

THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 19 DECEMBER 1972

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen: there is a matter which will be interesting in the next few days, it concerns diplomatic relations with East Germany - the German Democratic Republic.

I have instructed the Australian Ambassador in Moscow to have discussions with his East German colleague there, about the early establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and the German Democratic Republic. These discussions are in progress.

Following the recent moves between West and East Germany to normalise their relations, I consider it is important both for political and commercial reasons to normalise Australia's relations with East Germany. Apart from facilitating trade in both directions, Australian recognition of East Germany would, when agreement is reached, make people in Europe more aware that there is a new government in Australia which is not concentrating on South East Asia and the Pacific to the exclusion of our highly important relations with Europe.

I would also make the point that in opening discussions with the German Democratic Republic I am seeking to avoid situations in which Australia takes general decisions in international affairs late. I would rather see Australia in the vanguard than in the rearguard in coming to its own foreign policy decisions.

MR. BARNARD: Mr. Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen: the Government has decided that because of the heavy burden of defence policy which will fall on the Defence Minister, a second Minister under the policy of higher management direction of the Minister for Defence should be appointed to whom the three services may look for political guidance, and who will answer questions in parliament relating to their particular service interests. He will participate along with the Minister for Defence himself in discussions in the Ministry when the interests of servicemen are involved in matters coming before the Government. The Minister assisting will exercise many of those functions which under existing legislation are conferred on the Minister for the Navy, the Army and Air.

The Government intends, at the second stage and before the end of 1973, to merge into the Department of Defence the three service departments and, if deemed practicable, at the same time the Supply Department. Legislative amendments will be introduced after the plans for organisational change have been prepared by the Secretary of the Department of Defence in consultation with other responsible authorities, and after the Government has made a decision on them. There will be other innovations; the Government will establish standing machinery for assessing the pay and conditions of the armed forces and it will come into effect after the Woodward Committee completes its work. An Ombudsman for the members of the armed services will be appointed after his mandate has been drafted and his relationship with the military disciplinary and command system

has been clearly laid down. As soon as the re-organised Department of Defence is ready to assume the responsibility, the Civil Defence Directorate will be transferred to it from the Department of the Interior, and there will be created a National Disaster Organisation in association with it to cope in co-operation with other civil authorities in Australia with the effects of natural disasters like droughts, floods, fires and cyclones to which Australia is subject. The appointments reflect the Government's intention to give an important priority to maintaining efficient fighting forces controlled by modern administration under a senior Defence Minister. The Government intends to break down the separation of service administration from each other and from the Department of Defence in which respect a number of countries have moved far ahead of Australia.

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen: the last two Conferences, the first two of the three Conferences given by the present administration, were given in the late afternoon. We tried to have the last one in time for the afternoon papers - to have it in the morning. You remember, that that wasn't possible, but we have been able to arrange this one this morning. It might suit your convenience best for the representatives of the afternoon papers to ask the first questions.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, in the field of foreign affairs, has it been made clear to the United States government that your government does not follow the same policy on Vietnam as your predecessors did and are you, at this stage, prepared to deplore the resumption of American bombing of the Hanoi/ Haiphong area?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, naturally we regret that the negotiations for a cease-fire, leading one would hope to a peace settlement, have broken down. There have been no communications on this subject between the United States and the Australian governments. Australia is not a party principal in any way in Vietnam. As you know, the last Australian combatant or training forces have now left the country. Obviously, we hope that the negotiations are soon resumed.

Prime Minister, what about the bombings?

Q. Have you any comment on the bombings to Mr. Matthew's question?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't think a comment would help. We would like to have the negotiations resumed. That's all that I feel I should say.

Q. Have you at last received the communication from the Queensland Premier about the Torres Strait Island border problem? Have you had any representations from the Islanders themselves that you should visit there or see some of their people? What's your latest attitude on this?

PRIME MINISTER: I might have received a reply from Mr. Bjelke-Petersen. I haven't seen it. You can understand that yesterday and today I wouldn't be very much up to the minute on my correspondence. I don't know if he's replied. I did write to him last week on this subject. He must have the letter by now.

Q. Has he said that he's replied?

HAWKINS: I understood that he had written back to you again, but I'm not 100% sure that it was in reply to your letter.

PRIME MINISTER: I don't - I haven't seen a letter from him on this subject.

