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TEXT OF TV PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES, IN SYDNEY, ON SUNDAY,  
30TH APRIL, 1961

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister can we talk, first of all, about West New Guinea? Both you and General Nasution have said that as a result of your talks here in Australia that the issue over West New Guinea has been clarified and has added, perhaps, to common understanding. However the two views remain quite opposed. Would you say the two countries have grown farther apart, or closer together?

PRIME MINISTER: I would say closer together - for two reasons, applying one each way. So far as Indonesia is concerned it has obtained quite readily, a statement by myself that Australia has no military engagement with the Netherlands, direct or indirect. He attached importance to that. It had been said before, but perhaps not by me. So from his point of view that was something cleared up. And in my turn I felt that I had cleared up with him pretty completely the importance that we attach to self-determination for the people of New Guinea, whether in West New Guinea or in our section of New Guinea. And I think that that registered in his mind.

QUESTION: Do you feel, then, that they may press less vigorously this claim to West New Guinea after these talks?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think that one should assume that they won't abandon their claim, they'll pursue their claim. But I think there will be less disposition, perhaps, to permit people to suggest a forceful solution of the matter. I think that the General means it when he says "We are not going to use force to establish our case". But that he will use propaganda, all these other means that are available, is quite clear. In fact he was very frank about it.

QUESTION: Do you think that the stand that we have taken may increase the influence of the Communist Party in Indonesia?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so. The Communist Party in Indonesia, I gather, is on the bandwagon, to use our expression, on this matter. It is among the leaders of the demand for West New Guinea. Then there is a difference of opinion. Some people there think that if the claim succeeded and the Dutch handed over West New Guinea then the position of the Government against the Communists would be strengthened. I would take leave to doubt that. I would think that if they could claim that they had a big hand in getting West New Guinea that their position might be strengthened. But anyhow that is an Indonesian problem at the moment, not mine - though, of course, if the Communists did a lot of good, made a lot of advance in Indonesia that would be our problem.

QUESTION: Do you feel that the possibility of an incident creating some greater conflict, which General Nasution mentioned when he first came here, has disappeared now?

PRIME MINISTER: It would be saying too much to say that it had disappeared. But I think the danger has receded. Because this business of infiltrators, and some of them with arms, has been discussed and has been made public. Everybody now knows that this kind of thing has been going on. And I think, therefore, that there will be a little less disposition.

QUESTION: What will Australia do, though, if such a conflict does arise, whether it is limited guerilla activity that you have referred to yourself, or open conflict?

PRIME MINISTER: Now that is a question that you really shouldn't ask me at this stage. I said all I had to say about that in my statement in the House.

QUESTION: Can I ask you this, Sir? On that - don't you think it would be of advantage if the Indonesians knew the type of policy you were envisaging in such circumstances to prevent them possibly bringing about a fait accompli in that area?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so, no. What I indicated in my statement in the House was that if anything of that kind, if force were used - I've forgotten whether I used the actual expression - either in wholesale or in retail and this gave rise to armed conflict then of course we couldn't profess not to be interested in it, deeply interested in it. So are the other nations affected by these matters. The United States would be deeply interested in it; Great Britain, all the SEATO powers would be greatly interested in it. And then I indicated it was something the United Nations itself couldn't ignore; and that what any other nations - irrespective of such an intervention by the United Nations - what they were to do, they would have to determine. But I don't think that it is wise in a matter of this kind for us to be sabre-rattling. There's enough of it been going on; I'd like to keep it outside ...

QUESTION: Do you have any fears, Sir, that the President of the United States might adopt an attitude towards Indonesia that would be opposed to your own?

PRIME MINISTER: That would be opposed to mine? No, I have no fear. It might be different from mine. You see what I mean by that? It may be that the President - I don't know, this is pure speculation - would find his mind attracted by some form of Trusteeship for West New Guinea. I mean this thing is floated around. Not the kind of trusteeship that was proposed by Malaya which was not a true Trusteeship under the United Nations, but was an interim management, so to speak, before handing it over to Indonesia. Well, the President may very well be attracted by some idea of Trusteeship. We don't reject some idea of Trusteeship; neither indeed, so far as I know, do the Dutch. It is when you get down to the brass tacks of it, what kind of Trusteeship, who should be the Trustee, who should be the Administering powers, this is the kind of thing that they argue about in the General Assembly of the United Nations for about a year. We might not be exactly identical in our views - that's the point that I want ...

