

QUESTIONS PUT TO THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE NATIONAL  
PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON - CANBERRA - 15 April 1971

Q. Vincent Matthews - Melbourne Herald. Mr. Prime Minister, could you tell us, apart from the wheat problem, what the Government is actually doing or contemplating doing to ensure that the vast potential of the China market is not lost in the future to Australia's export industries, and could you perhaps elaborate on what effect domestic political considerations have had, particularly the attitude of the Democratic Labour Party on the Government's approach to the China problem?

PM If I can answer the second part of your question first. Naturally as Members of Parliament, and as members of a Government we have to take a total look at the political picture before any decisions are made. But on our attitude to trade with Continental China, and on our attitude to the position of Taiwan China in the United Nations, I can assure you that this is a Government decision and I now reflect Government policy. This is decided in the interests of the Australian nation, and that position will dictate our policy in every respect in the future. As to the first part of your question - I will divide the question if I can into three different sections. First of all as to our actual trade with China itself - unless goods come within what is called the Strategic Limitation List or unless it comes within a special list of which we have administered quite severely in recent years, then our own people are free to go and to return from China and to trade with them to the maximum of their capacity. So they can go, they can trade. I can move a stage further and say that our own people, of course, have no obstacle placed in their way if they want to go, and for that matter unless there are security reasons involved, involving the Peking Government itself, then our citizens are free to return. I hope you'll understand the reservation that I have made about security reasons coming from the Peking Government itself.

Q. Ted Barker - West Australian. Sir there was a certain amount of concern last year about Australia's exports of iron and scrap steel to China. As Foreign Minister you said at the time that you would re-examine the list of strategic material that could not be exported. Has there been any change in policy as a result of that review, have materials such as iron, scrap steel and zinc been added to the list of prohibited exports?

PM Yes I have. Ever since I made the statement or answered a question in the House I've had the problem under review. I've also had it considered by the Government, and shortly I'll be considering the measures that we've taken in order to ensure greater trade with Continental China.

Q. Brown - Brisbane Courier-Mail. Prime Minister you seem to have left out one current important topic - the South African sporting tours. What action do you plan to take against the Labor-ACTU boycott?

PM Thanks for that question because I've already answered this once in the House and I regard it as discreditable on the part of the ACTU and the Labor Party that they should try and stop sporting teams from coming to this country.

We have the Gallup Polls - 85 per cent of the Australian people thought they should come. Now we don't like apartheid and already I have sent a message to the South African Government, letting the South African Government know what I and my Government, for that matter, think of their action in stopping two native South Africans from coming out here with the South African cricket team. But we have taken this attitude. We believe, and I'm sure most Australians agree with this point of view, that we must not import our politics into our sporting or cultural life. I can explain it to you in this way. What a strange thing it is that an ACTU that is supposed to be looking after industrial relations, should gang up with a group within the Australian Labor Party and say yes, let politics superimpose itself on every single aspect of our lives. If you'd like to look at it in a different way in terms of our cultural relations, we don't agree with the USSR as to what its social and political system might be. But we don't stop their sporting teams, and the Bolshoi Ballet from coming here. Even in the case of Continental China, of the Peoples' Republic of China, they are now permitting a sporting team of the United States - one of their bitterest enemies to go there, indicating that they want a liberalisation so far as these extra-political activities are concerned. I want to warn you of this factor. You must now have recollections of the shadows of the twelve faceless men, when the ACTU, not elected to Parliament by the people, when the Mr. Mick Youngs - not elected by the people of Australia to the Parliament - are trying to determine every single aspect of the social and cultural and sporting life of this community. In my view the Australian people will regard it with resentment, and I believe that they will treat these sporting teams, if they come, in exactly the same way as they treated the South African Surf Life Saving Association. They gave them a marvelous welcome, and I hope they show their strong sporting instincts and give the cricket team and the football team when it comes, that they give them the same kind of reception as they gave the Surf Life Association members.

Q. John Lombard - Melbourne Sun. Both the Treasury and Mr. Bury say there will have to be a new Federal Tax. The Treasurer is reported as believing it ought to be a tax on retail sales. Do you believe a new tax will have to be found to supplement income tax and what are your views on a retail sales tax?

