

TRANSCRIPT OF

PRESS AND T.V. INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THE
RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES AT LONDON AIRPORT ON MAY 30, 1962

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, could you first of all give us your reactions to the agreement that was reached in Brussels yesterday on Commonwealth manufactured goods?

PRIME MINISTER: That's rather a difficult question to answer because I've read about it in the press flying over from Geneva, but I've not heard any official account of it yet, and therefore I speak with some caution. But I imagine that an agreement of this kind can hardly be treated as final; I don't know, because we're to have a Prime Minister's conference in September and it's hard to believe that we will have a series of agreements before then which will render the conference unnecessary. So I take it that this has some tentative quality. In so far as it appears to recognise a cut-off point, or what's been called a precipice, then of course that's not quite our cup of tea. We want to have arrangements made that are fairly permanent, of steady quality. They may not be identical with the old preferences that have existed which have gone on and on and might have been expected to go on for a long time, but in substance we're looking for arrangements that have some permanent and protective quality, giving out an opportunity of preserving our trade patterns and of growing as an economy. This is tremendously important to us, and I think it's very important for Great Britain, perhaps more important than a lot of people here think. Because we're an enormous customer of Great Britain, and therefore we provide many thousands of people in this country with jobs. It's very important to you, it's very important to us, very important for the Commonwealth, and so all I can say is that if this does represent a final arrangement of some kind, then I hope it doesn't represent what I might call a general pattern for these agreements, because if it did it would run counter to the ideas that have been put up.

Which rather brings me to that second question you have in your mind. My colleague, Mr. McEwen, has been here with my full approval and support. He has put the case in detail, here and in Europe, with the full approval of the Government and myself, and I think, with great ability. I'm here merely to back up what he's doing, not to water it down, not to qualify it, to back it up, and perhaps discuss it in those more general terms that Prime Ministers are supposed to engage in when they meet each other, but no subtractions from what Mr. McEwen has been putting.

Q. Would you say that the possibility of this loosening of Commonwealth ties is a much more emotional matter in Australia than it is here in Britain?

P.M. Well, I don't know what the opinion is here on this matter. We, of course, are traditionally very strongly Commonwealth-minded, but I've been an old Commonwealth hand, as you might say, for so long now that I never undertake to say what any other country thinks about it. So I don't know.

QUESTION NOT CLEAR :

P.M. Don't forget this, that we in Australia could have simply said "Look, there's nothing doing - we have preferential arrangements with you, they've been going on for years. They are satisfactory to us, they are satisfactory to you, you must choose between continuing that way and going into the European Economic Community." That would have been legitimate wouldn't it? But we haven't done it - we have, in fact, outstandingly said - "Well put our officials down with yours", we've gone to all the people in the European countries concerned. Doctor Westerman made a long and careful analysed statement on a series of commodities. We've done all these things because we've said, in effect - "Well, we won't stand on the letter of the law. If you can negotiate a series of conditions for us which enable us in substance to preserve our pattern of trade and to grow economically - then whether you call it A or B, we won't argue about that; we're looking for the substance." And so, outstandingly, the Australian negotiators have been constructive - very persistent I've no doubt, and they need to be - persistent, constructive, not standing on a letter but looking to the substance. And that, I think, is a pretty good approach.

QUESTION NOT CLEAR:

P.M. I am not passing a judgment. I am not saying which, in the end result, is to be preferred, but I cannot believe myself that if Great Britain goes into Europe and becomes a member of the political organisation, I can't believe that her relations with the Commonwealth countries will be as flexible or, let's say, as independent as they have been in the past. That's not to say that I am saying you must not do it. Not that that would cut much ice anyhow, but I am not saying that. But I am saying that I don't think that the Commonwealth will be the same as it was before. As the Commonwealth has been changing very very rapidly for a long time now, I suppose one further change might be acceptable to a lot of people. All I say is, there will be a change. Great Britain as part of Europe, as an integrated partner in European high policy, could hardly be as independent a member of the Commonwealth as she has been in the past, that's all. I merely state it as a fact. I've got past arguing about it.

Q. You regard it obviously as a change for the worse?

P.M. From the Commonwealth point of view. As long as you understand that it may be a change for the better from the point of view of world security, of a powerful Europe, a powerful third great Power in the world - this may be very good. My observation is not to say that that's a bad thing, but that the Commonwealth will no longer be the same thing as it was before. Well, I suppose that's clear enough.

Q. Do you in fact, Mr. Prime Minister, envisage Britain's role in Europe, if it goes in, exclusively in terms of its becoming a member of a world power or do you think that Britain has a choice of staying out and of building links with countries like yourself? Do you think we have a real choice?

P.M. Well, look, I wouldn't like to answer that question because while the economic implications of the Treaty of Rome are, I think, broadly clear enough, the political implications are as yet not clearly to be seen. Because they will, I think, develop. It may be that the historic differences between the Six European countries will continue to assert themselves politically. That's very much on the cards, and if so, the political integration will be much slower than the

P.M.
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economic integration. We can't tell at this stage what form any political integration will take, whether it would be some form of confederacy or whether it would be some form of federation, there being a world of difference between the two things. Whether it would lead to a common foreign policy, common high policies on various matters, is a matter of evolution and, therefore, I am not proposing to be a prophet about it. But however far the development goes, or however fast or slowly it goes, my only point is I don't see the Commonwealth relationship as remaining unaffected - the Commonwealth relationship, mark you, being a pretty hard thing to define anyhow.