QUESTION: In the event of there being conflict you have mentioned that perhaps the United Nations would be interested. Is there a possibility, do you think, that a United Nations attitude may be, in fact, against Australia's stand on this, with a majority of say the Afro-Asian nations supporting Indonesia's claims?

PRIME MINISTER: The first thing that would be done if this were taken to the United Nations would be that they would call for a cessation of hostilities. That, one would expect, would bring to an end for the time being, these matters of hostilities - fighting, the conflict - on the spot.

Then you are quite right: if the United Nations then said, "Well this has become a matter of international significance and we therefore propose to investigate it", and having investigated it proposed then to alter the sovereignty of West New Guinea, and they had the numbers for it, well that could happen. You are asking me to speculate now about something that is a contingency on a contingency.

QUESTION: Sir, don't you feel that there is a contradiction in the policy of one, recognition of sovereignty and two, the insistence upon, or the preference for self-determination on the Australian Government's part? Is there any way in which the securing of self-determination for the indigenous people can be brought about by Australia? Could it go to some tribunal to get that?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I don't think so. I don't see this conflict that you are speaking about. We have sovereignty over at least portion of our New Guinea territory and we are the Trust power in relation to the other. We recognise Dutch sovereignty. But the whole point about self-determination is that the colonial power, so to describe it, having sovereignty, exercises that by pursuing a policy designed ultimately to give the indigenous people the right to determine their own future. That is an exercise of sovereignty.

QUESTION: Sir, if Indonesia got control of West New Guinea legally and had a sovereignty that you recognised would there be any chance of the indigenous natives of West New Guinea achieving self-determination at any time in the future?

PRIME MINISTER: None.

QUESTION: That would be the end of it. There would be a conflict then?

PRIME MINISTER: That I thought was made quite clear by General Nasution. It was one of the matters of discussion between us. Because I was saying, "We think that self-determination of these peoples is of the essence. The Dutch have promised it; the Dutch have made an agreement with us" - which I quoted in the House - "undertaking to pursue this end and you won't have it". And he said, "No, we won't, because we regard West New Guinea as part of Indonesia, not as a colony of Java and Sumatra or whatever it may be, but as part of Indonesia, and it therefore would have no more right of self-determination than Sumatra would, or the Celebes, or whatever it may be". So that there is a marked distinction between the Indonesian approach and our own, and the approach of the Dutch. And I think this has been brought out into sharp relief as a result of these discussions, in a perfectly friendly way. There is the point of difference.

QUESTION: On the other hand we have shown our interest in self-determination; and yet we have said in the agreement that we will respect any decision mutually reached by the Dutch and Indonesians about this which, in fact, would not involve self-determination by the people of West New Guinea, would it?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I see what you mean. You think there is a conflict between the idea of sovereignty and the idea of self-determination. I don't think so. We start off

about West New Guinea by saying "We recognise sovereignty". We want our own sovereignty to be recognised and we therefore respect the sovereignty of the other man. One of the faculties of the sovereign state is that if it wants to deal with its territory in some way, it may. It has agreed with us that it will deal with that territory by producing self-determination. But if it made an agreement tomorrow with Indonesia to transfer West New Guinea to Indonesia, in the exercise of its sovereignty, that of course would be an end of self-determination. But it wouldn't prove that our policy and approach had been wrong. It would merely mean that the Dutch themselves had changed the policy that is contained in the Agreement with Australia. And we would regret it, of course. Sovereignty is the paramount thing because it is the beginning of the whole matter. Without sovereignty it is idle to be talking to people about giving them something in the way of self-determination because only a sovereign power can do that.

QUESTION:

And yet in pushing self-determination hard do you feel that we may arouse some cynicism in certain quarters about this very thing? I mean for instance, do you think people may ask if Australia believes in self-determination for the natives of South Africa, for the Bantu?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, of course, here you are raising the whole issue of South African policy. You have to remember that the Bantu population is in the same country, South Africa, within the Union of South Africa, within the same country as the European people. It is not a case where you have a separate race in a separate community in a separate spot, as we have with New Guinea. If you have a geographical area like New Guinea, and there you have a lot of Papuan people living in it, you can then talk about self-determination for those people in that area, because the problem lends itself to separate treatment. But if we had the Papuans mixed up with our own people in the Continent of Australia, you wouldn't be talking about self-determination because that would be an irrelevancy - you would be talking about racial policy, you would be deciding whether you were going to have integration, or separateness; but you wouldn't be talking about self-determination in the case of a community which itself was a mingled community.

