

PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION CONFERENCE  
GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT.HON.  
SIR ROBERT MENZIES, AT CANBERRA, ON  
THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 1965

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PRIME MINISTER : Gentlemen, the spectacle of all these microphones and of all you people suggests to me that I am here under false pretences, because I want to make it clear at the outset that this is not one of those cases where I went abroad conducting negotiations or discussions about which something may usefully be said later on. I was on a holiday and, I assure you, not reading any cables or doing any work. For the first time since I became Prime Minister, I was hoping to escape these matters for a time. However, I interrupted that and went to London where I had two or three discussions about which I spoke in London to the Australian Press just before I left there. So really, I have no great matters to report. There are some problems inside Australia about which I have been trying to learn something in the last twenty-four hours, but I don't profess to be a master of them by a long chalk..... Mt. Isa..... and I believe there are certain questions you have in mind about Malaysia. Well, I have done my best in the last twenty-four hours to catch up, but one doesn't entirely catch up the events of a month in twenty-four hours. At least I can't. Now are there any questions you would like to put to me?

Q. There was one report from London, Sir that the British Government had put pressure upon you to send troops into Borneo. Is that correct?

A. I didn't even see the report.

Q. Well, it was published.

A. What happened on that matter was that this was being debated in Australia - I mean not debated - thrashed out in Australia in consultation with the authorities in Malaysia, and when I was in London I received word as to what the availability of the forces was and what my colleagues here thought about it. What happened then, was that I conveyed that to the Prime Minister of Great Britain. There was no pressure by him. He received the information with great pleasure.

Q. Sir Robert, what will happen now with the Mt. Isa dispute? Where do you go from here?

A. Where do I go?

Q. What happens from now?

A. Let us understand that the Mt. Isa dispute is a local dispute. I know it has immense national consequences of a disastrous kind but it is, in the strict sense, a local dispute, within the jurisdiction of the Government of Queensland and the Parliament of Queensland and, so far, matters have been dealt with by the industrial machinery set up by Queensland in Queensland. We, literally, have no jurisdiction in an industrial sense over this matter which isn't interstate. This is rather more important than appears to have been realised. A problem may be, as this one is, of very great national significance, tremendous national significance, but it doesn't follow that the Government of the nation can deal with it, itself, because we do live in a Federal community

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and this is one of the awkward things about it. I have been in touch with the acting Premier of Queensland and I have told him that if at any time I can be of any help on this matter I will be not only willing, but eager to help. But what has happened there - as I understand it - is that the processes of arbitration have been invoked, awards have been made, the dispute has been now narrowed down almost to a personal one about this man, Mackie. It seems an extraordinary state of affairs to bring to a halt the greatest copper mine in Australia, and perhaps becoming one of the greatest in the world. I would like to think that the people concerned in this matter were really thinking about its significance. I say this not because I am going to crash my way in without authority in a difficult matter of this kind, but I wonder if they have all given thought to this that, first of all, this is really an attack on arbitration. That's quite clear, and this is an old battle in Australia and it has had to be fought more than once. We, in Australia, believe in industrial arbitration and the people who are employed in Australia have a great deal to thank arbitration for. It would be a tragedy if it were destroyed or even seriously damaged in a struggle of this kind.

But even more importantly, here is a mine which contributes and would normally continue to contribute very great wealth to the country in its international trade, in its internal economy. One has only to look back over negotiations that occurred about the railway line from Mt. Isa, with the many millions that the Commonwealth itself was able to find for that enterprise, the whole thing being predicated on a steady increase in the through-put of the Mt. Isa mine. One of the greatest strokes in northern development for a long, long time, and here is a crippling blow delivered to it, and delivered innocently in a misguided way by the very people who have everything to gain by northern development and by living in a prosperous community.

So that here you have this crippling blow, because it is one, first of all, to a lot of families living in their homes in Mt. Isa - I have been there myself on one or two occasions and was tremendously impressed by the fact that here was a community; this is a crippling blow to themselves; this is, in human terms, a terrible thing. Then it is a crippling blow to a great Australian industry, and then in the broad national sense it is a crippling blow to the whole development of the north because, let it be remembered, you can't develop the north of Australia, particularly in the mineral fields in which there are such enormous possibilities, without attracting the investment of capital, enterprise, having people take risks, and if they think that their enterprise can be snuffed out at short notice by one, one curious character - not even an Australian, I believe - this is a terrible thing.

And I would like, so far as I can, to appeal to all those concerned to realise that they are not just dealing with a little local dispute about one man but what is involved in this is all the significance that I have just been trying to describe. However, at this stage, this is all I can do. Mr. Hiley has been good enough to tell me that if any development occurred on which he thinks my own influence can be of help, then he will tell me, and I have indicated that I will be willing at all times to help. I attach enormous importance to this, but I don't think

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(Contd.) powers - so far as I know; I have had no chance to have consultations with the Law Department, but so far as I know, our powers on this matter are, for all practical purposes, non-existent.

Q. Sir Robert, this is very far removed from Mt. Isa. I wonder if I could get a comment on this from you. Do you regard the situation between Communist China and Russia, as it stands now in the political situation of the world, as a safety valve for the rest of the free world?

