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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 9 JANUARY 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen: As you know we had a Cabinet meeting this morning and this afternoon, and there are quite a number of announcements which I will make arising from that meeting. Many of my colleagues will be making further statements on some of the subjects which fall within their province.

First of all, the Governor-General has signed the Proclamation calling Parliament together on Tuesday 27 February. A special Gazette is being issued. The presiding officers, Sir William Aston and Sir Magnus Cormack have been informed.

All but two departments have now had their permanent heads appointed. The permanent heads who were appointed today are as follows:

Department of Aboriginal Affairs:	Mr Barry Dexter
Department of the Capital Territory:	Mr Engledow
Department of the Environment and Conservation :	Dr Donald Frederick McMichael - he is not a member of the Commonwealth Service. He is an outstanding member of the New South Wales Public Service.
Department of the Media :	Mr Jim Oswin - also not a member heretofore of the Commonwealth Public Service but the Head of the Channel 7 network, and a man with exceptional experience in newspapers, radio, television and advertising: We regard ourselves as very fortunate to have secured the services of Dr McMichael and Mr Oswin
Department of the Northern Territory:	Mr Allen O'Brien
Department of Secondary Industry:	Mr Frank Pryor
Department of Social Security:	Dr Wienholt
Department of the Special Minister of State :	Mr Peter Lawler
Department of Tourism and Recreation:	Mr Lloyd Bott, D.S.C.

The vacancy on the Australian Broadcasting Commission has been filled by Mr Hal Lashwood, who has been the General President of Actors Equity for the last 21 years. All these appointments were made by the Executive Council at half past one today.

I might draw your attention to the fact that the appointment of Dr Stephen FitzGerald as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China is being announced today. A press release is being issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The advance party to establish an Embassy in Peking will be crossing into China tomorrow, Wednesday, the 10th of January.

Now matters of legislation: I'll ask you to bear with me because I have to look through the Cabinet papers, and there may be a few pauses as I come to various paragraphs.

Cabinet authorised the preparation of a Death Penalty Abolition Bill. This will be based on the bill which was introduced into the Senate by Senator Murphy in April 1971, and which passed the Senate in March last year but which was allowed to remain on the Notice Paper in the House of Representatives.

Cabinet authorised the preparation of enabling legislation to remove the excise on wine. We authorised the preparation of legislation enabling the removal of the sales tax on contraceptives. We authorised the preparation of legislation to amend the National Health Act to provide that oral contraceptives which have been by regulation made available on doctors' prescriptions will be incorporated in the schedules of the Act as the Act requires in respect of any provisions which are made by regulation.

We authorised the preparation of legislation along the lines of the amendment which Mr Cameron moved in the last Parliament to the Compensation (Commonwealth Employees) Act in effect saying that there will be no reduction of income for people who are injured in the service of the Commonwealth during the period of their incapacity.

Now all of these are legislation unless I state otherwise:

To extend the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme to include all children of Aboriginal descent attending secondary schools and classes from the beginning of this year and to continue to assist the small number of children of primary level who have reached the school leaving age. And, provision is being made that education officers of the Federal Department will visit each student receiving benefit at least once a term.

Legislation to adopt the principles of maternity leave for Commonwealth employees for 6 weeks before the expected date of confinement and 6 weeks thereafter, this maternity leave to operate from the first of January this year.

Legislation to lower the franchise for Federal elections to 18, and to lower the age for candidature at Federal elections to 18. There are some States in which such legislation has already been passed but is awaiting gazettal depending on Federal action. The practice has been in the case of States where there are common Federal and State electoral rolls, for the two governments to share the expense. We will share the expense of preparing rolls for 18, 19 and 20-year-old men and women in anticipation of this legislation being passed. This has particular relevance to Victoria where an

election is pending and where enrolment is compulsory, and to South Australia where an election is pending but where, State-wise, enrolment is optional.

