

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR JOHN GORTON AT SHERATON MOTOR HOTEL;
MELBOURNE.

24 OCTOBER 1969

PM: I'am always happy when Gallup Polls are runing for rather than against. I can only repeat what I said previously that the real poll we are interested in is the poll on Saturday the 25th.

Q. Would you care to forecast the election outcome, Mr Gorton?

PM: I wouldn't like to forecast by how many seats we will win it, but I don't think there is any doubt but that we will win it. The only reason I wouldn't like to forecast by how many seats is because I leave that to the political experts and pundits. I wouldn't like to be as wrong as I think some of them might be.

Q. You don't feel you might have been better having more public meetings than you have held in this campaign?

PM: No, I don't think so, or if so, perhaps one or at the most two more. I have had public meetings in Perth and Adelaide and Hobart -- if you count the sort of thing to which the press came in Evans; it was not really a public meeting, but I think those sort of things do -- in Melbourne and Sydney and Brisbane and Townsville and Rockhampton. I might have had one more if I had replanned because it was planned to have the majority of them towards the end of the campaign.

Q. Would you have had them in a capital, Sir?

PM: Well, I don't think we would need to have another meeting in a capital city/ After all, we had a fairly good one at Moonee Ponds and a good one in Sydney the night before. I don't want to go around to the suburbs and have a couple of hundred listless people like Whitlam does.

Q. There have been a lot of people ringing up in Melbourne and saying what a scurrilous campaign it is. Do you think it has been rougher....

PM: I think there has been for a long time a sort of fairly organised smear campaign going on. . . .

Q. Aimed at you personally or other candidates?

PM: No, I think mainly at me. I don't know about the other candidates.

Q. Would you like to say who might be behind it?

PM: No.

Q. Do you think it has been effective?

PM: I would hope not. I don't think there is room for this sort of thing in Australia. /

Q. How do you stop it, then?

PM: I don't think there is any way to stop it except to believe that Australian people are not affected by it.

Q. Does it distress you?

PM: I think it is rather revolting that that sort of thing should happen. It reminds you of little white frog-bellied things scurrying around in a sewer. But I don't think it has got a proper place and I wouldn't say that it unduly distressed me personally.

Q. What are the symptoms of such a campaign?

PM: I don't know what you mean by symptoms. .

Q. Where do you see it reflected?

PM: Oh, in the sort of literature that is put out, photographs put out and that sort of thing.

Q. This is separate, you feel, to any allegations that St. John made? Or do you think it is part of the same thing.

PM: I think it is all part of the same picture.

Q. Do you think St. John himself. . .

PM: I wouldn't want to comment on Mr St John.

Q. You mentioned earlier in the week, it was in the Sun-Pic. I think last Saturday that there were two people running a campaign against you. It left us with a guessing game - and you mentioned in Brisbane that they weren't politicians. Are these people in public life and are these the sort of people you think are running this campaign against you or ^{are} these just individuals who are opposed to you or they journalists.

PM: Oh, I think we can leave this as a guessing game. Your guess would be as good as mine. I am fairly sure it would be.

Q. Have you learnt any lessons from this campaign - is there anything you would have done differently. ?

PM: No. I don't think I would have given the Policy Speech in any different way because a Policy Speech as such ought to be one that can be put before people in a composed and coherent way without being broken up. There are meetings I like better than doing that sort of thing, but I still think it is probably the best way to do it if a Policy Speech is to be regarded as putting programmes before the people for the next three years. We can't have the staged faithful at a public meeting the way our principal opponent can. So I think we will continue to do it that way.

Q. Why not Sir?

PM: Well in the first place, we don't go along and attempt to bust up.

Q. We are talking about having it on stage. Why couldn't this be done in the same way?

PM: I suppose you could if you filled the hall by tickets only - admission tickets only - but that is about the only way you could do it, because if it was a meeting where tickets were issued to the faithful only it could scarcely be called a real public meeting. If it is a real public meeting and the likelihood of interjections and noise and so on - which I like - the likelihood of ^{this} at a meeting we hold is much greater than at a meeting they hold, and I think this

would interfere with the proper presentation of the Policy Speech. But after that, I would sooner be out speaking publicly. I think the meetings I liked the street meetings we had in Queensland, at Townsville and Rockhampton. I would not be sure --- and this is just thinking; it is not to be attributed to me -- you are asking me the approaches and these are not decisions. . . I might possibly have a couple more meetings earlier on, but I am not sure in my own mind whether it is better to have a few and then concentrate them in the last five or six campaigning days.

