

WEST NEW GUINEA

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
29TH MARCH, 1962

Mr. Speaker, I think I ought to begin by congratulating my honourable friend the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) on his speech. After all, he has had great difficulties on this matter and we have witnessed them from afar - how was he going to reconcile the very war-like utterances, so dramatically described in the "Sydney Morning Herald" with the well-known views of some of those who sit, metaphorically, behind him? And so we have been waiting anxiously to see the grand reconciliation. I do want to congratulate him on the way in which he has escaped from his known difficulties, by diving into a nimbus of words, because that is what he has done tonight.

But in my limited time I cannot deal with all the points I would like to deal with. I hope I will be excused by the House for a little recollection of my earlier, and what some of you may think my more respectable, days at the Bar. We had a broad rule, as cross-examiners, that if you could bowl a witness out in a really good cold-blooded lie you ought not to worry about him much longer thereafter. Bearing that little principle in mind I just take one statement among the many made by the honourable gentleman in the course of his speech. "Have we ever insisted on the principle of self-determination" he said. "We", (the Government) "Oh, no," he says "the Prime Minister has himself admitted that the Government has not", and he then proceeds to quote from a speech of mine made in this House on 27th April, 1961, after the visit of General Nasution, and he quotes two passages, torn out of their context; one of them referring to sovereignty and the other of them referring to domestic jurisdiction. And with a triumph of eloquence, or what passes for eloquence, he says "Here you are. This is an admission by the Prime Minister that the principle of self-determination, to which the Labour Party is now so devoted, has been abandoned by him and is not worth a mention".

I sent out for my statement of 27th April. I invite all members to read it, if they want to judge the truthfulness of the Leader of the Opposition. Read it - it is in "Hansard" at page 1247 and the following pages - because in the course of this statement - I think it might be desirable to remind honourable members of it; I will not quote all the passages, because there were many passages on this matter - I went on to explain - this is to General Nasution - what we were doing in our section of New Guinea in pursuit of our long-held goal of improvement of living standards, education and health to a point where the population would freely determine its own future. Then later on I referred to the fact that the Government of Australia, under my own Prime Ministership, and the government of the Netherlands had made an agreement in which they jointly declared that they are therefore pursuing and will continue to pursue policies directed towards the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the peoples in their territories in a manner which recognizes their affinity. I said further -

"In so doing the two Governments are determined to promote an uninterrupted development of this process until such time as the inhabitants of the territories concerned will be in a position to determine their own future".

Then again - I will not read it all because I have not time; I think I have only twenty minutes - I went on to add -

"In our own New Guinea Territories our policy is, by steady degrees and up to the limits of our financial and administrative capacity, to promote the advancement of the people so that ultimately they will choose for themselves their own constitution and their future relationship with us. We will respect their choice whatever it may be. This, for us, is not a new policy. We have pursued it for years. It arises from our sense of responsibility, a responsibility which cannot be suddenly or prematurely abandoned if our trusteeship is to be honourably performed!"

Sir, those are three out of half a dozen references, in my statement of that date, to this problem in this House. And yet the bedevilled Leader of the Opposition, bemused by brawls in his own party, has the nerve to stand up here and say that this principle is something for which we do not speak, something for which we do not stand, and which apparently I am supposed to have abandoned specifically in the three statements from which I have read excerpts to the House. Sir, I recall the old principle of cross-examination to which I referred and if he were the witness I would say, "I leave it there".

Now, Sir, let me go on a little. I will not leave it there, for this purpose: The honourable gentleman, so pressed by his own domestic party anxieties, has thought fit, as usual, to deliver a torrent of personal abuse at me. I want to make it clear that he almost invariably apologises in private. But he has done it. I made an awful fool of myself at Suez. Really, it is about time that people understood that it is not an insult to a Prime Minister of Australia for him to be invited by eighteen nations in the world to present their views to the President of Egypt. It is not an insult to the Prime Minister of Australia. It is not a job that anybody would covet. If anything would make one sick, it is this crawling, apologetic attitude that you should never take on any responsibility in the world, even on behalf of your most powerful friends, unless you have it underwritten for success in advance. I am happy to say that I am not made that way and neither are my colleagues.