QUESTION:

Mr. Menzies, could I switch to a local issue? Your figures for those registered for employment are in the neighbourhood of 82,000. Does the Government regard this as a satisfactory figure? Or does it propose remedial action on that?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you know, this expression "a satisfactory figure" is a little bit ambiguous, because if I say "Yes" then I will be told I am all in favour of having 80,000 unemployed, which I am not. No figure of unemployment is satisfactory so long as it exceeds the inevitable limited number of people who will be unemployable - and there are some such, of course. But intrinsically, this is not a critical figure, of course. The work force today in Australia is estimated to be 4,200,000. And if, out of that number, you have 80,000 who are, at a given moment, registered for employment, with of course another 20,000 vacancies being advertised at the same time, that is not a critical figure, that doesn't present a major problem. But if it grew then of course nobody could ignore it - if the numbers grew.

QUESTION: The point is, Sir, that the Government does recognise it as a problem?

PRIME MINISTER: Look we don't exaggerate the problem - not for a moment. But so much do we have it on our mind that every week in Cabinet we have a report on the figures and we have some discussion about where there may be a patch of unemployment, and what may be done about it. It's very much in our minds.

QUESTION: Well how do you look at Queensland, Sir, where the figure is 3.5%?

PRIME MINISTER: Queensland, of course, will always have a certain amount of unemployment, technically, because Queensland has so much seasonal employment. If the cane cutting season is long, then the people who are standing off are fewer in numbers. If the cane cutting season is shorter, then you will have people registered for employment rather more numerously. Same way with the meat season, so much affected by the weather - by whether they have had proper rains in the cattle country - because this will determine the length of the killing season in places like Rockhampton and Gladstone. Therefore there will always be a slightly fluctuating figure in Queensland.

QUESTION: As you do regard it as a problem, Sir, though not a grave one at this stage, what remedial action do you contemplate for the foreseeable future?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, well, look I'm not prepared to say that at this stage because as I say, the problem doesn't call for drastic action at the present time. What you do is to have a look at Queensland, to take that example, and say, "Well, now is there really a serious pocket of unemployment there; and if so where?" Then you consider whether by some adjustment of your public works programme, or by some dealing with the housing programme, you might be able to bring about some relief in that area. But I am not going to be dogmatic about this because that very problem is at present under examination.

QUESTION: Would you say, Sir, that likewise the repercussions of the so-called "credit squeeze" don't call for drastic action at the moment? In the way of remedy?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you know, there seemed to be profound differences of opinion on this matter. I noticed in your State and mine - that is if you are still a Victorian - that there is a widespread belief that the right cure now is to restore import licensing, to slacken out on the credit squeeze.

QUESTION: I don't think everybody in Victoria shares that view, Sir, but I do think even some of your own friends feel that perhaps the width of your own responsibilities today and the pressure of day to day events mean that there isn't sufficient attention possible for the job of winning the next election right at this moment.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it's interesting that you should say that, because I had a conference yesterday with what they call the "organisational planners" in my Party, and they, and I, had a very strong belief in common and that was that we were going to win the next Election. And we discussed ways and means of doing it.

QUESTION: Did you fix any target, Sir, of what would be your employment figure for round about the election period?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no. All these estimates of figures are, of course, as you know, rather speculative.

QUESTION: What has happened, Sir, to one or two of the what are loosely described, perhaps, as "planks of platform" that haven't been mentioned for a little while - constitutional reform? Was there not an all-Party report submitted to you on this apparently very vital question? Are we going to hear any more of that in the course of this year, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Well we had a debate about it the other day in the House. The Opposition, very naturally, is warmly in favour of the entire report because it embodies practically every constitutional principle they stand for.

QUESTION: You haven't particularly fond memories of referendums I think, Sir, have you?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't mind telling you I am a complete sceptic about these referendums: 'When in doubt, vote "No"'

QUESTION: And will constitutional reform require a referendum?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Therefore you have to consider very carefully not only whether it would be agreeable to have a particular amendment in the Constitution, because on a number of occasions it would be, but you have to consider 'Will the people vote to include this amendment'? And past experience, you know, doesn't lend much support to the view that they will. Because the Constitution is a complicated document, not very many people have read it, and fewer have understood it. Judges have disagreed about it; and the man down the street who is a sensible chap says, "Well if the Judges can't make up their minds what this means, who am I to say so?"

QUESTION: Does that mean, Sir, that there will be no constitutional reform proposed?

PRIME MINISTER: Let me choose my words with some care. I don't anticipate that you will have a constitutional referendum before or at the election.

