

AUSTRALIA AND WEST NEW GUINEA

Statement by the Prime Minister, (Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies)

There are plenty of words in Mr. Calwell's statement, but not much common sense or, for that matter, understanding of the facts.

I will deal briefly with his central proposition, the "key note", so to speak, around which the whole of his very long statement turns. It is that "if Indonesia seeks . . . to use force to create a potential threat to Australia's security, then I say, with all due regard to the gravity of the situation, that the threat must be faced".

What does this mean?

If it means that Australia should be ready and willing to protect its own territories, i.e. Australian New Guinea and Papua, the answer is that I said so in plain terms in my statement of Government policy on January 12th - a statement which stands.

If his statement means that an Australian government should convey in relevant quarters its views against aggression and in favour of self-determination, the answer is that my own Government has done so on very many occasions, by personal contact and through diplomatic channels, over the last 12 months - and indeed long before that. This applies not only to the Netherlands and Indonesia but also to the United Kingdom and the U.S.A., with whom we have had very frequent exchanges. We have also maintained close contact with the Secretariat of the United Nations. It would not be proper for me to state the attitude of either the government of the United Kingdom or the administration of the U.S.A. But they are most familiar with our desire that every possible pressure should be exercised to deter the use of force.

If Mr. Calwell's statement means that, without any regard to what might be the attitude or action of these great powers, Australia should, in the event of armed Indonesian aggression against Dutch New Guinea, declare war against Indonesia, it is clearly crazy and irresponsible.

For it is the inescapable fact that, though we have throughout recognised Dutch sovereignty in West New Guinea, every nation in Asia supports the Indonesian claim.

Mr. Calwell's vaguely bellicose attitudes do nothing but harm. No nation has more to gain by peace, and the peaceful and just settlement of disputes in and around South East Asia, than Australia. No nation has given clearer evidence of its attachment to the principle that under-developed peoples should have, after adequate and helpful preparation, the choice of their own future. No country has done more in an endeavour to secure a persuasion of Indonesia against the use of force.

Whatever the result may be - and we do not despair of a peaceful and just solution - Mr. Calwell appears determined to create an atmosphere which would make it difficult in future to live in a state of harmony with our neighbours.

To call our policy and actions "appeasement" is to trifle with the facts and to gamble with the future of our country.

CANBERRA,
11th February, 1962.