

PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION CONFERENCE GIVEN  
BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON, ON  
HIS RETURN HOME AFTER THE COMMONWEALTH  
PRIME MINISTERS' CONFERENCE, LONDON



On Board s.s. "Arcadia", Sydney, N.S.W.

28 JANUARY 1969

- PM. Good morning, gentlemen. It's nice to be back! Before I start on asking you whatever questions you have in mind, I have got an announcement to make. That is that The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, at the invitation of the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, will visit New Zealand and Australia in March and April of 1970. In both countries, they will take part in the celebrations of the bi-centenary of Captain Cook's voyage. Their visit to Australia will be confined to the Eastern States - to the A. C. T., New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. If it is any help to you, the last visit, according to the note I have, was made in February and March 1963.
- Q. Some of the papers have said that the Commonwealth Conference, although to everyone's relief it didn't blow up into a fight, no-one is taking much notice of whether it did anything else. Do you think in view of Australia's increasing preoccupation with the South Eastern Asian region that the Commonwealth Conference this time achieved anything positive?
- PM. I don't think it achieved anything positive if you mean by that did they reach agreement on some plan or some prospect of combined action or some unified approach to some problems in the world. No, I don't think it did. What it did do was to provide a forum where differences of approach, which are natural when there are 28 different countries gathered around a table, were able to be discussed moderately, temperately, and I think with an increase in understanding on all sides of the points of view, of the reasons for the points of view of the people sitting around that table.
- Q. Prime Minister, would you care to say how, and if, your thinking on defence has been affected by your talks in London?
- PM. I'll put your question around the other way: Would I care to say if my thinking on defence has been affected, and if so, how. The answer is no, I don't believe it has. That answers the second part too.
- Q. Mr. Prime Minister, why did you fail to support the suggestion that aid should be given to the lesser-developed Commonwealth countries?

PM. I didn't fail to support any such suggestion. There was a suggestion - though I don't remember it being discussed at the Conference in any detail - that the Commonwealth should establish a multi-lateral aid fund under the control of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Mr. Arnold Smith, and I failed to support that. Indeed, I didn't notice anybody else supporting it either, because we feel that we are contributing already quite considerably through multi-lateral United Nations funds and prefer to keep our assistance to the Commonwealth on a bilateral basis.

Q. Prime Minister, what do you think was the highlight of the Conference?

PM. Well, I don't know. I don't think I could pick out for you any particular dramatic moment or any stage where crisis was almost reached and avoided, which was what I would understand "highlight" to mean. I don't think there was one. There were a number of interesting matters all the way through.

Q. Prime Minister, could you perhaps comment on your relationship with the African leaders? Mr. Hasluck said on his return that it was perhaps your smile that made things go so well.....

PM. Well, frankly, calling on my memory, the smiles of all the African leaders were far more beaming and they had far better teeth than I did! They were far more attractive. I liked a number of them. Indeed, I didn't dislike any of them. I liked some more than others as one always does, whether they are African or Asians or Australians or English or whatever they might be. But we did, I think, get on in what seemed to me to be a completely friendly way.

Q. Prime Minister, you appear to have struck up a special friendship with Mr. Wilson. Would you care to say if you see any tangible value in this relationship?

PM. If you mean can I see that there is going to be some discernible difference in matters of trade or matters of defence or matters of some other specific content, no I can't. But I think there is tangible benefit, nevertheless, from a close relationship between the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Prime Minister of Great Britain. There must be.

Q. Mr. Gorton, is there any prospect of the Canberra Five-Power conference going to Prime Minister level?

PM. We haven't decided on that yet. We discussed it when we were sitting around whether it would be on a Prime Ministers' level or on a Defence Ministers'/Foreign Ministers' level. It is obvious, of course, as far as Great Britain is concerned, that Mr. Wilson would not be coming out here for that conference. But as far as Mr. Holyoake or the Tunku or Harry Lee.....

Q. Mr. Wilson wouldn't be coming? Apparently the Labor Party are afraid that he might!

PM. Are they? Well, I wouldn't know about that. But the question of whether the other four of us attend as Prime Ministers or not is left for further discussion amongst us.