A. I don't think anybody can answer that question because, so far as I can gather, and I am gathering up at pretty short notice, don't forget, and therefore I must be a little discreet - but so far as I can make out, the recent contacts between the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union and the Chinese authorities gave rise to some suggestion that there might be a little watering-down of the troubles that arose between the Soviet and China in the days of Khrushchev, because we all know there was more than a little difference between them. Whether this indicates that those differences are being lessened or not, I don't know, but I can't help feeling that they are pretty profound differences, differences of outlook, and that so long as this tension continues, it..... well, it all depends on the point of view - I think it is not a bad thing for the world. I have heard people say, philosophically that.....

Q. I have heard this all over the world. It is the thing that is asked everywhere. What are your views?

A. Well, that's my view. In a realistic fashion, I don't think it's too bad having two people like that disputing with each other, disagreeing with each other.

Q. Could we go back to Malaysia for a minute, Sir?

A. We haven't been there before. (Laughter)

Q. Mr. Calwell has accused your Government of allowing what he calls a haphazard drift into war with Indonesia, Sir Robert. Do you think that is a fair comment?

A. No, I don't, but still I realise that Mr. Calwell has his weekly chore to perform and I don't mind. "Allow it to drift into....." What he is getting at, I suppose, is that we are inert or something like that on the diplomatic front and that we are thinking solely in terms of military activity. This, of course, is not right. We are constantly diplomatically active in Djakarta and we have constantly endeavoured to produce some peace in this part of the world, but you can't get away from this that the cause of all this trouble is that the Indonesians are shooting. When they give up shooting people, to give effect to whatever their claims may be, then, of course, there will be plenty of room for negotiation. I have said repeatedly we have to live with Indonesia for hundreds of years and I am the last one to want to create some sort of inevitable hostility, or some long-standing hostility between Australia and Indonesia. We want nothing better than sound and good relations, but the fact is that Indonesia is the aggressor, without warrant, against a neighbour.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, is it still the view of the Government, we having decided to send troops into Borneo, an attack by Indonesia on them would be an attack within the terms of the ANZUS pact? Sir Garfield Barwick raised this issue about a year ago.

A. Now, look, I rather deplore this business about the ANZUS pact. I made a statement about the ANZUS pact in Parliament - I thought somebody might ask this. When was it? They don't even put the date on Hansard now.....21st April, 1964, page 1280. There, I said categorically what the position was, as we understood it, under the ANZUS pact and I was able later on to say that that interpretation was entirely acceptable by the United States. Now, I have nothing to add to that. We have no dispute or difference with the United States about the ANZUS pact. I attach supreme importance to it.

Q. I was going to ask you, Sir, what were the limitations in the role of these Australian troops in Borneo. Presumably they can only go into action in a defensive role on Malaysian territory.

A. Well, they will be under the command of the military people and will no doubt co-operate according to the military plans. I'm not privy to them at the moment. I can't answer that question. They will do well, wherever they are.

Q. Sir, will the growing intensity of the Vietnam struggle mean a deeper involvement for Australia?

A. This is a good question. Perhaps it is to be answered in a somewhat different way from the one you had in mind. The Vietnam struggle, an immensely difficult one, and made all the more difficult because of the serious political instability in South Vietnam, seems to me to be associated with all these other matters, it all tends to become part of a pattern. The intensification of fighting in South Vietnam is bound to increase the United States' efforts in that area because they have made it clear that they intend to remain. We are profoundly involved in this for a variety of reasons, one, of course, being that we are parties to SEATO, South Vietnam being one of the protocol States; that the viability - to use the blessed word - of some of the other South-East Asian countries will be seriously affected if South Vietnam falls to the Communists; these things are all inter-acting or will inter-act one with the other.

Perhaps I ought to say this. I had occasion to point out in London that we have not only one or two, but perhaps three or four or five particular interests and responsibilities in this part of the world, all of which affect defence. One, of course, is our own self-defence which we don't see as a coastal defence but as a defence, if possible, in depth, but it is our own defence and the defence of New Guinea and Papua, our side of New Guinea. In the second place, we have our old associations with Great Britain and New Zealand in what has been called ANZAM, which is a planning body. In the third place, we are partners in SEATO, and SEATO, of course, being devised as a screen against communist aggression, gives rise to contingent liabilities if I may put them in that way. And under SEATO, South Vietnam being a protocol State, we have come in at their request with modest forces into South Vietnam. We have the ANZUS pact with the United States and with New Zealand, and in the case of Malaysia, we have a unilateral obligation arising from the statement I made in Parliament.

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So that we have five aspects of this problem, New Zealand has four. Nobody else has five. We have a variety of interests and responsibilities, and that is why it is one of the things I took the opportunity of discussing with Mr. Wilson and some of his Ministers in London. I took the opportunity of discussing with them ways and means of reconciling the views from time to time - not that I contemplate their differing - but reconciling them, getting some order of priority as between Great Britain, the United States, New Zealand and ourselves, because there will arise times when you must balance an actuality like the fighting in and around Malaysia with a contingency such as obligations that might arise under SEATO.