QUESTION: Now, Sir, if we could ask of one of these other things that have been proposed by your Party. Will we shortly hear of any progress in regard to restrictive practices, and the measures necessary to eliminate them?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sorry, old boy, but you have been so occupied with such success in the television world that you haven't been reading your parliamentary debates. Because the Attorney-General has been questioned about this matter several times. And I can tell you that he takes this problem very seriously; he has done an enormous amount of work on it; he investigated when he was over in America to see how they were handling their problem; we had another investigation made in London about the working of their Restrictive Practices Act. It is not a matter on which the Commonwealth has single power. Therefore the Attorney-General himself is in consultation with the States on this matter. But it is not to be hurried. It is no use pretending that you have discovered the answer to all this, and putting down a piece of legislation that can have a coach and six driven through it. But the work is being continued. I myself attach very great importance

to securing the best possible measure that can be got in collaboration with the States.

QUESTION: Have you any hope, Sir, that at least the broad principles can be stated in your Policy Speech which should be the end of this year?

PRIME MINISTER: I would hope so.

QUESTION: Sir, there has been a great deal of talk about the burden that you bear carrying the External Affairs portfolio as well as the Prime Ministership. Is there any chance that you will be relinquishing that portfolio?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know yet. All I can say is that I have had two major operations in the capacity - not internal operations - major operations in the field of External Affairs, that relating to the Prime Ministers' Conference and South Africa and the attendant matters, and the other matters on which I spoke the other day. I don't think anybody, really, on either side of the House, felt that I wasn't informed on the matters that I dealt with.

QUESTION: Without suggesting that, Sir, don't you feel that a weakness could be that in this day and age there must, of necessity, be contact with Asian heads of State, and your dual role which demands your presence at Prime Ministers' Conferences, for example, and things like that, rather restricts your ability to go to Asia to see these people?

PRIME MINISTER: Look if that is a disability in me, let me remind you that it is a disability which is shared by the Prime Minister of New Zealand and by the Prime Minister of India.

QUESTION: By the way, Sir, wasn't there criticism of that by your own High Commissioner in India, Mr. Crocker, in a departmental document?

PRIME MINISTER: Was there? Well, I haven't seen it. You seem to have an infra-red eye.

QUESTION: When Lord Casey was Prime Minister up until January last year, I think, it would be true to say that he travelled very intensively in Asia. Do you feel that you have been able to do that as much as you would have perhaps liked because of the fact that you occupy both portfolios?

PRIME MINISTER: I think I have done it enough. You can overdo this business, you know. I find when I am talking to Foreign Secretaries around the world, both in England and in Washington, that they are all getting a little tired of the idea that a Foreign Secretary, or a Foreign Minister, has to be in the air all the time. They have been forced to the conclusion that if there is to be continuity of policy there has to be a great deal of work done at the centre, and more responsibility imposed on Ambassadors. And consequently if I were Foreign Minister, Minister for External Affairs, and nothing else, you wouldn't get me hurtling around the world at a great rate, at intervals of a month or two. I'm not criticising anybody. I would find that, myself, inconsistent with the proper performance of my policy work. Other people thrive on it. John Foster Dulles absolutely thrived on travelling around.

QUESTION: At the other end of the scale, Sir, we have Mr. Khrushchev who does get around a great deal, doesn't he?



Presumably because he feels that it is worthwhile, particularly in the part of the world in which we have this vital stake, in Asia.

PRIME MINISTER: But you must always remember that Mr. Khrushchev has an extraordinarily - what shall I say? - well-disciplined administrative structure under him and is, himself essentially, the greatest living Minister for Propaganda; and propaganda, he finds, is more usefully exhibited outside his own country. And so he goes.

QUESTION: Do you ever attempt to envy him these advantages of his efficient propaganda ..?

PRIME MINISTER: Never! You see I have a reasonable expectation that when I am dismissed I'll still be alive. (Laughter) I feel that this is an enormous advantage in a democratic country. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Sir, if we could ask you a question as Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs. You must be very disturbed about the events in Laos the last couple of days. Do you regard them as very dangerous?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I do. This thing isn't going very well. At the SEATO meeting we were able to get a unanimous view on the part of the SEATO powers in favour of having an independent, united, neutral Laos, quite independent of control by the Soviet Union or the Communist powers, or control by the Western world. That was the objective, and in order to get that a proposal was made by Great Britain which was approved of by the United States for a cease-fire, for the re-constitution of the International Control Commission and the re-calling of a 14-power Conference. All this looked to be good. And the Soviet Union itself, after a little delay, agreed and has joined in the call for a cease-fire. I hope, bona fide.