Q. What do you expect to get out of this Five-Power thing?

PM. Well, as you know, there has been for a considerable time working parties up in Malaya/Singapore since the last Five-Power conference, working out this, working out matters of various kinds. Indeed it was such a report from our own people in such a working party that led us to the decision already announced to base our troops at Singapore rather than remain in Terendak. By the time that the next conference is held I think that these kinds of discussions, at working-level group by foreign service departments, by defence departments will have enabled more details as to the working out of the general arrangements.....

Q. Do you expect then from this conference to be able to announce or decide what our role will be in the area?

PM. It will help towards that.

Q. You won't at that time be able to make a fresh.....

PM. I didn't say that. But if it didn't result in one being able to make a definite role statement, and a role is what I am talking of.....if it didn't enable that, then it would certainly, I think, have made a considerable advance towards the situation where that could be.

Q. Will you be able to intimate to the other leaders.....

PM. I think there will have been a lot of discussions on this before the meeting takes place, and when the meeting takes place, it could greatly help to crystallise it. You know, it was agreed at the last Five-Power conference that there would be another one held in the first half of this year, but the actual date on which it was to be held was not decided, nor was the place at which it was to be held decided.

Q. Both these facts having now been decided, and it being Canberra, I would have thought the other Prime Ministers would expect you to be far more positive about our role after 1971.....

PM. How do you know how positive I have been with other Prime Ministers?

Q. You haven't discussed it with them?

PM. No, not yet!

Q. Prime Minister, would you care to elaborate on your speech to the Australia Club on 17 January about foreign investment on your terms. Can you give us some idea of what these terms will be?

PM. What I did was lay down general principles, in the speech to which you are referring, which we would like to see carried out. Those general principles being that we would wish to see - if I can put it this way - more selective controls on the takeover of Australian companies, particularly by foreign companies, the sort of controls that Great Britain has and so many other nations have themselves. This is a matter being studied at the moment by the Eggleston Committee and no doubt we will be getting reports from them, and in the meantime the Treasury itself has been asked to make a study of the question too. In relation to the raising of debenture capital inside Australia by overseas firms, we have indicated that we would wish to see before debenture capital was raised in that way that an opportunity for participation in equity was given by those overseas firms. We have also indicated in a general way that when some new enterprise is started with overseas capital, we would also like to see the opportunity for equity participation offered to Australians. This is the subject of study by the Treasury. The Treasurer informs me that the papers concerning this, which would come to the Economic Committee of Cabinet, are well advanced. Subsequently, of course, we would have to see what it was we were able to do of our own power and what it was that it would be necessary to be done by States Attorneys-General and our own Attorney-General, acting in concert.

Q. You have spoken in terms of opportunity for equity and the necessity for some equity. Have you in mind any size equity - 5 per cent, 10 per cent - even 1 per cent is the opportunity for some equity.....

PM. Yes. I think we would need to have a far more definite indication than some equity. I would prefer to see the Treasury's papers and have full discussions on them before I would go any further than that.

Q. At that time you might be able to make a statement?

PM. Possibly.

Q. While in London, did you meet again Taufa'ahau Tupou of Tonga, and if so, did you discuss supporting Tongan moves to join the Commonwealth?

PM. No, I didn't meet him.

Q. Prime Minister, just to return to that foreign investment question again. These guidelines.....are they in fact guidelines or just your thinking aloud on the subject? Is the Reserve Bank obliged to follow your remarks relating to this?

PM. They will be more than thinking aloud. They will be an indication, in more detail when the papers have been further advanced, as to what it is that we would wish to see and what it is that we could arrange to see did happen.

Q. The position at the moment in relation to the raising of debenture funds. . . . companies that have been well established here such as the ESSO organisation have been allowed to raise debenture funds. Do you intend to change this, or hope to change this?

PM. ESSO/BHP were allowed to raise debenture funds, I think not just for ESSO but for ESSO and BHP which is the Australian component of that company. Also, of course, they have brought in a great deal of proper overseas capital at the same time.

Q. If I could just switch across to defence for a moment, Sir. In Kuala Lumpur, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia indicated that Malaysia has firm ideas on what sort of a role Australia should play if it wishes to retain troops in Malaysia. In his own words, he expects Australia to get involved in intra-regional affairs. He was talking specifically of Sabah. When you were in London and you were speaking to the Tunku, did he spell this out to you or wasn't the subject raised?