Q. Sir, will there be a Cabinet meeting before Christmas and what do you see as the most pressing problems or questions to be discussed by the first Cabinet meeting?

PRIME MINISTER: I hope there'll be a Cabinet meeting tomorrow. There will not be many matters that can be dealt with at this notice, but one that I have in mind is the application pending on Thursday before the Public Service Arbitrator about four weeks annual leave for the Public Service. I would like the full Ministry to consider the attitude that should be taken on that application.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, I'm told that the Chinese, in the discussions on recognition, are demanding that your government expropriate all the assets of the Taiwan Government and hand them over to them and, secondly, that we remove even our trade representatives from Taiwan. Are these things that the Government is prepared to negotiate with because they seem to go beyond the Canadian formula that you have laid down as the key to recognition?

PRIME MINISTER: You've been told more than I have. There will be no official representatives in Taiwan once relations are established with Peking. There are - there never have been official representatives of Canada in Taiwan.

Q. Aren't there trade officials?

PRIME MINISTER: I thought not.

Q. Appropo to that particular subject. Could you say what stage has been reached in the negotiations with the People's Republic of China through our ambassador to Paris?

PRIME MINISTER: The discussions are proceeding satisfactorily. I expect that there will be another meeting between the ambassadors quite shortly.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister. If Mr. Barnard can handle five previous portfolios, admittedly with the assistance of an Assistant Minister, how hard will Senator Cavanagh work in Works? Could not the Ministry have, in fact, and the general administration, been cut considerably?

PRIME MINISTER: The practical fact is that no Commonwealth Ministry from now will have less than 27 ministers. I would imagine that Senator Cavanagh, as Minister for Works, will be much more fully engaged than his predecessor in that portfolio.

Q. Sir, have you opened any negotiations with the French Government regarding nuclear tests in the Pacific?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Prime Minister, you indicated prior to the elections that the one Minister would control both the Departments of Labour and Immigration. In the Ministry you announced last night this was not so. Why have you now appointed an individual Minister for Immigration? Does this involve a re-thinking of your immigration policy?

PRIME MINISTER: There have been three or four Ministers who I have said, from time to time, would have two portfolios but who will now be having only one. The reason is largely the reason I've just given, that there have to be portfolios for 27 Ministers. I also had said that Mr. Uren would handle both Urban and Regional Development and Environment and Conservation but he agreed to take only one. I had also said that Mr. Hayden would take both Social Security and Health. He has agreed to take only one and the change in Mr. Cameron's position of taking only one of the two that I'd previously suggested was one which was also taken with his agreement.

Q. This doesn't represent any changes in your thinking on immigration - the change in immigration policy?

PRIME MINISTER: No. No, I'm not quite sure what you mean there.

Q. The fact that immigration will be running down?

PRIME MINISTER: No, the emphasis will be, as you can well see from Mr. Grassby's appointment, in making people who have migrated to Australia happy in this country, and the prime means of bringing other migrants to this country.

Q. Do you intend to give assisted passages to coloured migrants in the near future? If so, when and how many per year?

PRIME MINISTER: I would. The general attitude is, as has been stated for quite some time, the emphasis on who comes here will be not what the Government determines, but what is determined by people who are already living in Australia. Principally, that is the people who are close relatives and close friends of existing residents in Australia will be the migrants who will be coming here. No numbers have ever been stated, but I would think that the number of migrants of all categories will continue, I emphasise continue, to fall.

Q. Will you give assisted passages to the Taiwanese?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll consider that.

Q. How do you regard Australian and British relations now that you're Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: Better.

Q. Prime Minister, following the split between Social Security and Health, will Dr. Everingham and Mr. Hayden both be involved in negotiations, for example with the doctors, or will the Social Security Minister be solely responsible for those negotiations?

PRIME MINISTER: The Social Security Minister will be mainly responsible. There may be occasions when the Health Minister would also be involved in bringing in the new form of health insurance. There will be other matters in which Dr. Everingham would be principally concerned in negotiation with the doctors such as hospitals and clinics.

Q. Would he be involved in discussing with the doctors fees, the question of doctor's fees?

PRIME MINISTER: This would be primarily Mr. Hayden's. I don't say that Dr. Everingham mightn't be involved but this would primarily be a matter for Mr. Hayden. You will appreciate that the Department of Social Security will deal not only with cash social services: it will also deal with health insurance and with the introduction of national superannuation and national compensation.