PM These views have never been communicated to me directly and I have no paper at all in front of me from the Treasury or from the Treasurer or from any other group of officials recommending any new type of tax.

Q. Max Hawkins, Brisbane Telegraph. Mr. Prime Minister on March 21 when you announced your Ministry, you said you intended to appoint certain Assistant Ministers or Parliamentary Under-Secretaries. Can you tell us how far you have got with this proposal?

PM There are two pieces of uncompleted business. One is the appointment of a Minister to head the new Department of the Vice-President of the Executive Council that will look after a wide range of environmental and cultural relationships, and the other is the problem of Assistant Ministers. I have not in the time available been able to deal with either of these problems because until the last few days I have not had worked out in specific and legal terms what the responsibilities and the conditions under which the Assistant Ministers can in fact be appointed,

particularly in order to meet the Constitutional requirement that they cannot accept an office of profit under the Crown. All the details have now been completed and I hope as soon as the House rises I will be able to appoint the new Minister as well as being able to appoint the Assistant Ministers at the same time. I might, if I can just add this. I might find it desirable some time next week or the week after to be able to put down a paper in the House explaining the true position so far as it concerns the Assistant Ministers.

Q. Michael Richardson - Melbourne Age. Could you give us an explanation about why the Chinese bought a large quantity of wheat from Canada recently. It was noted at the time that the announcement was made shortly after Canada announced formal diplomatic recognition of Peking.

PM First I want to remind you of the background against which this problem is being considered. I have said that our position cannot under any circumstances be regarded as a difficult one. But secondly why China chose to buy - not a large quantity of wheat as you have said - but a much reduced quantity of wheat, of high protein wheat from Canada. Thirdly I admit that there was a strange sort of coincidence between the date on which the wheat was purchased and the negotiations that were taking place in New York at the United Nations relating to recognition and the Albanian Vote. But I am not privy to the mind of the Peking Chinese. I am not privy to the mind of the Canadian Government. In my conversations with Mitchell Sharp, I came away no better informed than I was when I first started to speak to him.

Q. Peter Samuel - Bulletin. I want to ask two questions. Firstly, a cultural one, secondly a sporting one. On the cultural one, what are you going to do about the proposal for a National Art Gallery here in Canberra? There has been a proposal for a Director of that Gallery and the plans are all prepared for its construction. Secondly, on the sporting question, the question of the ACTU's proposed black ban on dealing with the South African cricketers when they come here, in a previous case where the Government has disapproved of a black ban - in the case of the black ban on the export of merino rams - the Government moved in and used Service transport to break this black ban. It would seem logical if you disapproved of this black ban to give consideration to using the Forces at your command to break this black ban, too. Would you consider doing that?

PM As to the first question, which is, I must confess, a sensitive and difficult one, I have appointed Sir Alan Hulme to act as the temporary Minister in charge of the portfolio of Vice-President of the Executive Council, and he for the moment has this task of deciding what is to be done. I can't give you any greater answer than that other than some possible solutions have been put to me but have not been put in a way that I would be able to make an immediate decision about it. I am afraid this will have to wait for some time until I get more time to be able to devote attention to it. As to the second question as to what we will do if the South African cricketers do come, regrettably in a way, we can't transport them in the same way as we did the merino sheep. But my very sincere hope is that by that time the Australian people themselves will let both the ALP and the ACTU know of their revulsion of feeling that these extra-Government organisations should try and dominate the Australian political scene and should determine what happens in cultural and social affairs and sporting affairs in this country. But the true

answer to your question - that is the second question - is that at the moment it is too hypothetical. I think it is best if you intend to do something, to reserve your own opinion as to what you will do and meet those when they actually have to be met.

Q. Fingleton - Argus Group of South African newspapers. The trade unions, Mr. Hawke and Mr. Whitlam - I don't know whether I have given the right batting order - have threatened a boycott of the South African team. Can you say, Mr. Prime Minister, whether either the Australian Board of Cricket Control or the Rugby Union Board has been in touch with you as to your views whether the tour should be cancelled - either tour - and if they do, would your opinion still be the same as you expressed here today that the tours should proceed?

