course it was a shocking incident. Of course Langa was a shocking incident. But the people in London who stood around talking about Sharpeville and Langa, I didn't hear a word out of them about the massacres that occurred in the Congo. Not a word! Let us be fair on this matter. Don't let us be too political. If we are going to be humane, let us be humane all round.

QUESTION: But shouldn't we expect a better standard of conduct from a foundation member of the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course, of course! But was the Government of South Africa responsible for the shooting at Sharpeville? Did the Government order the shooting? Do we know that yet? No. Well, I think we should wait until we know.

QUESTION: Mr. Menzies is there any possibility of you saying anything about a new Governor-General?

PRIME MINISTER: No, none.

QUESTION: There is a rumour in Canberra ...

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sure there is. (Laughter)

QUESTION: There is a rumour at the moment that Lord Carrington could be the man?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, you disappoint me. I thought the rumour would have been that I was going to be. Oh, what a pity. That is a blow to my ambitions. There is no appointment - yet.

QUESTION: It was reported, Sir, that you made certain recommendations to the Queen?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sure it was. I have read reports of every conceivable kind.

QUESTION: Is it true?

PRIME MINISTER: My conversations with the Queen, my dear fellow, are private until they produce a result.

QUESTION: When will we know?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. As soon as possible.

QUESTION: Mr. Menzies did Australia make any offer to send forces to Laos if they were needed in the agreement under SEATO?

PRIME MINISTER: No occasion arose for people to make offers. The SEATO organisation is set up under a treaty. The obligations are set out in the treaty. We affirmed on this occasion our obligations under the treaty. And I imagine that the resolution has now been published, has it? Well that contains with precision, the results arrived at by all of us after a day and a half of constant discussion. I won't add to it because if I added to it I might subtract from it.

QUESTION: Did France raise any objection to the resolution..?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, now look, you don't think I am that kind of fellow do you? You want to get the lowdown, do you, on the discussions in SEATO. You won't get them from me.

QUESTION: Sir, do we support the Boun Oum regime or do we go along with the British in hoping for the return of the Souvanna Phouma regime?

PRIME MINISTER: There is nothing to be added to what I have said about this statement on Laos. There it is. It speaks for itself.

QUESTION: Did you have any discussions on West New Guinea when you were in London?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes, in an occasional way, yes.

QUESTION: Then you don't think it is an important vital issue at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER: Does that follow? I think it is a tremendously important issue, but I did not go around London talking about it all the time. I had talks in the relevant places.

QUESTION: Did you meet Dr. Luns?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: Did the question of West New Guinea crop up then?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes. You may be perfectly certain that whenever Dr. Luns and I meet that question crops up. I mean that is a reasonable proposition.

QUESTION: But you have no statement to make on the matter?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Except that the policy that we have repeatedly stated about West New Guinea stands unaltered.

QUESTION: Did you get the impression, Sir, at Bangkok, that the member nations of SEATO were as strong as ever against the Communist menace?

PRIME MINISTER: Stronger, stronger. I am perfectly certain that we came out of this conference with the member nations stronger on that matter - if they needed to be stronger - than before. SEATO is more powerful and well-knit and significant today than it ever was before. I am sure of that.

QUESTION: Sir, do you still intend to continue as Minister for External Affairs in view of the increasing world problems and the strain it must impose on your time?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I don't know, I don't know. There seems to be a somewhat strange idea that the Prime Minister is not worried about external affairs, but a Minister for External Affairs is. I assure you that that is not right. I am not aware that I do any considerable amount more now that I am Minister for External Affairs than I did as Prime Minister. Prime Ministers read the cables, you know, every day. They always discuss the high-level policies that emerge. I am not anxious to duplicate my work, but I will change this position as I see an opportunity and when it proves convenient. But I think it is easy to exaggerate the idea - I notice it is exaggerated in certain quarters - that I am trying to do two men's work all of a sudden. I don't mind that, but after all, Senator Gorton does an awful lot of the work in External Affairs. It is rather offensive to him to say that his work is negligible. He does a very great deal of work, so I am not doing two men's work. I am doing the work of a man and a third. Well, perhaps that is a mistake. I don't know. I will get around to it.

QUESTION: What about our internal problems, Sir, regarding the present credit squeeze?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, since I left the plane, I have had no opportunity of looking into that matter.

QUESTION: But you must be kept acquainted with what is going on here in Australia during your trips away?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I have had one or two cables, yes. But you are going to ask me now to make a comment on what has been happening in Australia while I have been away. No, I won't take on three men's work. Two men's work is enough.

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With the compliments of :  
 R.C. Maley,  
 Press Secretary to the Prime Minister.