Q. Sir, do you intend to encourage your Ministers to take up residence in Canberra and do you intend to review the policy of the last government on Ministerial housing?

PRIME MINISTER: This will be considered by the new administration to be sworn in at half past five this afternoon. Where Ministers live will depend, as it always has, on the two considerations of looking after their electorate, which is their base after all, and best performing their administrative duties.

Q. The Hospitals Commission you proposed. When do you envisage setting that up and who will be administering it, Dr. Everingham or Mr. Hayden?

PRIME MINISTER: It would be responsible primarily to Dr. Everingham.

Q. When do you envisage setting it up?

PRIME MINISTER: I think, in an interim form. I would hope quite soon.

Q. I want to clarify a question I asked you last week about a statement you made in July, of which you were apparently unaware, about rehabilitation assistance to people who suffered in the name of conscience under the National Service Act. I've since looked up the reference. I don't know whether you have.

PRIME MINISTER: No I haven't.

Q. It was a telegram you sent to the Reverend Roger Wooten of the Melbourne Presbyterian Church.

PRIME MINISTER: My communications from clergy usually come from other quarters.

Q. Well, this telegram was quoted in the "Age" on the 11th of July 1972. The telegram you sent to him in which you promised rehabilitation assistance for those who had suffered in the name of conscience under the National Service Act. Again, what form will the rehabilitation assistance take. Will it be financial compensation and is financial compensation being considered for draft resisters who went underground?

PRIME MINISTER: I would guess that the answer I sent to this gentleman would be quoting the resolution at the Launceston Conference last year. I would doubt if I went any further than that, but I've given no further consideration to this matter. It's obviously a matter for the new Government to consider if it's to be considered at all.

Q. In view of Mr. Cameron's rather gloomy forecasts about the future employment situation and the high priority which you gave to this in your election campaign, what remedial action can you take in addition to the action already taken through the States? Is there any program in your mind for setting up plans to absorb the unemployed persons?

PRIME MINISTER: I've received a letter from Sir Robert Askin, along with several proposals for employment which can be rapidly increased in various fields through public expenditure in New South Wales along the lines that have been arranged with the four southern States already. I think this letter came yesterday and I'll be discussing it with Mr. Crean today, but the form of Commonwealth assistance to get people back to work will largely be in the form that's already been taken.

Q. With regard to your own area of responsibility, could you explain specifically your responsibility to the Tariff Board and how this fits in with the functions of the Department of Secondary Industry and, the second question, do you know at this stage when Parliament will meet?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't know when Parliament will meet. This will be a matter which will be discussed by the new Ministry. About the Tariff Board; you'll remember that the proposal that we were making earlier this year was that the Tariff Board should be extended and perhaps renamed "Protection Commission" in order to have references, not only in respect to secondary industry from the Department of Trade and Industry which is now being abolished, but also from the new Department of Secondary Industry and from the continuing Department of Primary Industry and from the continuing Department of Customs and Excise, the whole idea being that the Tariff Board, or its enlarged and maybe renamed successor, would investigate and, if it sees fit, recommend the forms of encouragement for protection by way of tariff or subsidies or grants - research grants - in both primary as well as secondary industry.

Q. Prime Minister, have you had a chance yet to have a look at the proposed Cabinet Committee system? How many Committees will there be, what will be their names and to what extent will they be able to make decisions on behalf of the Cabinet? And, also, could you explain why you've transferred Primary Industry from the Reps to the Senate?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't considered yet the Cabinet Committee system. I've done a little study of it - for instance, on the Canadian model. All I can say at this stage is that it's unlikely that the Cabinet Committees will make decisions on behalf of the Cabinet. What may happen is that the Cabinet Committees would make a recommendation to the Cabinet and that would become the Cabinet decision if no other Ministers objected to it and asked for the matter to be re-opened. You also asked me about the transfer of Primary Industry from the House of Representatives to the Senate. There is, of course, no requirement for any Ministry to be in either House except, I suppose, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have to be in the House of Representatives. Any other Minister can be in either House, and I would think every Ministry, hitherto, at one stage or another has been represented in each House.

Q. Prime Minister, some pensioners have complained a little that they haven't received an immediate increase as you had promised in your policy speech, and I would like to ask how it's possible that you're able to find a loophole in terms of getting draft resisters out of gaol and not being able to give a pension increase?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I'm sorry that any pensioners have made that complaint because I never made any promise in the Policy Speech of an immediate increase. I said there would be in Autumn, and there will be - in Autumn - quite early after the House sits. However, I never said there would be one before Autumn. I said that, thereafter, there would be twice a year, Spring and Autumn thereafter.