PM I think your batting order was wrong on this issue. I think it was Young, Hawke and Mr. Whitlam might have been somewhere in the team but I didn't notice it! As to the second part of your question, the Secretary of the Australian Cricket Control Board, Alan Barnes, has been in touch with me and I have informed him that we would offer no objection to the tour and that it should go on. To the best of my knowledge, the Australian Rugby Union authorities have not been in contact with me or with the Department. Nonetheless, I will check on this fact, Mr. Fingleton, and I will let you know as soon as I can.

Q. Commins, A.B.C. In the context of controlling inflation, you said amongst the measures to be taken would be to strengthen the Arbitration Commission. Do you imply by this they are not doing their job now, or in what manner would you do it? Also, Sir, in the same context, Sir Colin Syme has recommended some advance in unemployment as a means of controlling inflation and Mr. Hawke has said he would not have been game to have said this under Mr. Gorton, but is game to do so under you.

PM That is Mr. Hawke's opinion, and in public like this I must refrain from expressing any personal opinions about him. But if I can deal with the opinions expressed by Sir Colin Syme, I, for one, do not believe that the creation of unemployment is the way in which you solve your problems of inflation. Every country that has tried to create unemployment, or permitted unemployment to develop has failed miserably and I think it should be known that the one Government that solved the problem of unemployment before any other was the Government started by Menzies, continued through Mr. Holt and Mr. Gorton and now led by myself. With us, full employment is a cardinal act of political faith and we will sustain it and won't resort to any kind of unemployment in order to achieve our objective. And I repeat again, I don't think this is a very satisfactory way of handling it. That, too, might answer Mr. Hawke as to whether or not he thinks there might be a different approach during the course of the last three or four weeks. I have forgotten the first part of your question - could you repeat it?

Q. Sir, it was to control inflation you were aiming to strengthen the Arbitration Act....

PM

Well, I said we would try. We will be looking to see whether there are some methods by which we can ensure that the Arbitration Commission itself does try and control the whole of the structure of the Arbitration Commission, in order to ensure that the Commissioners fit in with the policy directives or the policy lines that are determined by the Presidential Members themselves. But this is only one area that we are looking at. We want to look at the total area to see if we can make some contribution here to strengthening the forces which will reign back or break back inflationary tendencies in our community.

Q.

Tom Connors - Financial Review. How closely does the Government watch and check the activities of the Australian Wool Commission which has built up a considerable stockpile of wool without actually checking the drift in prices, and what form will the proposed review of the Commission's activities take at the end of this financial year?

PM

As to the second part of your question, this is a matter which is within the jurisdiction of both Trade and Treasury and they will be advising us towards the end of the season, or at the end of the season, what they think should be done and will be making their recommendation to the Cabinet. So far as watching the activities of the Commission, as I understand it, and I am not in the machine for this myself, but as I understand it and it is agreed to by the Australian Wool Commission itself that there is regular examination of the activities of the Commission and that the Commission regularly reports not only to Primary Industry, Trade but also to Treasury as well.

Q.

Tony Thomas - Melbourne Age. It has been mentioned that private office construction has fallen off lately in view of the economic climate. On the other hand State and Commonwealth, or rather Government office construction is increasing fairly sharply. How do you regard this?

PM.

I didn't phrase it in exactly the same way as you've said. I did say that because there had been over-building in commercial and industrial buildings we had been advised by the civil construction people that automatically there would be a reduction because they wouldn't be able to find rentals for the space that had been built. I agree with you that it has been difficult to reduce State expenditure on public works. But what we are doing now - and I want to emphasise this and I thought I'd emphasised in the body of my speech itself - that at the time of the next Budget we must ensure that public works expenditure - Commonwealth or States - that the rate of increase is reduced to what we could regard as a satisfactory level. Once you've got committed, as they have got committed in this present Budget year - or the Budget year of the Commonwealth or the States, it's difficult to stop expenditure. But when we start on the new year that is the appropriate time when we ensure - or do our best to ensure that the rate of increase in these works and services is reigned in.

Q.

Richard Ackland from Maxwell Newton's publications: Two questions Prime Minister in your capacity as a Treasury expert - can New Guinea pay all the subscription to the Asian Development Bank, and what are the advantages of New Guinea being a member? And secondly, are you going to press ahead for an abolition on withholding tax to interest payments overseas as the previous Prime Minister announced last year?

