

PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION CONFERENCE
 GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, SIR ROBERT MENZIES
 AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, ON THURSDAY,
 7TH OCTOBER, 1965 AT 3.30 P.M. ON THE OCCASION
 OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS APPOINTMENT AS
 LORD WARDEN OF THE CINQUE PORTS

PRIME MINISTER : Sorry I didn't hear the 19 guns.....
 Well, no doubt you will have some questions but I think I ought to begin by mentioning two points that I gather are being dealt with in other places. Somebody appears to have imagined that because I have been given this purely honorary title and office that I am going off to live in Great Britain. You can forget about it. I live in Australia and I hope I'll die here. So all that kind of rumour has no foundation at all. In the second place, I hope nobody will think I am going to career around Australian waters as an admiral because I am not. This, as you probably know, having looked at it now, is a very ancient style and title. Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports used to have considerable actual jurisdiction both legal and otherwise. He has none now. His principal duty is, if he can, to go down about once a year for a week or so. His first duty is to attend his installation and after that the people in the ports like to think that he will be down there once a year. Well, I normally fetch up in Great Britain once a year so that is no great inconvenience. He has the right, I believe, to reside at Walmer Castle but as it is uninhabitable, it is a theoretical right rather than anything else. Though, Mr. Wilson when he raised this matter with me in London did indicate that they were investigating the possibility of making some part of it habitable, putting in a flat or something of that kind so that it might be used officially. Well, that's on the knees of the gods. It's fascinating to know that the Lord Warden has the right to flotsam, jetsam and lagan.

QUESTIONER : What is "lagan", Sir?

P.M. : Lagan is wreckage which lies on the sea floor.

Q. : Oh, I thought it might be mermaids. (Laughter)

P.M. : No, unhappily mermaids are not included in "Fishes Royal" I am entitled to Fishes Royal. Queer entitlement - whales, porpoises and so on. All it means is if a whale gets itself washed up on the beach at Dover, the Lord Warden has the supreme privilege of paying for its removal.

Q. : When is the installation, Sir?

P.M. : Oh, that isn't fixed. That will be the next time I am in England, whenever that happens to be.

Q. : The style of the uniform, if any?

P.M. : They tell me there is a uniform. I don't know..... My predecessor, Winston Churchill, he was interested in the uniform but I don't think he went down for his weekly visit very much. He was more conspicuous by his absence. But, yes, in terms of uniform, the Warden is a species of admiral, which I imagine is the most nautical thing about him. But it is really a very great personal honour. I feel it in that sense. Lord Willington, Lord Reading and Winston Churchill being the three predecessors.

Q. : Would it suggest that it is a prelude to a peerage?

PM. : Not the slightest chance.

- Q. : Have you made any decision on when you'll retire?
- P.M.: Oh, come off it. Do you expect me to make a decision this week?
- Q.: I've been expecting one for three months, Sir.
- P.M.: Well I'm not even thinking about that. I'll deal with that at what I think is the right time. Yes or No.
- Q.: You did suggest, Sir, when you returned from abroad earlier in the year that you were in fact thinking of it. Are you still thinking of it?
- PM.: Oh, yes, of course, and I will continue to think of it. Wouldn't you at my age think of it?
- Q.: When do you think you will be in England again, Sir?
- P.M. : Well, I don't know. I don't know.
- Q. : In reference to your age, Sir, do you feel the duties of the job are growing such that they are testing you physically?
- P.M.: You mean my present job.....
- Q. : As Prime Minister.
- P.M. : Well, it's not easy. But, look, this problem - let's be quite plain about it. This is a matter that I will have to decide one way or the other at the right time, and that time hasn't arisen and as far as I can see, it won't arise for some time to come.
- Q. : Sir, getting back to the position of Lord Warden, are there any privileges that go with this position?
- P.M. : Yes, I have the right to flotsam, jetsam and lagan and I daresay that what I'll have to do is to live....."hoping" would be the wrong word because it would be inhuman..... for some decent luxury liner to be cast ashore out of which I might get a few perquisites. There are no privileges. You have the privilege of spending a good deal of money.
- Q. : Do you fly a special flag, Sir, over the castle?
- P.M. : Yes, there is a flag, I believe.
- Q. : Will you use it in Australia?
- P.M. : Oh, I wouldn't think so. None of this has any operation in Australia.
- Q. : Doesn't affect precedence in Australia?
- P.M. : Oh dear no. Oh no.
- Q. : Do you know what the uniform is like, Sir?
- P.M. : I am told that it is based on the uniform of an admiral.
- Q. : A modern or an ancient one?
- P.M. : Oh, I haven't a clue. I was under the great impression at the Coronation time that Winston had on this uniform under the gown of the Garter. That's mere speculation. He enjoyed dressing up. I hate it.