Q. Reading the policy speech though it does, in fact, say an immediate increase?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think it does. There was no suggestion that there would be any increase before the Parliament met. There can't be, can there?

Q. If I may just supplement that one. You were able to find a loophole in terms of conscription, and draft resisters were let out of gaol.

PRIME MINISTER: There was no expenditure of money required there. You can't expend money on social services except by authorisation of the Parliament, and payment of social services comes out of the National Welfare Fund - I think it is - to which the contributions are made under amending social services acts. I haven't got a copy of the policy speech with me but I never came across any misunderstanding on this matter at all. The promise was that there would be an increase of \$1.50 when the Parliament met next year and thereafter every Spring and Autumn until the pension reached 25% instead of the present 20% of the average weekly male earnings.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, a question on your announcement at the weekend of a scheme to favour Australian-owned companies in the allocation of government contracts?

PRIME MINISTER: That was in the policy speech.

Q. Do you envisage the situation of tenders equal in price and availability arising very often? If tenders equal in price and availability do arise often, this is not a matter for the collusive tendering provisions of the Trade Practices Act?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it would be.

Q. If they don't arise often what benefit - real benefit - will the scheme have for Australian-owned companies and the second point; have you any details of the criteria for determining Australia ownership? If those details haven't been worked out yet, why was the scheme announced by the interim administration and not announced in full detail so that companies who could be affected by it can find out all the details by the second Whitlam Ministry?

PRIME MINISTER: The present administration carried out as many of the proposals in the party platform and in the policy speech as it could do in the time available to it. This was one of the proposals in the policy speech. It was particularly mentioned in the policy speech in connection with Commonwealth purchases of petrol and oil. The present situation, as I understand it, is that if tenders are equal then they go to the company which previously had the order, the contract. Presumably, therefore, there have been cases hitherto where people have made the same tender. Now, in that case, there may be in the future. If this happens in the future, instead of going to the old supplier it would go to the Australian supplier. As you will remember in the press statement I made two days ago, current contracts for petroleum products will not expire before the end of 1973. I've been investigating this as regards the Department of Supply by way of questions in the last Parliament, but there are a considerable number of instrumentalities where I was unable to find the position in the last Parliament. It now appears that all the contracts go on until the end of 1973. Now, if by 1973 some of the other oil companies achieve the favourable position of Ampol or even H.C. Sleight then they will continue to get some of the Commonwealth contracts which hitherto they seem to have been largely monopolised.

Q. The question of the criteria of Australian ownership. Has that been resolved?

PRIME MINISTER: No. There are various criteria which have already been laid down in Commonwealth legislation. Ampol would clearly comply with this and maybe H.C. Sleight but it would appear that the other companies which have Commonwealth contracts at this stage do not.

Q. May I ask, through you, Mr. Barnard a couple of current issues on defence? First of all, the Woodward Committee reported to you, I think last Friday, on the outstanding items which included possible pay rises. It was mentioned that these pay rises could cost \$70 million. How soon do you expect to be able to implement these last matters and also, on the D.F.R.B., you had meetings also last week on the D.F.R.B., which I believe are being

tidied up this week. Are you encountering any unforeseen difficulties in carrying out the policy promise to implement the D.F.R.B. Jess Committee's Report as quickly as possible?

