

INTERVIEW

72/45D

With Messrs Bob Baudino and Brian Johns, Perth, 7 May 1972

PM

The Leaders of the Federal Parties in the Commonwealth Parliament to find out if they would take part in a convention.

I wrote to the Leaders of the Country Party, the Labor Party and the D.L.P. and I havenow received letters from each of them expressing their willingness to take part in a Conference. But the Government also made a decision, at least we made a decision, as the Government, that we would be represented. Shortly afterwards, on 19 April to be precise, we considered a submission by the Attorney-General, and I was given authority to convey the decision to Sir Henry, to make an announcement at the appropriate time .

Q You have done that ?

PM I think a letter is ready now. I had to wait until we got one additional letter at that time, and I received that just before I came here. I think I can stress the importance of this Convention because of the rapid change in conditions in Australia, and the need to develop a Constitution that is appropriate to the times, both from the point of view of the Commonwealth and the States, and the desirability of giving some voice to Local Government Authorities.

We took our decision against the background that the fundamental Constitutional role must lie with the Commonwealth Parliament because only the Commonwealth can take the necessary action to have a referendum presented to the Australian people. So that whilst we are willing and anxious to participate, we must do so on the basis that the convention could not bind the Commonwealth.

Shortly I will be submitting a paper to the Leaders of the other Parties so that we can have preliminary discussions prior to having the proposals submitted to the members of each Party for consideration. I've already told the States, after receiving a question in the House, that there was a strong feeling that Local Government should be represented.

Q Can you tell us in the Sir Henry Bolte letter, the points he made ?

PM Well, fundamentally, we would ask the Leaders of the various Parties in the Parliament....

Q Would you spell out where he would like the Constitution altered ?

PM No, so far it's only in a preparatory stage. I'd like very much if subsequent matters could be dealt with in depth.

Q You don't expect anything this year ?

PM We'll have meetings, yes, but to establish the kind of forum, to establish the rules and the framework and the number of representatives from the States and Commonwealth, I doubt whether we can get on to the subject this year.

- Q So this is a long term - it will be right at the top level?
- PM Yes.
- Q It will be yourself, and the State Premiers ?
- PM Yes.
- Q All State Premiers involved ?
- PM Yes. I think we will find though there will be Parliamentary Delegations, for example, we have been thinking of this Preliminary Conference that there should be probably as many as fifteen or eighteen representatives from the Commonwealth Parliament, but that would be without prejudice to larger representations, at a later date.
- Q Eighteen representatives from the Commonwealth Parliament ?
- PM Fifteen to eighteen .
- Q From the Commonwealth alone ?
- PM Yes. We are thinking of it. I'm not saying we are committed to it yet.
- Q This is designed to cover all avenues of the Constitution- All possible points of discussion.
- PM Well, that's going too far yet. I think we wouldn't touching subsequent matters just at the moment, but this is the number of people that we think we could cope with at a preliminary conference.
- Q Well, could I ask what would be the breakdown on this party - would it be Ministerial or official levels?
- PM No, it would be members of both Houses, and members of each of the Parliamentary groups, each of the Parliamentary Parties: drawn from each of the Parliamentary Parties.
- Q When do you think this meeting might take place ?
- PM I could not tell you when it's likely to be, but I understand, THIS PART IS OFF THE RECORD, I rang Greenwood yesterday, because he had been at a conference some time in April, and he'd written to me, telling what happened at the Conference and making several recommendations to me.
- Q That was the Conference in Adelaide - Attorney-Generals just looking at Constitution review ?
- PM Yes.
- Q And this follows on from that I take it - obviously Sir Henry's Attorney-General has gone back and briefed him?

PM This followed - this must have happened in the last few weeks - because this is the Attorney-General's meeting and I have not yet received = I've seen the press release made by the Attorney-General, but I haven't yet got a report from the Attorney as to what happened, or any recommendations that he may have made.

Q What I'm questioning is the timing of Sir Henry Bolte's letter. Sir Henry Bolte wrote to you after the Attorney-Generals' Meeting?

PM No, before. He wrote to me on the 22nd March. I don't have the date the Attorneys met, but it would have been in the last couple of weeks.
