

PRESS BRIEFING

CONCLUSION OF MEETING OF LIBERAL PARTY JOINT
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL POLICY

7 APRIL 1972

PM: Gentlemen; I think you know that over the last few days there has been some publicity about the meeting of the Standing Committee on Federal Policy which is that section of the Organisation, or that Policy Group within the Organisation, that can make recommendations to the Government about matters which it feels should be taken into consideration, and if thought desirable, implemented by the Government.

Under no circumstances can they do more than put a recommendation to us and certainly can't tell us what we should do. And consequently, whatever I say, therefore, must be considered against that background.

We have had two meetings already: Each one extending over very nearly two days, that's four days in total. And we're decided that unlike most cases in the past, that it would be wise if I, as the Chairman of the Committee, gave you a general survey of the kind of subject we discussed, and how we intend to handle them in the future. As to the subjects that we've discussed, there are about fourteen.

In each case, a paper has been prepared and they've been particularly well prepared, and have dealt with the subject in depth, both from a philosophic point of view, and from the point of view of making concrete recommendations.

Each one of the submission or papers, together with the recommendations, necessarily have to go to me as the PRIME Minister, and then on to either the Minister primarily concerned, or to the Cabinet. In most cases I think they'll go to the Cabinet.

And subsequent to that they will then be announced when the decision has been made, as part of the Government policy.

The Standing Committee decided that we should not try and hoard decisions following the recommendations, but we should be ready at all times to make decisions either prior to the rising of the House - ^{Government} ~~decisions~~ and announce them prior to the rising of the House, and during the period of the Budget, or if thought desirable, to keep the decisions for policies.

But, as they believe public opinion is best served by making the decisions at the most appropriate time, they've recommended to the Government that we shouldn't be hesitant in letting the public know what we think and why we think it.

PM: I don't know whether you'd like me to read out the fourteen subjects to you, but I can do that if you want it.

Yes please.

PM: There are such matters as the economy, and which way we should proceed in ensuring a sensible rate of growth. Development, defence, foreign affairs, the quality of life, urban development, immigration, arbitration and industrial law, the rural of law, national health, national goals, education, social welfare, and rural matters.

In particular today, we dealt with defence, national goals, education, urban development, and rural matters.

Some of the others have been dealt with before and we have about three, including social welfare and social services, that will have to be dealt with the next time we meet.

And we'll be meeting again on the 21st April..

I personally believe they are some of the best papers that we have had prepared, and they've done by groups of members of the Liberal Party, drawn from the Parliamentary Party, including the Cabinet and Ministry, members of the Organisation, and the Officials, particularly the Secretaries, and the Research Officer such as Graham Starr, Federal Secretariat, and Jim Carleton from N.S.W., together with today, the new Secretary from Victoria.

There was, I believe, the fullest discussion of these problems, and I think the range of the subjects indicate pretty clearly what they see, not only as subjects which are of great national importance, but subjects that they believe a politically high in the order of priorities. And therefore they wanted to drive home their message of what they think has to be done in order to create the proper atmosphere and psychology in which we can start to develop an election programme, an election policy.

I think that's about all I can say to you as to what's happened.

Q. That's all on the record?

PM: All that is on the record.

Q. Did you discuss the national superannuation plan, and decide to defer it ?

PM: We had that on the paper to be discussed today, but we didn't reach it, and it's put down as the first subject for discussion, amongst other social welfare matters, for the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Policy and the Federal Executive immediately after.

- Q. Sir, most of these things presumably, will have to be translated into Government policy. National goals is a philosophical thing. Can you tell us what decisions were made in that area ?
- PM: No, I can't, because for most of them, there are so many of them, they will, I believe, each one of them, have to be put to the Government. Because for the most part they deal with social issues: And social issues of a kind that are of increasing importance in a public relations sense, and we did decide that each one of them would have to go to Cabinet for decision.
- Q. Can you tell us some of the recommendations, Sir ?
- PM: No, I can't.
- Q. Sir, what's the objection of the Liberal Party telling us what their policies are ?
- PM: The reason is, and this one of the other papers that I wasn't going to mention, showing the differences between the Liberal and Country Parties and the Opposition. The simple fact is that in our case they can ONLY make a recommendation. They can do no more, and as there are Ministers present on the Standing Committee on Federal policy, we don't want to put ourselves in the position where that Committee can make recommendations which subsequently might not be accepted by Cabinet as a whole, or might not be regarded as satisfactory for the Government, which means the Coalition Parties.
- Q. But as the Leader of the Liberal Party, Sir, don't you feel that the Australian public are entitled to know what the Liberal Party policy is, before it gets into power?
- PM: No, I do not. I believe that when we are looking at policy decisions, we must look at policy decisions which mean something, and which will be carried into effect. It is no use flying a kite when there is a possibility that it might not be accepted, because I think people want predictability and certainty. That is the reason why we don't announce the recommendations, and I emphasise again, they are recommendations.
- Q. When will Cabinet consider these recommendations?
- PM: I can't tell you yet. We've got so much on our plate at the moment, and I've got to now convert these into Cabinet documents that I couldn't give you. But we will try and get them out as and when we think it is appropriate and as soon as we can.