MR. BARNARD: Well, first of all on the Woodward Committee Report. I received it last Friday afternoon. That allowed me some time over the weekend to look at it myself. Now, it's a very comprehensive report. It is true that it will involve the Government in additional expense but it is in line with our policy undertakings to improve the conditions of serving members of the armed forces. Naturally, I want sufficient time to be able to carefully consider the proposals before I have further discussions about the Woodward Committee's report with the Prime Minister. Now, I hope to do that as soon as possible because we have said that we will provide improved conditions for serving members of the forces as soon as possible. I believe this is a very valuable and significant report and, therefore, I hope to have the discussions as soon as possible and then the decision will be one for the new Government to determine when legislation is introduced into the Federal Parliament. But we have also said that we would want to make reports available to the public and those interested in them as soon as possible. I can assure you that I'll be moving, as soon as practicable, to have the report made available to the media after consultation with the Prime Minister. Now, the second part of the question was on the Defence Forces Retirement Benefit Fund. Again, it was a policy decision during the last election that we would implement the recommendations of the Jess Committee. Now, I began last week by having discussions with those concerned; with the Treasury Department and from the armed services. I have indicated to them that I would hope to have legislation ready for the first session of the Federal Parliament. This, of course, will depend on some administrative matters, the availability of the necessary machinery to provide the legislation. But, I will be having further discussions again this week on matters concerning the D.F.R.B. and it will, as I have said, be introduced as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, on the subject of primary industry again. Only the second time since Mr. McMahon became the first Minister in the early fifties has this job fallen to a non-farmer. In view of the fact that the previous farmer representative in the previous government was ranked about fourth or fifth in the Cabinet - with due respect to Senator Wreidt - why has the position been so downgraded?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know where primary industry has ranked in the Ministerial list hitherto. I think the highest position it ever reached was in the last Government and that was merely for the reason that it was held by the Deputy Leader of the Country Party. It was not because of the Department, it was because of the party position of the Minister.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, I'd like to know who's going to authorise the tapping of our telephones? Could you tell us about the relationship of ASIO to the government, and are there any new arrangements there?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. It stays with Senator Murphy does it?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q. Sir, on tariffs. Which department will now carry the overall responsibility for moulding general tariff courses?

PRIME MINISTER: This is probably one of those matters which will be discussed by one of the Cabinet committees. Tariff Board matters will only be defused - to use your term - because there will be, for the first time, an investigation of protection in various forms for primary products, not, as hitherto, secondary products alone. The administration is already pretty defused because two Ministers hitherto have been able to refer matters to the Tariff Board for enquiry and report, the Minister for Trade and Industry - formerly I think it used to be Customs and Agriculture wasn't it?.....Commerce and Agriculture...and then, of course, Customs and Excise can do so.

Q. Sir, will we have an early increase in members' pay and, if so, will this mean an increase in ministerial pay?

PRIME MINISTER: I do like the lilt in your voice! This has not been considered by the present ministry. As you probably know, their emoluments have not been increased for years. Mr. Barnard and I are drawing the emoluments, and I've seen that Senator Murphy and Senator Willesee continue to receive them although they would otherwise have lost the emoluments we were all receiving in the last Parliament and no more at this stage.

PRIME MINISTER: Incidentally, on this I forget the calculations but technically Mr. Barnard and I could have taken, for this fortnight, the whole of the ministerial pool.

Q. On that subject, Sir, at the moment there are senior ministers and junior ministers who receive differing pay scales. I think you are going to be an egalitarian minister, you're receiving the same salary.

PRIME MINISTER: You are quite right.

Q. Will your salary drop or will the others increase?

PRIME MINISTER: They might.

Q. There is a point, Sir, related to that. What sort of staffing facilities do you think the Government will provide for the Liberal and Country Parties so that they can carry out their mandate to oppose?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll have to....they will get better staffing facilities than the previous Opposition, and they'll probably need it. This is a matter where, clearly, the new ministry will have to discuss the matter and the method of communication in the first instance is between the leaders of the various parties. When the Liberals choose their new Leader then, presumably, he and Mr. Anthony and I will have a discussion on this matter and then the Ministry will have a discussion upon it.

Mr. Anthony did approach me about this. He was very quick off the mark but I told him that he could go ahead on the basis that his staff should be not smaller than that which Mr. Barnard enjoyed in the last Parliament, and he has taken up residence. I hope the Speaker approves of it.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, in view of the meeting, I think early next month, with Mr. Hamer and Sir Robert Askin on the development of Albury/Wodonga. Have any instructions been issued cancelling or deferring the transfer of departments to Canberra and, in particular, the building of office blocks - further office blocks - for the Public Service in Melbourne or Sydney?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

I'm not sure that there wasn't...I said no orders had been given. I'm not sure there wasn't something on the proposed Woolloomooloo Commonwealth building. You'll remember that the Public Works Committee reported against it. Now, I...if you're interested in this matter perhaps I'd better look it up and see precisely if anything has happened since then, but otherwise there hasn't been.

Q. Will Dr. Patterson be answering for Primary Industry union representatives and, if so, what will be the inter-actio n between Northern Development and Primary Industry?