PM

As to the second one - yes. As to the first - as Foreign Minister I did all in my power to ensure that Papua/New Guinea became a member of ECAFE, and through becoming a member of ECAFE became a member of ECOSOC and through becoming a member of ECOSOC was entitled to participate in the World Bank and the IDC. Secondly I had as the full objective - and we achieved it - of making Papua/New Guinea a member of the Asian Development Bank. We did this because we knew that it didn't matter what contribution was made by Papua/New Guinea - either out of its own indigenous funds or through advances provided by the Commonwealth - that at least it would get benefits many, many, many times greater than the contribution that it would make - the initial contribution it would make to those funds. If you can look at the participation of the World Bank in the construction and development projects for Papua/New Guinea you will know what I mean. Equally am I certain that not only so far as expertise, but access to funds is concerned, the Asian Development Bank will turn out to be a very, very good investment project.

Q.

Hugh Armfield - Melbourne Age : Bearing in mind how you've handled relations within the Liberal Party, pensioners, Premiers' Conference and the Queensland Government since becoming Prime Minister, would you regard this period as one in which your main role has been that of a peacemaker?

PM

I know the word I'd like to use, but as you know in a press gathering you've only got to use one word in humour and it's likely to be taken seriously - and so I refrain from using the word. I wouldn't like to give it any conceivable sort of title other than to say that I believe it's been in the best interests of this country. And I hope that during my term of office as the Prime Minister, whatever I do is not determined by a title, or by any other grouping of words or phrases, but is determined in the national interest and the national interest alone.

Q.

Bruce Juddery - Canberra Times. I've also got a double-pronged question, Sir. Last January, your predecessor said in Singapore that within the next two years the State Governments must legislate to remove all discriminatory legislation on the aboriginal question - or else the Commonwealth would do so for them. Since then you've apparently made some progress - last week I think it was in Queensland. Sir are you committed to this undertaking of your predecessor, and more generally what thoughts do you have on the progress of aboriginals and the Commonwealth's role in seeking that progress? Secondly, Sir, you have recently removed the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of the Environment, various cultural groups you mention from your own Department where their presence was an earnest of the Prime Minister's personal commitment and concern for these issues, to another Department whose Head has got a fairly grandiloquent title but no particular guarantee of access or influence within the Government. Are you not concerned that some sections of the community may think you're playing down these relatively minor - in absolute terms - but nevertheless emotionally-charged issues?

PM

As to the first question there is a great deal of difficulty about definition. I sometimes feel that the word "discriminatory" is used too freely, and that what has to be thought of is some sort of means of protection of certain sections of the aboriginal community. But to come down to the facts of life, I did obtain from Mr. Wentworth a note as to 11 different areas where he felt we should try and come to an accommodation with the Queensland Government.

I went up and I had the most successful discussions with the Premier, with Mr. Gordon Chalk the Treasurer, and their officials and with Sir Alan Hulme and my own officials. On 9 of the 11 points that I put to him, they were all agreed to by the Queensland Premier, and we will have no difficulty about them whatsoever. On the other two, I believe protective measures may perhaps be taken. If I can just mention some of them to you. That is people can freely leave the Reserves. Access to the Reserves will be under the control of the Aboriginal Councils themselves. There are really a lot of matters of this kind - discrimination and a separate Act of Parliament relating to the Torres Strait Islanders. The only place where there was an agreement between us that I can regard as of a protective kind was so far as alcohol is concerned, and there, the proposition was put to me that each of the Local Councils should have the right to determine whether or not alcohol should be permitted on the Reserve itself. In other words, not that it should freely come in - but those elected by the members of the mission or the members of the station should have the right to determine. I felt this was a wise recommendation and one I immediately agreed to. The second one that caused a little discussion - but again we came to a sensible solution - related to control over property. And here it was felt that if you immediately gave some aboriginals immediate access to considerable sums of money, that they could be exploited. And consequently it was felt that the Aboriginal Council itself should have some power of supervision, and that if there was extreme difficulty relating to exploitation, then the State Government Administration itself should have the power to protect the aborigine. The details of these last two have not been worked out. But I must confess they seem to me to be sensible propositions and one that when we look at we can consider the details and I am fairly certain we can come to a happy conclusion about it. So I don't believe under these circumstances that legislation is necessary or desirable. Nor do I think for one moment that my predecessor thought that under all circumstances legislation would be enforced. What he did say, I believe, was that unless our requirements are met, then we may be compelled to legislate. As our requirements have in fact been met or are in the process of being met, then I don't think legislation is necessary and that consequently I don't think that there'll be any need for me to introduce it.

