

PRIME MINISTER'S
REMARKS TO PRESS ON DEPARTURE FOR LONDON

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PRIME MINISTER : Well, gentlemen, I don't think I have any statements to make to you. As you know, I am going over to a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. The last one was held, I think, two years ago. No doubt, you have got some questions you would like to ask me, and if I can, I will try and answer them. So fire ahead,

Q. Will you be putting forward any proposals for a Singapore-based mobile defence force in either formal or informal discussions with the other Commonwealth leaders?

PM: This is not on the agenda at all.

Q. What are your views on such a proposal?

PM: Well they are not views that would be appropriate to a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, and they are not views on which, at this stage, I am going to express an opinion. Let us get on to the Conference!

Q : I would like to ask you a question concerning something which will take place after you have left -- the publication of this book - "The Power Struggle" by Alan Reid. It concerns the voting at the party meeting which elected you as Party Leader and therefore Prime Minister. The figures published at the time and since widely circulated indicated that you had a very impressive margin over Mr Hasluck of 51-30 votes. Alan Reid suggests that the margin was in fact much closer -- 43 to you and 38 to Mr Hasluck. Which set of figures is nearer the truth?

PM: I haven't the slightest idea. I wasn't a scrutineer. I would imagine that only the scrutineers would know.

Q: Mr Reid's sources are usually fairly reliable, and assuming that his figures are anywhere near the truth, Mr Alan Barnes, commenting on the book suggested that the nearness of the figures has in fact influenced the style of your Prime Ministership in the past twelve months, that you have been seeking popular support to make up for, possibly, divided party support. What is your comment?

PM: I wouldn't be prepared to assume that Mr Reid's or anybody else's assessments of things that are only known to the scrutineers were correct. I don't know.

Q: Sir, can you tell us what is the reaction of the Malaysian Government to the decision to move Anzac troops to Singapore?

PM: Well, you saw the statement made by the Tunku who quite happily accepted the proposals that we put to him,

Q: Was there any time, Sir, when they opposed the idea?

PM: I don't know of any time when they opposed the idea. I think they might have liked to have been able to keep Terendak running as it could be run as a viable base, but I wouldn't say they opposed the idea. You have seen the statement made by the Tunku on this matter.

PM: And after the move to Singapore, Sir, will the Malaysians be able to call on these troops at any time they may need them.

Q: These troops are stationed in the area and as you know, Singapore and Malaya are acting together in defence matters and our forces are there to assist both these countries in their joint defence efforts.

Q: Mr Gorton, what matters do you hope to see introduced into the Conference?

PM: What matters do I hope to see introduced into the conference. . . . well, I find it a little difficult question to answer. I would answer it in this way: I would hope no one matter dominates the conference and that it is able to deal with the quite large number of subjects that are put down on the agenda, and doesn't spend all its time on just one subject. I think that is about all I could say on that matter.

Q: Sir, how big an issue do you expect Rhodesia to be?

PM: This will depend entirely on what the people at the conference wish to make of it. I know that the British Government doesn't wish it to be a subject which dominates the whole of the meeting, and we wouldn't wish it to be either. There are a number of other subjects which could be of considerable value to discuss.

Q: Mr Holt came back from the last Prime Ministers' Conference somewhat dubious about the value of the conferences continuing in the same way as on that occasion. In what frame of mind are you going to this conference - hopeful or are you going over in a somewhat.

PM: I am going over in the frame of mind of someone who has never been to one before and who will be most interested to see how it operates and what subjects are discussed and what consensuses -- or consensi ! -- of opinion are arrived at on those subjects.

Q: Sir, will you while you are there be pushing anything on the Nigerian situation? Will Australia be taking an active role in bringing this forward and pressing the Nigerian Government into some sort of action?

PM: We won't be taking an active role or an initiative in this. It is a matter which, as I understand it, the British Government, and indeed we ourselves, would very much like to see brought to a conclusion so that the killing ceased. But I believe - and I can only say that I believe - that the British Government thinks that the organisation of African unity, the African States which have been concerning themselves in this matter, are perhaps the best tool - if I can use this word - with which to bring about this desired result, and we would, I think, agree with the British Government on their approach to this matter. But we would certainly like to see the killing cease but not be taking our own initiative.

Q: Sir, if I could ask one more question on the conference. Does Australia favour any increase in the role of the Secretariat to the Conference?

PM: An increase in the role of the Secretariat? In what particular way do you mean?

Q: In perhaps strengthening ties between Commonwealth countries?

PM: Well, I think the Secretariat is occupied now as a Secretariat in conveying views and messages between the various Commonwealth countries. We would not wish to see it have any power to do anything other than that.

Q: Mr Gorton, do you think the remarks in Dame Zara Holt's book will have any effect on the attitudes of the Africans towards you?

PM: I can't imagine why they should. These are remarks which are published by a private citizen at second or third hand and I find it difficult to think that they would influence the attitude of anybody towards me.

Q: Mr Gorton, just to return briefly to the question of "The Power Struggle", if I may, do you agree that the role played by Lord Casey in this matter has been a more active one than has been the role of the Governor-General in the past? Do you think that is a change that has come to stay?

PM: Well I really came here to answer questions about the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and not to make comments on the actions of any Governor-General.

Q: The dinner you are having with the British Prime Minister, Sir, is that likely to include any Defence proposals along the lines of Malaysia and Singapore?

PM: Well, I will be having a dinner with the British Prime Minister, and I have no doubt that quite a number of subjects could be brought up for discussion. I will be having a private dinner with Mr Trudeau. I have no doubt that any number of subjects will be brought up for discussion. But there is no agenda for either dinner.

Thank you, gentlemen.
