

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES, ON THURSDAY, 21ST  
DECEMBER, 1961, AT 4 p.m.

PRIME MINISTER: I was just about to say that I suppose I will have to alter my Who's Who entry by including among Hobbies - Cabinet-making. That seems to be my chief job for the last two days.

QUESTION: Can you announce the result yet, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: No, but I'll be in a position to. I have to do something on this between now and lunch time tomorrow and I've secured the Governor-General's permission to - because as you know I don't like to announce these things without his approval. I should think I can have this out by lunch time tomorrow. And the Swearing-In will be at 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon. That gives unbridled pleasure to the evening press.

QUESTION: How many at the Swearing-In Mr. Menzies?

PRIME MINISTER: A few. Yes, a few.

Well, who wants to know something that I can't say.

QUESTION: When will you hold the first of these conferences that you mooted yesterday, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I would hope by the middle of January. I gather that there is a widespread belief that every man is entitled to three weeks holiday a year. Is that so? Not having had any for ten years I thought I might take a week or two off at the beginning of January.

QUESTION: The question has been raised whether you are likely to speak with the A.C.T.U. or Trades Hall people ....?

PRIME MINISTER: I can't answer that at this stage. I used, advisedly, fairly general terms. Those are matters that we will discuss when we meet, and I would hope to have a meeting of Ministers by, or possibly before, the middle of January. And I certainly want conferences that will occur to occur before the end of January.

QUESTION: Will you indicate, Sir, the machinery you will use for these conferences, the machinery of selecting people, and topics to be discussed.

PRIME MINISTER: No. I don't think, however, that there will be very much difficulty.

QUESTION: Have you got anything like a sort of standing arrangement, standing link, in mind, Sir, as an outcome of the conferences?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that will depend on the conferences. I don't exclude that possibility at all.

QUESTION: Do you propose to limit the representation, Mr. Menzies?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I haven't begun to work this out yet. I want to have a talk with say the Bankers, I want to have a talk with, say, the manufacturers, and so on. But really I haven't worked out any standing orders yet.

QUESTION: When you say conferences, Sir, do you include conferences on Northern Development as you suggested, by the end of January. Do you think that you can see the Queensland Government, say, by the end of January?

PRIME MINISTER: I would hope to have all the consultations that I have indicated, somewhat generally, before the end of January. It would suit me. Maybe they would run into February. But I don't regard it as a matter that admits of leisure. I mean, subject to your kind permission, to have a week or two, myself.

QUESTION: Any possibility of a supplementary Budget early this year Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't the slightest idea.

QUESTION: Can you see sufficiently far into the crystal bowl to see a date for the opening of the Session?

PRIME MINISTER: No, but it will be before the end of February. But when I don't know. I haven't really discussed that with the Leader of the House. I would think somewhere in the third quarter of February - I haven't looked at the dates.

QUESTION: Can you give any indication at all, Sir, at this stage of any proposed changes in economic policy that you have in mind?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I was surprised to read in one paper this morning that we were abandoning the policy of stability and development. I didn't say that, or anything like it.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything, Sir, from official channels about the situation, Indonesia vis-a-vis the West New Guinea argument?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think that you probably know as much about that as I do because the newspapers have carried a report of what Soekarno had to say. We have had some discussion about this matter, of course, in the last few days. Our attitude on all these matters has been, first, that we have had now, both from President Soekarno and Dr. Subandrio categorical assurances that force will not be resorted to -

QUESTION: Have you had that in the last 24 hours Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: No. We've had it before, publicly announced. And nothing has been said to us that would modify that.

In the second place we, of course, have the greatest desire to live on the friendliest of terms with Indonesia. Indeed, we have only one matter of difference - and that a difference of opinion - about the sovereignty of West New Guinea. We would desire to maintain that position.

Third, we think that in the United Nations the Netherlands made proposals which went a long way. They involved, at the appropriate time, transferring sovereignty to the people of West New Guinea by a process of self-determination. We are deeply attached to the principle of self-determination and it is interesting to recall that in the United Nations General Assembly when the Netherlands proposal came up, 53 nations supported it. In other words - without going into detail - a majority of the nations in the General Assembly found the general approach satisfactory.

We still adhere to the principle of self-determination; and we still hope that out of whatever discussions may occur, self-determination for the inhabitants of West New Guinea will be respected, just as we look forward to and respect it, in the case of our part of New Guinea. So that we stand firm on that principle: we have stated it from time to time quite plainly, both here and in the United Nations, through Mr. Plimsoll, and earlier through myself last year, and we adhere to it. We think it is a sound principle, and that it is - to us - one of the inevitable steps in passing from a stage of colonialism to a stage of self-government. We have expressed these views to all the relevant parties and they remain our views. But they are not put forward in a hostile way. They are put forward by Australia as a subscribing member of the United Nations, recognising that the Charter provides for self-determination, and adhering to it ourselves, for our part, in New Guinea, and profoundly hoping that it will be respected in the case of West New Guinea.

QUESTION: Do you think it is only a political threat rather than a physical threat....?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, don't ask me that, I don't know. I don't know. Threats have been made before.

QUESTION: Sir, could you say whether you have received in the past three years requests for special Commonwealth development aid from the Queensland Government which the Commonwealth Government has rejected?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't recall any.