Cabinet authorised the Minister for Minerals and Energy to confer consent under the Petroleum Submerged Lands Act with respect to farm-in agreements between Burmah-Woodside Consortium and Mt. Isa Mines Limited. Cabinet authorised the Attorney-General to draft legislation combining broadly the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill which was introduced in 1970, and the Minerals Submerged Lands Bill which was promised at that time. I have sent telegrams to all the Premiers informing them of these decisions.

Cabinet authorised the Minister for Minerals and Energy to confer with the State Mines Ministers with respect to construction and operation of a national pipeline system.

A Committee of Cabinet is meeting tonight to draw up terms of reference for an inquiry into the Postmaster-General's Department. There are a very great number of matters which have arisen in the election campaign, in the policy speech, in recent times concerning the whole operations of the Post Office, regional basis, concessions, different categories of mail, capital and running expenses.

Another committee of Cabinet is to make a report by the end of March on the proposal for an international airport at Townsville for the purpose of encouraging tourism. Mr Stewart, the Minister, will be the chairman of that Committee.

Cabinet approved the provision of additional funds of up to \$5 million for War-Service Homes in the current financial year. If this had not been done, a waiting period would have had to be introduced for six months.

Aged, invalid and widows pensions: you will remember that in my policy speech I said "all pensions will immediately be raised by \$1.50 and thereafter every Spring and every Autumn the basic pension rate will be raised by \$1.50 until it reaches 25 per cent of average weekly earnings".

The increases will be raised for aged and invalid pensions by \$1.50. They will be paid as soon as possible after the legislation is passed by the two Houses, and payments will be paid at that increased rate from the first full pension period after the day of the elections, the 2nd day of last month.

The old categories of widows pensions (B) and (C) will be abolished. All widows receiving (B) and (C) pensions will receive a pension and the pension for widows will be increased by at least \$1.50; i.e. every widow will receive \$21.50 soon after the legislation passes the two Houses and the additional rates will be paid as from the first full pay period after the date of the elections.

The position of repatriation benefits will be considered probably next Tuesday.

Unemployment and sickness benefits and special benefits will be paid at the rate of aged, invalid and widows pensions; i.e. \$21.50 for a single person, and \$37.50 for a married couple as from the 1st March. There has hitherto been payable an additional benefit of \$4.50 a week for all children up to 16 years of age.

We have authorised an amendment to the Act to make that payment available to all full-time dependent students without limitation of age.

Now there's something on the French Nuclear tests... The Australian Government has communicated its position to the French Government that the conducting of the tests would be unlawful, and has invited an assurance that no more atmospheric tests would be held either this year or in the future. And in the event of the Australian Government not receiving satisfactory assurances from the French Government, the Australian Government proposes to institute proceedings in the International Court of Justice to restrain the conducting of future tests in the Pacific by the French Government.

Q. Prime Minister: Can I ask you about your communications with the French Ambassador before he left for Paris?

PRIME MINISTER: The note was delivered to the French Foreign Office by Australia's Ambassador, Mr Alan Renouf - I think on the 3rd of January.

Now I think those are all that I can say at the moment.

Q. Is there any time limit on the assurance of the French Government?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. It is sort of indefinitely any time this year?

PRIME MINISTER: Any undue lapse of time would be taken as a refusal to give the assurances invited.

Q. Well, would you consider an undue lapse of time?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd like to take advice on that. This is the first time that any nuclear power has been invited to give such assurances.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, have you asked the President to give a similar assurance about illegal bombing of North Vietnam?

PRIME MINISTER: I've written to the President, as you know, 20 days ago and our attitude was made known to the President also at the State Department when our Charge called there and more recently I think it was yesterday when our Ambassador called there. Also, of course, it has been made known to the American Ambassador in Canberra when he called last week on two occasions on the Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Department, Sir Keith Waller, and when he called on me yesterday.

Q. Prime Minister, supplementary to that: Have you had discussions with the United States Government or the U.S. Embassy about the purposes of the various American bases in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. You have not?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Can you tell us if any of their purposes are involved in the logistics of the American presence in Vietnam?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm assured they are not. I've been very careful to make all possible inquiries on that issue - I'm assured that they have no bearing on any operations in Indo-China.