PM. The matter of the role of Australian troops in the area will be a matter for decision by the Australian Government and subsequent announcement by the Australian Government.

Q. Was Sabah discussed specifically between yourself and the Tunku?

PM. I don't think I will add anything to what I have just said to you.

Q. Is this the sort of thing that you might cover in your promised statement to the House when Parliament resumes, Sir?

PM. One would want to indicate the kind of role envisaged, not merely the disposition.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, did you gain anything from your talks with Mr. Trudeau?

PM. Well, all I gained from talks with Mr. Trudeau was an underlining as it were of what he has already said publicly that he felt himself that Canada should look more towards the Pacific and take more interest in the Pacific than perhaps she had done in the past. There was no opportunity for me to ask him to spell that out in more detail. Now, you asked me about anything significant. I think perhaps that is significant but not detailed and definite.

Q. Sir, you just indicated that you wanted to talk about the future role of our forces in your forthcoming Parliamentary statement. This must be an advance on your decision in December, when you spoke to us about this. Now what are the factors that have influenced you in the interim? You talk now about a disposition as well as a composition.

PM. We have had further discussions, we have had further advice and we will be having yet further discussions. I would hope by then we could advance, because after all, advance is the keynote of this Government.

Q. Do you think your visit to Mr. Nixon will have any bearing. . . . I mean will you be able to spell out anything in the Five-Power talks before you talk to Mr. Nixon about America's role in Asia?

PM. Well, according to the sort of timetable one envisages, the Five-Power talks would be in May and I would hope to have been able to visit Mr. Nixon before May.

Q. Would you care to say when you will make your statement to Parliament on defence?

PM. Oh, quite soon after Parliament meets. I wouldn't want to give you a definite day but as soon as possible after Parliament meets.

Q. Mr. Gorton, when in Fiji did you discuss Fiji's future relations with Australia and did you meet the Chief Minister?

PM. No, I didn't. I got off an aeroplane after having flown for I don't know how long and boarded the ship and went to sleep.

Q. Prime Minister, I didn't quite catch the request over here, but were you indicating that your talks with Mr. Nixon would have a bearing on your attitude at the Five-Power talks?

PM. I was indicating that the timetable envisaged was such that I would be likely to be speaking to Mr. Nixon before the Five-Power talks took place.

Q. It follows therefore that his attitudes would influence our attitudes at the Five-Power talks?

PM. Well, I can only refer to what I have just said, that I would be hoping to see him before the Five-Power talks took place in May.

Q. Prime Minister, I take it that you have heard of our latest Parliamentary romance. . . . and your good wishes?

PM. I read something in the ship's bulletin about it. I haven't heard in any detail if this is accurate. I gather it is accurate? If so, one extends the best of good wishes to both parties.

Q. Did it come as a surprise to you?

PM. Well, I had no inkling of it.

Q. Mr. Gorton, the Malays have indicated they would like to see an agreement emerging out of this latest conference, something to replace the present Anglo-Malaysian defence agreement. Do you think this is likely?

PM. I don't see the necessity for it, at any rate now. The arrangements under which our troops are stationed in the country at present would seem to me, and according to my advice, would cover the stationing of our troops there. So it doesn't seem to me to be a question which does arise.

Q. Have you been in consultation with President Nixon at all?

PM. No. He has been pretty busy. There was a possibility which could have occurred of my coming back through Washington and having a completely informal half an hour or three-quarters of an hour with him on the day before his inauguration. This appeared to me to offer no great prospects of advantage to either of us and considerable disadvantage to him when he was getting ready for his inauguration the next day.

Q. Sir, in view of the decision to do a study into a peaceful nuclear explosion in the North-West, has the Government moved further along towards signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

PM. Our situation on that remains exactly as it has been. . . . that we are in favour of it in principle, we want to make quite sure it is effective and efficient and also a good deal more information on a number of other aspects before we go any further.

Q. There was a reference in the communique from the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, Sir, to the Treaty. Did we take part in any discussions on it?

PM. No.

Mr. Eggleton. Perhaps one final question, gentlemen.

Q. Is there any suggestion, Sir, that our planes stationed at Butterworth will move across to Sabah?

PM. No.

Thank you.

---