Q.: Are you able to tell us, Sir, anything of the method of selecting the Lord Warden?

P.M.: Well, I gather that what happens is this. It's a Royal appointment but the Government of the day tenders advice on the matter. Mr. Wilson spoke to me about this towards the end of the last Prime Ministers' Conference and wanted to know whether I would permit him to put my name forward. Well, I said it needed a bit of thought. I didn't quite know what it involved, what travel it might commit me to in the future and what expenditure - that's not unimportant. And so we had correspondence afterwards and finally I said "yes". I had always said this was a very great honour. I wrote to him finally and said, yes, I would agree to his putting my name forward and he did then. I had reason to believe that he had discussed it with The Queen before and so the announcement was made.

Q.: You don't suggest, Sir, that Mr. Wilson was trying to help the Australian Labour Party?

P.M.: I would hate to put it on so low a level as that. Mr. Wilson is a very practical man. I don't think he would commit himself to an impracticable course.

Q.: Sir Robert, have you any idea why a Labour Prime Minister should suggest you for the office?

P.M.: What's this?

Q.: Have you any idea why a Labour Prime Minister should suggest you for this office?

P.M.: No. All I can assume in my own favour is that he thought I was an appropriate person. It wasn't proposed to me as Prime Minister because, after all, one is not a Prime Minister forever, and this appointment runs for life.

Q.: Do you see any political significance at all in the fact that he nominated you for it, Sir?

P.M.: I don't. No.

Q.: Does this carry any special precedence, Sir at Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences?

P.M.: Oh, no. I gather from some of the papers they sent me that I have special precedence in the Cinque Ports area. If The Queen is there, I outrank other people. I think that must be great fun, but the question won't arise.

Q.: Is this installation likely to be this year, Sir?

P.M.: You mean in 1965?

Q.: Yes.

P.M.: Oh, no. It will be next year some time.

Q.: Sir, do you think Mr. Wilson may have considered you a suitable person for this honour because of a possible imminent retirement?

P.M.: I credit Mr. Wilson with a great deal of intelligence and therefore he would never entertain so absurd an idea. You boys will chivvy me out of office if you have your way, won't you, but I will make up my own mind in my own time, thank you.

Q. : Sir Robert, have you any ideas of what city you will retire to when you do finally make the decision?

P.M.: I anticipate Melbourne, yes. That's my own, so to speak, home town and there I'll go, I hope.

Q.: There's a rumour that you have in fact made approaches about buying a house in Melbourne.

P.M. : Yes, that's quite true, I can confirm that. I have been doing it for the last fifteen years. Once a year my wife and I say, "Well, it would be rather nice to have a home of our own in our home town" and we think of it. You are quite right, so I can't deny that rumour.

Q. : Would you have actually been looking at any properties in Melbourne in recent months?

P.M.: Every year I have looked at one or two - so far without result, but if you should hear of a good one, I'll be grateful.

Q. : It might be easier to build a new Prime Minister's Lodge here, Sir, as you have been here that long.

P.M. : Oh, I hope not. I hope not. I wouldn't want to be here when the new Prime Minister's lodge was finished. That's a long time off. That doesn't mean next week.

Q. : Don't you think in view of the fact that you have been Prime Minister for so long, occupied the Lodge for so long you would be the appropriate one to make the decision to build a new Lodge, thereby saving your successor embarrassment?

P.M. : There are proposals about a new Lodge which I know the National Capital Commission has had in mind because in some ways this is not the perfect answer, the present house. The contribution that I will make to that will be to give them the benefit of my advice, and so will my wife, as to what ought to be done in a new Prime Minister's house. In other words what deficiencies there are in this one, how they might be improved or removed in another. But that's a mere matter of consultation. I will always be willing to do that, but I don't anticipate living in any other Prime Minister's Lodge myself than the one I now precariously occupy.