Q. There have been some criticisms, Sir, of the Senate voting system following the long drawn-out poll result. Is it likely that the Government will review it?

A. I hope you won't use it against me if I say that I have never professed perfectly to understand how they count the votes in the Senate. It has always been one of those murky mysteries to me which I leave to the fellows with the computers. But, yes, I think the system of voting for the Senate needs looking at. With great respect to my colleague, Senator Hannan, whose defeat I regret, who advocates a circular ballot paper, I would never become enraptured about a circular ballot paper. It is hard enough now when you hold the thing upright and you try to put the numbers in the right squares, but if you have to whiz it round, it will be what the French call "folie circulaire".

Q. We can take it, Sir, that this matter will be examined?

A. Yes, it will.

Q. Sir Robert, on the score of the Senate, how do you feel about the future that a deadlock will arise in the Senate?

A. I have had it before, not long ago. It is not keeping me awake at nights. Let's put it that way.

Q. Sir Robert, it has been mentioned in the Press that we will pay the money owing on the arms deal being conducted in the United States, that in the first three years or so we will pay in cash. Have you any knowledge at this time of how much that cash will be?

A. Don't ask me. I know no more about it than you do. I read the communique first in a cable from Senator Paltridge and then in the newspapers, but I have had no time to ascertain these Treasury matters. There were Treasury people there.

Q. There have been some suggestions, Sir that the Commonwealth Government will make a reasonably substantial grant to the Churchill Memorial Fund. Has any decision been made on that yet?

A. No, not actually, but I think it may be anticipated that we will.

Q. Sir, is there anything you can tell us about the Commonwealth Secretariat?

A. Well, the officials had a meeting, as you know, in London and they made a report which I have only just glanced at because I got it when I was on my way to the funeral. I had a word with Mr. Wilson about it. I think that we both agreed it was undesirable to build up a sort of formidable executive body as if we were copying the Secretary-General's business in the United Nations, and that this must be avoided. But on the whole, he is disposed to think that the report has the root of the matter in it. I offer no opinion on that except that I would like to see a Secretariat of the right kind. I don't want to see it become an executive body, nor do I want to see it become a body in which there are majority votes and minority movements and resolutions. That would give me the horrors. However, I have told him that on my return to Australia, we would have a look at this report and offer him our own views in good time, that is to say, before the next Prime Minister's Conference.

Q. Sir, when is it likely that you will be able to make a statement on the new Governor-General?

A. I don't know. You see, I had no chance to have any discussion with The Queen. I made my bow to her on Saturday with a lot of other people and Her Majesty was off to Ethiopia on Monday. I haven't yet arrived in my own mind at any firm recommendation, so I can't say.

Q. Might the matter stand over, Sir, until you are in London?

A. I don't know. I won't restrict myself on that matter. I might take this matter up by correspondence with Her Majesty or wait until I see her.

Q. Is it your inclination to recommend another Englishman or perhaps someone from.....

A. You will know exactly who the appointee is when The Queen announces it.

Q. Sir Robert, can you tell us your reaction about the High Court decision on the airlines case?

A. My only reaction is that I even managed last night to read the judgments, a considerable achievement, I think, and I found them very interesting, and that is all I have to say because my Law people are going to tell me on Tuesday. I'm just an ex-lawyer now, but I still think I know a bit about it.

Q. There are one or two vacancies in Cabinet.....

A. We will announce those as soon as we can.

Q. Any date yet for a conference on the airlines with Mr. Renshaw, Sir?

A. Well, I don't know. I know that there was a communication between the Acting Prime Minister and Mr. Renshaw in which they appeared to agree that there would be a consultation. On what level, I don't know yet. Probably between Air Ministers and Transport Ministers - Civil Aviation, I mean.

Q. Recent events in Asia have raised the prospect of a proliferation of nuclear weapons - Chinese, the Indonesians, India having plutonium capabilities.....Can you tell us your thoughts on this prospect in this part of the world?

A. Well, I am one of the Prime Ministers who passed a resolution about this some years ago, urging that there be no such proliferation, that atomic weapons ought to be kept in as few hands as possible - if possible, in the hands of the large powers who would have a sense of responsibility and that to scatter them would be very serious, and I still adhere to that view.

Q. In regard to Vietnam, Sir, to return to it, is it your understanding that the recent United States attack in North Vietnam was a purely retaliatory one and does not represent any basic change in American policy towards.....

Q. My impression is that it was purely retaliatory, but then don't ask to speak to me as if I were an authority on the matter because I'm not. I'm really forming an opinion on something about which you probably know as much as I do.

Q. Mr. Hasluck, commenting on that, Sir, said that the aggressor must stop or be stopped. Would you take that as a general statement of principle applying to all aggressors?

A. Well, now, really. And then you will think of some particular case.....

Q. Yes indeed, Sir.

A. You must save that one up. Mr. Hasluck was right all the same in what he said about this case, but that little curly one that you are thinking about you must tell me about privately.

Q. Have you got any ideas, Sir, when we are going to see the Vernon Report?

A. Oh, no. That is one of the many things I haven't asked about in the last twenty-four hours.

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