Q. That being the case, Sir, is it possible to reach a verdict in September when presumably only one half of the deal is known - the economic side. The political implications aren't then fully apparent. Is it possible to reach a verdict?

P.M.

Lock, don't ask me to say what will be possible in September. All I hoped about September was that by this time the United Kingdom Government, as a result of its negotiated work and as a result of all our consultations and so on, would be able to come to the Prime Ministers and say - "Well, it looks to us as if this kind of an arrangement might be got. Now, as this affects all of you, will you speak up and tell us what you think about it. We want to get your judgment before we sign on the dotted line." Well, suppose we had a discussion in September and, economically, everybody is satisfied, Canada is satisfied with losing preferences on manufactured goods and we are satisfied about something else. You know, we are all happy in September about the economic problems. Then I would expect us to say so. And have these arrangements made. But one thing I believe will have to occur in September also and that is some consideration as to the Commonwealth and what has become of it and what is becoming of it. Because, you know, it is not all related to the European Common Market. There are all sorts of problems coming along. There are many new countries about to come into the Commonwealth field. When I first attended the Prime Ministers' meetings, I wasn't a Prime Minister. That sounds a bit Irish, but I wasn't. I was deputising for one and that was 27 years ago. And there were five people there and now there are nine or ten and within a year, probably fourteen or fifteen. A good deal of work has been done on this and if you have a look at the number of former colonies moving into independence, this Commonwealth has become a pretty numerous body. And, of course, when that happens, obviously we will have to do a lot of thinking about the procedures to make it effective. Unless we are just going to have a meeting once a year. That is a difficult problem not soluble at this moment. But I have no doubt that in September it will come into the picture when we are discussing the Common Market. The Common Market will be the occasion, I think, for some of these discussions.

Q. Sir, is it your impression that the British Government is jumping the gun on September?

P.M.

No, no.

Q. Is that not implied in this agreement reached last night?

P.M. Now you are asking me to make a comment on an agreement that I haven't seen but have read about in a newspaper or two; on which I have no reactions from my technical people or those who have been conducting negotiations. Now if I were a newcomer to this business I would make a lot of inferences in the light of it. I am not. I have no reason to suppose whatever that the Government of the United Kingdom won't pay the greatest attention to what we have to say to them. If I thought anything else I wouldn't be here.

Q. Does the importance of this meeting in September make you feel that voting procedures at the Prime Ministers' conferences might not, after all, be rather useful?

P.M. What sort of procedures?

Q. Voting procedures, etc.

P.M. Oh, don't try to sell that to me. Look, there's one thing that is an article of faith with me. It is that the Commonwealth is not a committee of the United Nations. And that it doesn't have votes. When it becomes a committee of the United Nations and has votes I hope and believe that I will no longer be Prime Minister and no longer have to submit to such atrocities. Not a bad word, atrocities, for that either. Move a resolution, go round the corner, see if somebody will support an amendment; argue about sub-clause (3); get a motion carried. What does the minority do in the Commonwealth? Suppose Australia is outvoted in the Commonwealth vote? What do we do? Go and bow three times, and say, "Certainly, we will alter our policy to please you." Not on your life. That's not the way the Commonwealth has worked.

Q. But is unanimity possible on such an issue as this?

P.M. But we've never had unanimity. That's why we've never taken votes, perhaps. It's rather a perverse way of putting it, but the only thing that's unanimous out of a Prime Ministers' conference is the communique not a word in which can appear unless everybody agrees. And that's why these communiqués are such frightful collections of platitudes - they're the one thing or two things or three things that everybody can agree about.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, the problem for Australia is, of course, rather agricultural than manufactured goods and we have been hearing it suggested that Australia might find alternative markets for her agricultural goods in South East Asia. Would you envisage this as being so?

P.M. I think we have been doing our best to develop them for a long time. But you mustn't assume that you can get an alternative market for the whole sweep of our agricultural products, because some of them have been developed with particular reference to the markets here in Great Britain. Dried fruits, canned fruits are perfect examples. But I would just like to make one slight correction. You say our great interest is not in manufactured goods. If you mean by that that we

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don't have the same volume of exports of manufactures, however that may be defined, as, say, Canada, the fact is that we are a very great manufacturing country and people seem to assume that the whole problem presented by the Common Market is the export problem. That's not the only problem. If in fact the result of the Common Market and Great Britain going into it is that there is a tremendous exporting capacity, additional exporting capacity in manufactures developed in the European community, with reduced costs and all that kind of thing, the Australian manufacturer is going to have an interest in this, because he will be submitted to the most enormous additional competition and may have to come more and more frequently to the government and the authorities to ask for some protection. I mention that to show that, after all, trade is two ways. We know that. We sometimes forget it. This Common Market argument does operate both ways. As exporters, of course, we are primarily in the primary industry field, the agricultural, pastoral field.

Q. May I ask you, Sir, if you resent the American pressures on the British Government on entry into the Common Market?

P.M. Well, I would prefer to discover for myself what these pressures are before commenting on them. I will be seeing the President of the United States and so on when I have finished here. Well, I think it's time I went to the hotel. I'm seeing your Prime Minister tonight. If some of you will give me a paper of what I have said I will be able to give it to him.

Q. Before you go, Sir, is your arrival here today significantly connected with the forthcoming Test Match or is that pure coincidence?

P.M. No. I don't even know where the Test Match is. And if it's any comfort to you, I won't be there. There is a type of newspaper man who lives on the assumption that in the summer I never do anything else but go to test matches. It's a newspaper legend. I go to as many as I can. I see, on the average, two and a half days in the course of the season.