This is the irony of it all: The honourable gentleman loves to quote what somebody said about my appearance at the United Nations in November, 1960. I want to tell honourable members that at that appearance I made a speech which was as strong as a speech could be about the principle of self-determination and about what we were doing in Papua and New Guinea. In that speech I made an attack on the villainous new colonialism of the Soviet Union. The Leader of the Opposition does not worry about that speech. It was not in his official newspaper; it was suppressed. But that was the speech I made. Yet he comes back to it and says, "The Prime Minister was never fit to be Minister for External Affairs. Instead of cultivating the friendship of great countries like the United States of America and the United Kingdom he ought to be cultivating the friendship of the governments and peoples of Asia". That was the theory that was put into his mouth at that time. I do not want to repeat what I said on an earlier occasion, but I remind honourable members that only a month or two ago the honourable gentleman, goaded on by his friends in Sydney, made a dramatic statement the only significance of which was to say that, instead of cultivating the friendship of the Asian people all of whom support the Indonesian claim, I should have been prepared to declare war on them, not over the Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea, for which all of us will fight, but over West New Guinea.

What a paradox it is to have all this vulgar abuse about the Prime Minister, at the time being also Minister for External Affairs, not making friends with Asia. I venture to say that no man has done more to embitter our relationship with the Asian countries in the last six months than the over-excited Leader of the Opposition.

There is really not much occasion to elaborate this matter. But so I may make it quite clear that the second point which I have been making is firmly based, I remind honourable members once more that I and later my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Garfield Barwick), made statements in which we indicated, not for the first time, our views on this matter. We stated where we stood on such matters as peace being the great principle adopted by the United Nations, no threats, no armed force, and the assurances that had been given to us. We stated, secondly, our belief that this matter ought to be discussed peacefully and negotiated between the Netherlands and Indonesia. If the Opposition disapproves of that, it is new to me. I can remember the time when Mr. Chifley, a former Prime Minister whose name honourable members opposite invoke, and another former leader in the person of Dr. Evatt boasted clearly, and I thought properly, that this was a matter between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Apparently all that is gone. Those gentlemen must have turned out to be wrong.

We on this side of the House have stated our views. We have stated that we desire a peaceful settlement, that we are not a party principal and that we will respect an agreement made freely and not under threat of war. But above all things, we stand for the principle of self-determination of the future of the Papuan people whether they are in West New Guinea or East New Guinea. These views have been stated by us here, in the Press and in the United Nations. They have been debated all around the world. Our views are quite well known. Does the Leader of the Opposition quarrel with them?

Mr. Leslie - I do not know.

Mr. Menzies - Thank you. I do not know clearly. If he does not quarrel with them, what is he quarrelling about? If these views constitute the policy of the Labour Party, what is the uproar about? If they are not part of the policy of the Labour Party, let honourable members opposite rise and plainly and unambiguously say so. Let them snap out of this compromising coma into which they have fallen, rise one by one - even my friend the Leader of the Opposition - and say where they stand on this matter and what they would do that we have not done.

The only answer that comes up as repetitively as the beat of a metronome in the speech of the Leader of the Opposition is "The United Nations, the United Nations, the United Nations". Does he know that this matter has been before the United Nations? Does not he know that if this matter were taken to the Security Council a dozen times the Soviet Union would veto whatever view was taken. Does not he know that this matter has been the subject of resolution after resolution in the General Assembly? This idea of transferring your burden to the United Nations is no policy at all. It becomes worse than no policy at all if, as the honourable gentleman did, one sets about jeering at what he calls the power blocs and log-rolling campaigns by interested parties. Of course honourable members will understand that that is a reference to our old-fashioned belief that when it comes to peace or war in this part of the world where Great Britain and the United States stand is of vital moment to this country. According to honourable members opposite this is old-fashioned stuff. In their view we should not be interested in what he describes as power blocs. Thank God we have a power bloc in the world. It will be a poor day for Australia if, in the name of some theoretical idea, about the United Nations, we abandon our lines of communication with, to repeat my own phrase, our great and powerful friends. No country in the world more than ours needs great and powerful friends. I am all for them. I believe that the people of Australia are for them, and I believe that any policy pursued by us which would put at risk our friendship with those friends would be rejected by every sensible person in the country.