QUESTION: You have some doubts about that?

PRIME MINISTER: Certainly! Because the fighting has gone on. The Pathet Lao has been fighting and fighting since, making advances since. I would like to be sure that the Soviet Union has exercised its immense influence with the Pathet Lao, the Communist group, to bring about a cease-fire. But as it is the fighting is going on. And really, as at today, as you know, the position is very serious. It may be that before the Conference can ever begin there will be a conquest of the essential areas of the country and once the Communists become established in that fashion it is not a simple matter to get rid of them; and indeed every SEATO power will have to think very hard in the next day or two about the circumstance that arises should the capital, the royal capital and the administrative capital, both of them, fall to the Communists.

QUESTION: Is SEATO allowed to intervene in Laos, as there has been no indictable invasion?

PRIME MINISTER: It could intervene under the South East Asian Treaty on the request of the King.

QUESTION: Has there been such a request, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, not up to the moment.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate one, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know.

QUESTION: I think a point that viewers would like very much to hear from you, Sir, is what you consider members of the British Commonwealth still have in common? And what do you see as the future? A lot of people, I think, think that there is a slow disintegration, or an end to the worth of the Commonwealth.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think, in spite of what has happened, that the great thing we have in common is that we all recognise that we stand in a rather special relationship to each other - maybe rather undefinable - but a rather special relationship to each other which enables us to meet at a Prime Ministers' Conference and have a discussion, behind the doors, of a kind that I don't think you could possibly have in any committee or forum of the United Nations. Now that is a tremendous advantage. We get to know each other pretty well and we can talk quite frankly to each other. We can assist each other, if you care to put it that way, with advice on matters falling within our own experience. My trouble, essentially, about this last one was that I felt that South Africa, being in effect put out on a matter which was a problem of policy inside the boundaries of South Africa, may, if we are not careful, give rise to further difficulties in the future. Once we begin to talk, in the Prime Ministers' Conference about our internal, what we all think of our internal problems, then I don't see any end to it. Perhaps the shock given to the Commonwealth by these recent events will bring a realisation into the minds of the other Commonwealth countries that this process is not to be allowed to continue, except perhaps under the most extraordinary circumstances.

QUESTION: Was that your motive, Sir, in raising the White Australia question so promptly when this thing happened?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd like to make it clear that I didn't raise the White Australia question - nor do I ever refer to the White Australia policy, as a matter of fact: I refer to our immigration policy. That matter was promptly raised by Sir Edgar Whitehead of Rhodesia and was given some prominence. That having been raised I, in private, took the opportunity of pointing out to my colleagues in the Conference that that was our business, just as what happened to the Chinese in Malaya was Malaya's business and not mine, just as what might happen about the Tamils in Ceylon was the business of Ceylon not mine.

QUESTION: This support, Sir, for domestic jurisdiction which you have adhered to in the Commonwealth is not so now, in the United Nations, where Australia recently cast a vote condemning apartheid. Is there some danger, do you think, that we may be accused of doing one thing in the Commonwealth, and another thing in the United Nations over this?

PRIME MINISTER: I have been. I have been accused. An eminent journal in this city, when the vote had been cast in the United Nations, said that I was the greatest political acrobat of all time. But when I made my full statement on this matter to Parliament and had explained our actions on this matter I got a very commendatory leading article in the same paper. So the acrobatics were not all one way.

QUESTION: Why were there acrobatics, as you put it, Sir? Why did we change our policy at U.N?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the position, historically, in the United Nations was that Great Britain and Australia had, over a number of years, voted against this resolution - not because they were in favour of apartheid, but because they said that this was a matter of domestic jurisdiction. This time Great Britain altered its vote from opposition to straight out support.

QUESTION: Was that a surprise to you?

PRIME MINISTER: It was. A complete surprise. I had knowledge of it a few hours before the vote was to be taken. In the result they said, "We maintain domestic jurisdiction, we maintain our attitude on that; but in the events that have happened and particularly the removal of South Africa from the Commonwealth, this matter now has achieved international significance, and we therefore propose to vote for it". And Australia? What would have happened to us if we had been the only Commonwealth country standing out - sitting over there with Portugal? We would have been misrepresented all over Asia about our attitude; and we were not going to be misrepresented. We had had enough. We weren't going to be misrepresented any further. So we voted with the United Kingdom.

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