- Q. Will it be a matter of weeks or months ?
- PM: I couldn't give you a clue.
- Q. At the meeting today, did they discuss the standing of the Government in the community ?
- PM: No, they didn't.
- Q. Sir to get an idea of the level on which some of the discussions took place, - to pin you down - the discussion on immigration. Did that evolve around a new immigration policy for the Government, unless you already have one, or how you can exploit Labor's policy ?
- PM: Mainly, it centered round the paper that was delivered by the Minister for Immigration, over in Western Australia, an explanation of what it involved, and particularly precautions that were necessary that there could be no possibility of the idea of racism entering into consideration of our policies.
- Q. But this was the speech in which he talked about racism ?
- PM: He made it abundantly clear that there was no racism in our policies.
- Q. Which Minister for Immigration, Dr. Forbes ?
- PM: Dr. Forbes.
- Q. It would appear therefore, that your discussion on immigration was on status quo. Dr. Forbes did not put forward any new.....
- PM: I won't go any further than that because now you are starting to cross-examine me on an aspect that I'm not prepared to be cross-examined on. I said that we are here to give you an outline of what happened at the Standing Committee on Federal Policy, and whatever was discussed, was discussed on the background that it had to go to a Minister or to Cabinet, and that I would not elaborate fully on those until the Minister or Cabinet had considered it.
- Q. You'd said it was based on Dr. Forbes paper
- PM: 'Based upon' is the word I used.
- Q. And Dr. Forbes' paper did not advance policy.....
- PM: I didn't say that at all, I said 'based upon'.
- Q. Sir, it's been suggested that there will be a racist tone in the campaign ?
- PM: There'll be no racist slant to the campaign in any shape or form, and no one, of goodwill and honesty of intention, can think, if they look at the components of our immigration programme, that racism can be involved.

Q. Prime Minister, you suggested that the policy decisions if adopted by the CABinet, and yourself, would be spaced out possibly. That is what the Standing Committee recommended. Do you see that some of these might be acted upon and brought into Parliament before the House rises, say on May 25, or thereabouts ?

PM: I'd be fairly certain that some of them will be because they want them spaced out, and they want the people to understand that work is being done now, and put quickly into operation so that the people get the benefit.

Q. That only gives you seven weeks though ?

PM: Yes, but that's not a bad time.

Q. Sir, what justification is there in holding on to policies until three weeks before the election, at this stage ?

PM: I think if you had a great deal of experience of policy-making and policy speeches, you'd have to accept that no one has ever gone into an election campaign without some policy matters. But that doesn't answer the question. As I put it to you, we will be making policy announcements as and when we can, and we will be trying to do in a pretty regular fashion, and as and when we're in a position to make the policy announcement. In other words, unless there is something quite precisely and definitely associated with the policy speech, we'll make them immediately.

Q. Did you say that to the Policy Committee ?

PM: Yes.

Q. Could I take you a step further on that one?
The...

PM: Alan, which are you talking about. I've been putting the point of view that I have for long that you can't save anything up for the Budget or for a policy speech. You can't do that. And speaking in a background way, I've been like a bullocky driving a bullock team in order to ensure that we do, whenever we can make a decision, we make it and we announce it, and this is now generally accepted.

Q. This was a change of attitude?, I had the impression that policy-planning was in fact planning for your policy speech..

PM: I think you can take it that it is a total change of policy.