Q. Can you tell us if you will be seeing the Americans about the full purposes of the bases and will you be able to make these purposes public either to members of Parliament or to the Australian people generally?

PRIME MINISTER: I've had full briefings some weeks ago by the Australian Foreign Affairs and Defence Departments and the matter is being considered by Mr Barnard.

Q. Why have you remained silent over the last 10 days on the U.S. union boycott, especially, in view of the fact that you've already sent a note of protest to the President? Secondly, will you now disclose the contents of the note? Thirdly, did Cabinet today consider the boycott? If so, have you any announcement to make on that particular point?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, let me take it in reverse order. Cabinet did not consider this matter. It was not mentioned.

PRIME MINISTER: What was the second one?

Q. Contents of the note?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I won't disclose the contents of the note. It would be quite exceptional to disclose the contents of notes between governments unless they both agree.

Q. Will they be tabled in the Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: This again would be quite exceptional. I've said nothing on this because I don't believe by grandstanding on this issue a quicker solution could have been achieved than has been achieved. And furthermore I wanted to keep a sense of proportion in this matter. What is the significant thing for the Australian Government, or the Australian Foreign Minister, to be concerned with? A shipping strike or bombing strikes? I concentrated on the issue in hand - the important one.

Q. How would you have been grandstanding if you had made any comment on this?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I could have got even right across the front page of your paper, or any paper, if I had said anything on this issue. But ladies and gentlemen, I at least have kept a sense of proportion, even if not everybody in Australia or elsewhere has done so. There are 2 ships involved - 2 ships: One a cruise liner and the other, I think, a container ship. Two ships.

Q. Have you told your Ministers not to make statements on foreign policy?

PRIME MINISTER: The Cabinet didn't discuss this matter either, but I can assure you...

Q. I asked you whether you have asked your Ministers?

PRIME MINISTER: All I choose to say is that there will be no further statements on foreign policy except by the Minister. But I would like you to understand that some of the statements that have been made were made pursuant to arrangements concluded days or a couple of weeks before while the bombing was proceeding.

Q. Do you feel that the Australian-American relationship has been damaged by the events of the last couple of weeks?

PRIME MINISTER: No, not the events of two or three weeks ago; by the resumption of the bombing.

Q. How would you like to describe what the current state of play in Australian-American relations are at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER: Following the cessation of the bombing and the resumption of talks the relations have improved. The only cloud on the horizon in relations between the United States and Australia arose when the bombing was resumed.

Q. Was that indicated to you by the Ambassador, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, what indicated?

Q. The damaged state of relations between the two countries?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't say what passes between the Ambassador and me or between any of our representatives and representatives of the American Government. I'm just stating as a fact if the bombing had not been resumed relations between the present Australian Government and the United States Government would be better than they had ever been since the Second World War between any Australian Government and any American Administration. The difference is that in the period before the Labor Party in Australia was enthusiastic and co-operative with what the President and Administration was understood to be undertaking and desiring to achieve, and our opponents, the former Government, were sulky and sullen as they had been ever since the President took his great initiative to bring about a detente with China. We were the co-operative ones. We were the enthusiastic ones. We weren't hesitant, we weren't sulky.

Q. When you said just now that the statements made by the Ministers had been pursuant to arrangements in the last two weeks, do you mean that you approved the statements criticizing the President made by Dr Cairns and Mr Cameron?

PRIME MINISTER: No, not all of them.

Q. Some of them?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, what did you mean by that statement that some of the statements had been made by prior arrangements? I think Mr Uren spoke at the pleasant Sunday afternoon as a result of the arrangements which were made about a fortnight before - while the bombing was on.

Q. Had he told you what he was going to say?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Did any of the Ministers clear their statements with you beforehand?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Sir, which parts of the statements by Mr Cameron and Dr Cairns don't you approve of?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll not go over this issue at all. I'm not going to say anything on this issue which would be interpreted or alleged as in any way impeding the progress of the talks in Paris.

Q. Can I ask then something in relation to your approach to foreign policy concerning the United States?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q. The previous Government made much of the fact that, as far as they were concerned, the U.S.-Australia alliance was vital to the security of Australia. Do you continue to subscribe to that?