Q. On the question of campaigning, Sir, has this campaign brought home to you the absurdity of the Broadcasting and Television Act in respect of the broadcasting and televising of political material? What are your inclinations towards the amendment of that Act?

PM: I think the absurdity was first brought home when there was to be a by-election for some State seat, and the question arose whether . . .

Q. Curtin, wan't it?

PM: It was a State by-election somewhere. . . in theory that was supposed to have prevented in some way the covering of the Curtin one. I can't imagine why these restrictions were brought in. I can't see any practical reasons for them. I don't think it is terribly important. It is very nice for the newspapers. It is strange to hear a newspaper complaining!

Q. Are you going to change it?

PM: We will have a look at it.

Q. Senator Greenwood seemed to think this week that what the nation needed most rather than a five cent cigar is a censor to watch the way we write about politics. . . .

PM: He has denied that, you know.

Q. Did he deny it publicly?

PM: Yes.

Q. He denied that the report was accurate, did he?

PM: Yes. I haven't gone into it in any depth but he has denied that the report as it came out was accurate and said what he

was trying to say. I am repeating what a newspaper reported what he had to say -- so I won't vouch for the truth of it'. It was reported that what he had to say was he didn't say that at all because he thought there should be some way of seeing that policies put forward were not distorted or were reported or something of that kind.

Q. I'll argue it out with him later.

PM: I would be a bit surprised if he said there should be any censorship because I am quite sure we wouldn't. I am sure I don't.

Q. Are you happy with the reporting of your campaign?

PM: Not particularly unhappy with it. Not particularly unhappy with the reporting of the campaign. But I query some of the comments of some of the reporters. I am not disturbed about this but you asked me and it is in my mind. I think I had a good meeting, for example, at Forrest Place. We had interjectors and that was rather fun. Somebody went over with Mr Whitlam and said Forrest Place was a much better meeting because he had more people and he didn't have any interjectors, and he had won the battle hands down. Fair enough. But if that is to happen, then when I go to Townsville and have 1,000 people on the same street corner that he had 85 that might rate a mention too. That's what I meant. But I don't feel deeply about it. It's a small thing.

Q. This limitation of candidate's expenses has come up again. I think it is \$500, isn't it?

PM: Quite frankly, I wouldn't like to tell you with complete surety what it is because I know when I was standing for the Senate, for example - I always used to - as ~~both sides~~ everybody else on both sides did - sent in their returns and said they hadn't spent anything or just spent their hotel bills, which in fact was true. We hadn't. Somebody had. They had put advertisements in and put things on. Whether, legally, somebody doing that means that you have done it, I don't know. It can't I don't think. I suppose the basis of it - of putting a limitation on spending out of one's own pocket is to try and give everyone a fair go, to try and stop a chap with a whole lot of money from overwhelming somebody who hasn't. That I am sure must have been the genesis of it. But whether you can extend that to say

that nobody can help a candidate is rather a trickier sort of a question.

Q. As it is the law is being thrown rather into contempt by the fact of some candidates, for example, refusing to sign a declaration that they have spent particular amounts. There has never been any suggestion that anything should be done about them. Doesn't it seem a bad law ?

PM: Whether the law only applies to spending out of one's own pocket is something fairly significant, and I haven't had a legal interpretation of just whether it does. I would think there would be very few candidates who would spend out of their own pocket more than was allowed, but I would think that every candidate would have people collecting funds for him or donations being given to him which he would use in his campaign. Whether that is a breach of the law or not, I doubt, but I am not giving a legal opinion on it.

Q. Will 18-year-olds have a vote at the next Federal election?

PM: I believe they will. There is the question as you know of getting uniform with the States, so that we can have a uniform electoral roll and there is, so the conference of Attorneys-General tell me, other problems which come up and which they are discussing -- well, all right, if somebody is deemed to be a major and not a minor, what about inheritance of property and all those other kinds of things. But I have little doubt at all but that that will be ironed out.

Q. By the time this three years is up?

PM: Yes. I would have little doubt that that would be so.

Q. You think they will be voting next time round ?

PM: I think so.

Q. Are you happy with that prospect from your party's point of view?

PM: Who knows what the situation will be in three years' time. We certainly wouldn't lose by 18-year-olds voting, but I don't think that ought to be the deciding factor