Q. You talked them around - you said now 'Let's get the think out as we arrive at it' ?

- PM: And it doesn't only apply to background. It applies to Government as well.
- Q. Sir, I'd like to ask / ^{another} question on immigration that I hope you can clarify. Dr. Forbes' speech which you said was the basis of this discussion, was interpreted in the press publicly as an attempt to raise the issue of Labor opening the flood-gates, and I think Alan wrote a piece calling it a "grubby little speech". Was today's discussion aimed at making sure that this approach wasn't adopted at any Government ?
- PM: I've said that I will go no further because I said it was the basis on which we started to discuss it; I'm not going any further until I take the matter back to Cabinet again and we are definitive on what we're doing. What I will say is that the basis on which we act is one that we are not, and never have been, racist, and that's proved by the number of non-European that we permit to come into the country, and welcome them. And what can be recorded, if you wish to call it, the Oppermann concept which sets out our policy. For the rest, I go no further because we will be having another good look at this, particularly with regard to assisted passages, and then we'll be able to make a decision.
- Q. Did you say numbers of assisted passages for widening it ?
- PM: Look, I'm not going any further on this. That's as far as I'll go.
- Q. I doh't want to ask about Government policy, but from what you've said, immigration will not be an election campaign
- PM: I didn't say that, and I don't mean it.
- Q. Well, on what grounds would it be a campaign issue ?
- PM: I will not go any further than I've already gone.
- Q. PRIME Minister, could you tell me why you called it the "Oppermann concept" . I thought the most recent change in Government policy was the Snedden concept where we did in fact step up our intake of non-Europeans ?
- PM: Yes, but the Oppermann concept is the three conditions on which we accept non-Europeans. But I'm not going any further on the immigration one.
- Q. Could I ask you a question not applying to your policy, but about..... I was in Parramatta last night, and I was shown the Documents had been placed in a letterbox saying 'If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labor'. Do you have any comment on that sort of campaign ?

PM I have never seen one. I hope I don't ever see one. I think it's a disgraceful way of acting.

Q. PM, I realise we are not going any further on immigration.....

PM: Look, I'm not going any further ..

Q. I'd like to decide a point which Mr Reid made, when he looked up in surprise when you said 'you'd be looking at this in the context of assisted passage'. Now you mean assisted passage as we accept it now ?

PM: We'll be looking at this whole question. I go no further than saying that. I'm not going to be drawn in.

Q. Sir, you've already gone to a point where you've made it very major. I mean to say, at present the principle is - assisted passages for Eurorpeans. The Government has stated, as a matter of definitive policy, no assisted passage for non-Eurorpean migrants. Now you are saying you are going to look at assisted passages.

PM: In a different context altogether from the one you're trying to imply that I'm getting into. We are not going to cut down on the number of migrants.

Q. That's the point I want to make clear.

PM: We are not going to cut down on the number.

Q. Will you be putting most of the recommendations from this meeting through CABINET yourself?

PM: No, they go through the relevant Minister.

Q. Just for historical purposes, Sir, why do you say the Oppermann concept and not the whole concept ?

PM: Look, I'm not going any further than that other than the issue was raised and I was just raising the Oppermann concept to explain what our attitude was. And that has not been changed.

Could we have two more questions please ?

PM: Well, look it was a pity that we spent so much time on one subject.

Q. Are you confident that the House will rise as planned ?

PM: I will make a decision on that because I am not going to permit the House to rise until we've finished our business.

- Q. Does that mean Sir, that you are going to keep to your three weeks preliminary - that no legislation can be introduced three weeks before the House rises ?
- PM: We will try. ; But I am not going to raise the House prematurely.
- Q. So it's not a fixed rising period ?
- PM: We will try to the best of our capacity we will try to raise it on that particular date. But if I find that it's going to be a rush, the House is not going to rise.
- Q. Sir, could I ask when we might have a general on-record press conference ?
- PM: You find the time for me.
- Q. Well, Sir, in view of the fact that there hasn't been one this year ?
- PM: Look, I've had a fair amount of exposure. I will try and give you one. My trouble is how I get through the work, as I explained to you when I met you the other night: The only real difficulty I've got. I will.....
- Q. Sir, as an alternative, we got a few minutes left, could we ask you about other subjects now.
- PM: No.
- Q. Will you make any comment on the last public opinion poll ?
- PM: No.
- Q. Any reason why not Sir ?
- PM: I haven't got to answer every question that is asked. And you've formed your opinions and I don't want to get into an argument between yourself and myself.
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