QUESTION: During the campaign one of your Ministers, Mr. Hulme, was attacked by one of Mr. Nicklin's Ministers. Did you know of that and have you any comment to make on it Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: None, none. I don't think that it is useful, for Queensland, to engage in post-election recriminations. They are not very helpful. The main thing is to develop the country so I will go into discussions I have without prejudice, and without hostility.

QUESTION: Is it possible, Sir, that there may be scope for further development action at the Premiers' Conference or Loan Council meeting in February?

PRIME MINISTER: Is there one due in February?

PRESSMAN: Well around about that time.

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. I don't think that a date has been fixed.

PRESSMAN: Well it has been stated that there will be one early in the new year.

PRIME MINISTER: Where has it been stated? In the Mirror? Look, I don't know when there is going to be a Conference. I can't say.

QUESTION: Why the Mirror, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Because the Mirror has a greater capacity for inventive genius than any other newspaper in Australia. That lets you cut lad - but only just, only just.

QUESTION: Could you tell us, Sir, if there are any impending developments on the European Common Market - the possibility of a Ministerial visit?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll put it this way: I don't exclude the possibility of a Ministerial visit, but nobody can say that dogmatically at this stage, because the situation develops. There is no doubt that we must have the closest possible contact with it and I don't exclude the possibility of a Ministerial visit.

QUESTION: In that case, Sir, would you make arrangements for "pairs" with the Opposition?

PRIME MINISTER: I would hope so. We have never had difficulty in the past about pairs and I have no reason to suppose that the Leader of the Opposition will want to depart from that practice. He knows the importance of these matters. We have not had trouble in the past about them, and I don't anticipate any. I mean, I can't imagine for one moment that an experienced parliamentarian like the Leader of the Opposition would want to deprive Australia of having a voice on these great matters at the appropriate time. Of course it is not thinkable to me. I haven't the slightest doubt that Mr. Calwell will behave with the usual propriety on those matters. I don't doubt it for one moment.

QUESTION: I was just wondering, Sir, because there has been opposition to Mr. Holt's trips abroad in recent years.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, well now you are getting on to a different matter. I know about those arguments, but when it comes to overseas negotiations affecting the interests of Australia I have never found that the Opposition was unwilling to make those things feasible, because, after all, if it had won the Election it would necessarily be in the same position as we are now. And I wouldn't hesitate to say "Certainly. If anybody has to go to discuss these matters he's paired". There's no question about it. And I don't anticipate the faintest.  
...

QUESTION: Tradition gives you an automatic pair with the Leader of the Opposition, doesn't it Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I have a standing pair with the Leader of the Opposition.

QUESTION: Do you expect to go yourself, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. I don't know. My mind doesn't precipitate itself so far into the future at the moment.

Here we are, I've just had a birthday. Twelve hours work in the office is an interesting way of celebrating a birthday and I shall do exactly the same number tomorrow. I think I will wait and see how the Davis Cup goes.

QUESTION: Who's going to win Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't - well I have a clue, but it doesn't matter.

QUESTION: Will you have much legislative business for the first Session, the first sitting? How long do you expect it to last?

PRIME MINISTER: God bless my soul! Are you going to ask me for a list of the legislation and for a time-table? I haven't a clue - but I will, of course, but not now, not now. "I do not ask to see the distant scene. One step enough for me". Do you remember that? It shows that you had a proper upbringing in your earlier days.

QUESTION: Have you thought about the obligations to do some re-distribution, Sir? You should be getting a Certificate through from the Statistician soon.

PRIME MINISTER: No, I've had people whistle that into my ear but so far it would be flattering myself to say that I have thought about it. I've had other things to think about. But they tell me - I don't know, you're the expert - that we are probably due for one next year. I've even had people tell me what the result of it will be, State by State. But I don't know, I don't know. I have a considerable faculty for remaining uninformed until I want to be.

QUESTION: Do you intend to make any arrangement, Sir, with the DLP to ensure control of the Senate?

PRIME MINISTER: Not that I've ever heard of. I don't contemplate it. We've never made any before. Why should we start now?

QUESTION: I was just wondering, Sir, now that you are back with a hostile Senate.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, how hostile the Senate is remains to be seen.

QUESTION: What particular time of the year do you think is the most important to Common Market discussions?

PRIME MINISTER: Well look, nobody can answer that question because that will depend on the stage that negotiations have reached in January or February or March or April, or whatever it may be. No doubt when the stage has been reached at which the United Kingdom feels that there are crucial matters that fall for decision and that a Prime Ministers' Conference ought to occur, then it will occur. I used to think to myself that that looked like being about April, but I don't know. Because it is very hard to tell how fast the negotiations will go - or what form they will take. You have to remember that there are scores of items involved in this thing and quite a considerable number of nations involved. But I would think that that is a question that might be answered with some more accuracy by some time in January. It can't be answered now.

QUESTION: Do you think the consultations will be multi-lateral at the Prime Ministers' Conference?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I don't know. But if a Prime Ministers' Conference is called then of course they become multi-lateral. Just as I've had an election they tell me, so Mr. Diefenbaker, I think, has an election coming up somewhere. When is it, May? I don't know.

QUESTION: Do you have any special measures in mind, Sir, for dealing with unemployment?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't want to say anything about that yet. You see we met only, what, the day before yesterday. It's no use rushing at propositions on two hours' notice, that's no good to anybody. All I know is that we recognise that problem and this will be one of the first things that we have to consider. But don't ask me about the details of it. I may have some ideas but I'm not announcing them.

QUESTION: Are you still confident that you can re-absorb a great number of them within 12 months?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.