Q. Richard Carleton - This Day Tonight. The influence Sir of the DLP over a number of Government decisions in recent years has been quite evident. Bearing in mind Senator Gair's attitude towards recognition of mainland China, what attempt do you make to accommodate him before reaching a final decision on Australia's position.

PM I think I've said to you that the immediate problem that we face and one that ought to be solved before we come to grips with the problem of recognition is admission - or the retention of the position of Taiwan in the United Nations. As the first part of the question relating to recognition of Peking China is hypothetical and, in any event, is something that we'd have to deal with not in the immediate future, I think being hypothetical it's best to be left exactly where it is.

Q. Alan Fitzgerald. Sir your predecessor suggested that he may enfranchise 18-year-olds in Federal Elections. The States of Western Australia and South Australia have done so, which if you don't act could perhaps lead to a situation in the next Federal Election where 18-year-olds in two States of the Commonwealth were voting, and 18-year-olds in the other four and the Commonwealth Territories weren't. Have you given this your consideration?

PM I'm glad that you've given me your opinion of the Constitutional legal position. I can assure you that there's a wide divergence of views amongst all those I've consulted, and I'm not happy about any of their opinions, with the exception of the former Attorney-General and the Present Attorney-General too. But what I've decided to do, and I've answered a question on this in the House on at least one occasion, was to say that I've given assurances to my Party - to the Liberal-Country Parties - that before the Government makes up its mind as to what it will do, that there is to be full and frank discussion of this in the Party room. That hasn't happened yet.

Q. Bob Baudino - Daily Telegraph. This is a supplementary question. You referred to the opinions of the former Attorney-General and the present Attorney-General. What were those opinions?

PM I'm not prepared - these are Government documents..... I'm talking about the Constitutional position - and this is the position relating to the interpretation of the Constitution. I'm not talking about the political aspects of whether or not it should be done. Frankly at this moment, as I've said, I think there are divergences of opinion as to what the position is, both in relation to the House and of the Senate. As they're government documents I've got no intention of saying what they are.

Q. Maximillian Walsh - Financial Review. In your initial speech, Sir, you said that Australia would do all it could providing the Republic of China wants to sustain its position in the General Assembly, to make sure it is sustained there. Do you think that the Republic of China would be happy to have to sit in the General Assembly with Mainland China?

PM I couldn't give the answer to that question, nor does anyone other than Chiang Kai-shek himself - nor is any other person than Chiang Kai-shek able to give an expression of opinion as to what Taiwan China would want.

Q. Barry Wain from the Australian. Mr. Prime Minister, on Australia's phased withdrawal from Vietnam, for the next round is it militarily feasible, for one battalion to be withdrawn or would they have to both come out together?

PM Once upon a time we had only one battalion there and it seemed to be feasible then. But I don't want under any circumstances to commit ourselves to the future. Before any further action is taken - and as yet I haven't asked that action be initiated - before any action is initiated, we would want the comments and the recommendations of the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. I repeat - I haven't asked them to give me an opinion yet.

Q. Peter Samuel of the Bulletin. The question of the role of our troops in Malaysia. The former Prime Minister seemed to imply that they were confined in their defence role to the mainland of Malaysia to what he called Malaya. Is this still Government policy?



PM I think it was put a little differently. In fact I am sure it was put a little differently. The word "Malaya" was used and primarily they are there in order to provide confidence during the period the Malaysians and the Singaporeans are building up their armed forces. But as was made clear both by the former Minister for Defence and the former Minister for External Affairs, that does not automatically count out a contribution that we could make if we were asked and if in our wisdom we thought a contribution should in fact be made.....

Q. .... outside the mainland....

PM Outside the mainland.