Q. : Sir Robert, do you intend to go to England before the normal time as Australian Prime Minister in the winter?

P.M. : I hope not. Indeed I hope not.

Q. : There will be no special trip for this?

P.M.: Oh no. No. I have had a few winter trips there and I am not enamoured of them.

Q. : This suggested retirement before say, May next year, it's just not on?

PM. : I'm saying nothing about that. I have already said that I will decide that matter in my own time. Why are you in such a hurry to get rid of me?

Q. : We are seeking amplification of statements issued in your name.

P.M.: What statement is this?

Q.: The statement to the effect that normal duties will take you to the U.K.

P.M. : Well what's mysterious about that?

Q. : Well would "normal duties" be as Australia's Prime Minister, Sir?

P.M.: I didn't say so. I might with reasonable expectation of life hope to be still alive when I am no longer Prime Minister, and if still alive, then I may have some duties, or I may impose them myself, which will take me to England. All I am saying is that I would anticipate being able to go there once a year. This is not a job ex officio, you know. This is not an appointment as Prime Minister. This is an appointment under my own name.

Q. : Sir Robert, do you hope to be the Prime Minister when you accept the new honour formally?

P.M. : In other words, you want me to make a statement about a matter that I said I am not making a statement about. You are trying in vain. You must restrain your eagerness in spite of your newspaper.

Q. : On a different subject, Sir, can you give us your reactions or whatever analysis you have made of what could be the effect of recent happenings in Indonesia on Australia?

P.M. : Oh, no, look..... the conference was not called for that purpose. I am discussing all that with Mr. Hasluck because I think that we ought to, if we can, if the position has cleared enough, to have a statement made on that on Tuesday in the House, but at present, of course, it is all very obscure. By that time, perhaps, it will be sufficiently clarified to say something useful.

Q. : Sir, you told us two conferences ago you didn't know whether you were going to lead the Government at the next election. Do you now know whether you will or not?

P.M. : Weren't you here when I answered these questions earlier?

Q. : I was here two conferences ago.

P.M. : Yes, I thought you mightn't have been here today. Don't take me for a fool. You can't trick me into making some statement about a matter on which I have already stated quite clearly that I will deal with that in my own time, not in yours. Come on, any more intelligent questions?

Q.: We'll try, Sir, again. Can you tell us if this new appointment could allow you to go to Prime Ministers' Conferences in any other capacity than Prime Minister? Will it have any Commonwealth significance?

- P.M. : This appointment has no bearing upon what happens at a Prime Ministers' Conference. This is a purely local matter of great historic interest and continuity. It happens now for the first time to a man outside Great Britain. It has no bearing whatever on anything that happens at Prime Ministers' Conferences or otherwise.
- Q. : Sir Robert, if you don't wish to discuss Indonesia at this press conference, will you be holding one soon when we can discuss it?
- P.M.: I don't know. I am going to clarify my own mind with my colleague on what goes on in Indonesia first, with a view if we can get some clarification, adequate clarification, to saying something to Parliament about it.
- Q.: Sir Robert, would you let us go from the Five Ports to the Australian waterfront?
- P.M. : No. No, I won't.
- Q. : Sir, there was another announcement in London today from Rhodesia House that Mr. Ian Smith has sent a message to you.....
- P.M.: Gentlemen, I am afraid there has been a misapprehension. I thought this conference was about this little honorific affair of mine, not a general conference.
- Q. We thought it might be a lead-in, Sir.
- P.M. : Did you? No, I'm saying nothing about Rhodesia. I'm just hoping. I'm saying nothing.
- Q. : Sir, the ceremony of installation. Does it involve the British Prime Minister?
- P.M.: I couldn't tell you. I don't know.
- Q. : Does this take place at one of the Five Ports?
- P.M. : I think it usually occurs at Dover. They have a big function of some kind and when that happens you are initiated and when it's over you take off the uniform and hang it up. I think I must buy one and put it in the Parliament House.
- Mr. Hurst, President of the Press Gallery : Sir Robert, just before you go, Sir, on behalf of the Press Gallery, in spite of the questions, we would like to congratulate you on this honour.
- P.M. : Thank you very much. Thank you.
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