PRIME MINISTER: Off hand, the principal relation between the two will be in sugar and in cattle but administratively they would be sepa rate departments. You ask me if Dr. Patterson would be the Minister in the House of Representatives representing the Minister for Primary Industry. I haven't discussed the question of representation in either House with any of my colleagues but I would expect that Dr. Patterson would be the Minister in the House of Representatives representing the Minister for Primary Industry.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, can you name the new Permanent Heads of the departments you outlined last night and, if not, when can we expect to have the names of the new Pe rmanent Heads?

PRIME MINISTER: This is a matter where the new ministers will be having discussions with the Public Service Board, and then when they have recommendations they'll make them to the Cabinet which will then make the appointments. I don't know how soon this can be done but it may be possible to do it more quickly in some departments than in others. Some of the new departments are ones where it may not be possible to find a properly qualified person in the Commonwealth Service.

Q. Have you given any thought to the invitations you might like to extend during the coming period to heads of governments or heads of State from other countries - we've talked at previous press conferences about yourself visiting China, do you intend to invite anybody here? In terms of a European Leader, might you be thinking of the Chancellor of West Germany who is the Head of the fraternal party?

PRIME MINISTER: It's too soon to say. It's a happy thought. I appreciate your reference to the Leader of our brother party

in West Germany.

Q. On the question of Mr. Cameron's rather gloomy predictions for unemployment, do you expect now that you will quickly bring in higher unemployment benefits? If so, when and what do you see as a reasonable figure for unemployment benefits?

PRIME MINISTER: This is a matter where the new Ministry will make decisions. Higher benefits will have to await legislation. I think that these are benefits which have remained unaltered longer than any except maternity allowances and child endowment.

Q. I believe Lord Carrington, Britain's Defence Minister, is coming out in January. Can you indicate what might be discussed with him?

PRIME MINISTER: I've said that weI think I said this a fortnight ago...but there has been further correspondence and I have repeated the fact that we'll be very happy to have discussions with him on the whole range of matters which he likes to bring up on behalf of his Government.

Q. You said a fortnight ago that a question on the Honours list was premature. Do you now confirm that there'll be no Commonwealth list in the coming New Year's list, and are you seeking or have you received any proposals from your department on an alternative Australian system of recognition?

PRIME MINISTER: This is a matter of some delicacy. All I want to say is : no persons were sounded on their willingness to receive Awards in a New Year's Honours list on the nomination of the Australian Government. I say that because some people have suggested that there's been a breach of faith or a humiliation. No persons were sounded about any honours from the Australian Government.

I'm assured that no soundings were made. I've read reports that some former ministers had been recommended for honours. I have not asked to see any civilian honours lists. I'm assured no soundings were made. There was one former private member I noticed, according to the papers, had been recommended for a Knighthood.

Q. Who was that?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd only be repeating newspaper speculation. All I can say about it is that it would have been the most remarkable knighthood since Sir Toby Belch. A fortnight ago, I did say that I was seeking a report on appropriate recognition of long service or gallantry in the armed forces or in the uniformed services. This would not....I've not received it, but I didn't ask for it as a matter of urgency. I would not expect it to come to hand for quite some weeks. There would be no recommendations by this Government, accordingly, for people in the armed forces or the uniformed services - I mean people like fire brigades and police forces.

Q. Can you report on the progress of moves to close the Rhodesian Information Centre in Sydney, and also following the latest and yet more stories of Francis James' imminent release from China can you give us any information about this? Can you tell us the latest situation?

PRIME MINISTER: I wrote, you may remember, to Sir Robert Askin about the registration of a so-called Rhodesian Information Office under a New South Wales Act. He wrote back to me, in effect, acknowledging the letter. Now, I might have had a letter yesterday or today but due to the pressure of work, as you can imagine, I'm a bit behind with the letters. I've not seen a substantive reply. On Mr. Francis James, the answer is exactly the same as it was last time.

Q. Could you give us your tip for who might be elected Leader of the Opposition by the Liberals?

PRIME MINISTER: I've had some big problems on my plate in the last fortnight but none as great as this. Gentlemen, this apparently is the last question at the concluding press conference of this ministry. Therefore, may I take the opportunity of saying that we will try to follow the same procedure in the new Ministry. In the meantime, we wish you - as we wish ourselves - a restful holiday.

Q. And prosperous?

PRIME MINISTER: I hope so. I hope it's a prosperous New Year but this will require quite a deal of Government action. In the meantime, a Happy Christmas for us all.