Q. Max Hawkins again Prime Minister. I think when on the day that you were elected Prime Minister you gave a strong indication that your then thinking was that the present Parliament would run out its full course. Has anything happened in the last month or so which might have influenced you to change your mind and perhaps think of an early election?

PM So much happens every day that I never make up my mind firmly about any matter until I'm compelled to do so.

Q. Michael Guy - Reuters Economic Services. Mr. Anthony recently said the attitude to China is governed to a large degree by the attitude of the United States. To what degree do you regard this as governing Australia's attitude to the Republic?

PM I think I've expressed my views and I believe Government views a few moments ago when I said that our actions and our policy decisions will be determined by what I and the Government feels is in the best interests of the Australian people. Now you would have read in today's paper that President Nixon has somewhat liberalised the approach of the United States to Continental China. And he had announced shortly after the Nixon Doctrine that certain changes that were taking place in American policy. I think I can say that in many respects we are in advance of them, because as I said a few moments ago, we don't place any obstacle in the road of our own people going to China - in the case of trade we do not unless the goods come themselves within the strategic limitations, or limitations that are imposed because of military reasons - we permit trade to take place and we buy goods from China. And our ships freely move into Chinese ports as well. So that, consequently, I think it is difficult to sustain an argument that we are dependent upon United States' views. Of course we want to co-operate with them as closely as we can. They are great, and friendly allies, but under no circumstances do I think that our policies ought to be dictated by what the United States does, or what the United States might want.

Q. Michael Richardson - Melbourne Age. There is a rising tide of public concern in Australia about the related matters of environmental pollution and conservation. Do you regard these matters as serious problems and do you think the Commonwealth is doing enough to help deal with them?

PM I think I should have answered the question that you asked me a few moments ago, and thanks for the opportunity of coming back to that part of his question which I ignored answering. As you know we've already dealt with the question of pollution of the Barrier Reef and the Crown of Thorns Starfish. You know at the present time there are two committees of the Senate meeting. I have - or Sir Alan Hulme has stated that the Professor who was the Chairman of the Committee that looked into the Crown of Thorns Starfish has recommended to me that there should be a general enquiry into pollution of which he would be only too happy to participate either as a member, or as the chairman. This is a tremendously important subject and consequently I've placed it, with aborigines, as one of the major subjects or jurisdictions that are under the supervision of the new Minister. I take it extremely seriously. But before we act, I believe we've got to get the best advice and know exactly where we're going. And I believe that the report that we received on the Crown of Thorns Starfish indicates quite clearly that precipitate action can be dangerous. It's best to know the biological and other reasons before remedial action is taken. To come back to your question of aborigines, I can give you an assurance that the Minister who is appointed will be in the closest contact with me, and I regard it as my personal responsibility to see that we do everything we can to integrate the Australian aborigine into the Australian community.

Q. Mr. Fingleton : Mr. Prime Minister, should Dr. Patterson go to Communist China and return with a wheat order, would you see that it was fulfilled?

PM I'm sorry to have to correct you. But I think you know that the Wheat Board is there as the Australian Government authority and the representative of the Australian wheat-growing interests for the sale of wheat overseas. If he can go and get a contract where the Australian Wheat Board itself in the last week has failed, then his proper course of action is to go to the Chairman of the Wheat Board, put his proposition there, and see what the price is and let them make their decision. I'm one of those who believes that once you've appointed an authority, particularly one that has been so unbelievably successful in its sale of wheat when other countries haven't been anywhere near as successful, then you repose your confidence and trust in them. I'll leave it to them, because I know they'll do ever so much better over the long term than Dr. Patterson has any hope of doing.

Q. Prime Minister, you spoke in your opening remarks about the communications gap. I may be inflicted with one myself in as much as in your opening remarks you deplored the fact that Mr. Hawke and the Leader of the Labour Association would be leading the delegation to China on this wheat business...

PM Would what...

Q. Would be leading a delegation... would be going to China in a delegation on these wheat negotiations. You referred to the fact that Mr. Hawke and the Leader of the Labour Association would be going...

PM Promoted... Promoted. No "promote". Well if I could correct this then. If I said "going", my pronunciation was no where near as good as I'd like it to be. I meant promoting it.

Q.