PRIME MINISTER: I regard, - I've said quite recently, on the eve of Christmas I think it was, that I thought that the ANZUS Treaty was our crucial international treaty and what goes on in Vietnam, what has gone on in Vietnam, has not been under ANZUS.

Q. Now that the dispute over shipping appears to be on the way to being solved ...

PRIME MINISTER: I thought it had been completely ...

Q. Yes, the seamen have agreed. Are you now prepared to say what you think of the merits and demerits of the boycott?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I don't believe that any such action helps in any way because it distracted attention from the big issue - the bombing that was then going on.

Q. Did you convey that feeling to the seamen?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I've not spoken to any officials of the unions involved. I've regarded this as a matter which was appropriate for solution in the industrial context, and that's where it has been solved.

Q. Sir, do you think they were morally correct?

PRIME MINISTER: I make no comment on this. As I say, I'm not going to say anything which anybody can allege or construe as impeding the resumed negotiations. Our whole objective has been to get the negotiations resumed. Our sole interest in Vietnam now is to put an end to the war and to help in rehabilitating the country.

Q. Mr Prime Minister: You wrote a personal letter to the President. Have you received a personal response from him?

PRIME MINISTER: No. He has, however, acted in the way that I hoped he would.

I think Frank here, has been waiting for a second one longer than you. May I compliment you on the birth of my god-daughter.

Q. Mr Prime Minister - have you had any consultations or any information from Washington to assist you in assessing the progress of these negotiations?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Have you been taken into the confidence of the American Government?

PRIME MINISTER: No, we do not regard ourselves as involved in any way in the hostilities. No, the Party's Platform provides, and the people gave the party a mandate to do two things: to end Australian participation in the war and to oppose the continuation of the war. Now, we have completely stopped our participation in the war. Our opponents had, in fact, withdrawn all fighting men, and aircraft and ships and tanks. We, as you know, have withdrawn the training teams and have cancelled the military assistance. We are continuing the civil aid. We stand ready to give greater civil aid when the country is in a sufficient state of tranquility to be rehabilitated. But, I'd like to emphasize that our Government has a mandate to do all it can to stop the continuation of this war and I hope this is quite clear to everyone in Australia and abroad. It's our duty to do it. It's been the Party's program since the first Federal Conference after my becoming Leader. We are opposed to a continuation of the war and to Australia's participation in it.

Q. You said, some time ago, that you thought one of the things we could do in Australia, in an independent sense, although we're not actively involved, is to try and bring about a rapprochement between China and Japan. I was wondering, again, in an active sense - a rapprochement between America and North Vietnam - what we could do in an active sense and whether you had anything in mind in view of this stated aim of trying to end the war?

PRIME MINISTER: I think what is required is a continuation of the patient deliberations which are required of both Washington and Hanoi, and I'm sure - I know - that is the view of the Japanese Government also, with whom we have been in consultation.

Q. Do you believe that the retaliatory action of the American longshoremen in boycotting Australian goods was either encouraged or suggested by Washington?

PRIME MINISTER: I would never make such an offensive supposition. I mean I assume the trade unions don't make the foreign policy of the American Administration. I assume the American Administration doesn't control the affairs of the American trade unions. In fact the union concerned, I believe, had a boycott - a total boycott - of many foreign flagships on the east coast and the gulf coast of the United States for over twenty years and successive Administrations were powerless to end the boycott. I don't want to belittle the ideological purity of the union concerned. I'm told that their latest boycott was on the importation of some Mao dolls made in Czechoslovakia weren't they? Ireland ... which half? your part or ours?

Q. In practical terms what happens - what did happen in the past ten days when Australian-American relations weren't so good? That's one question. Secondly, if the Americans did start bombing North Vietnam again what would the Australian Labor Government do? Can you tell us the answer to those two questions?

PRIME MINISTER: The first one: both sides went back to the conference table. The second one: I will not limit myself to a private letter, but I will be making a public statement.



Q. Did Cabinet consider revaluation compensation today?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Will it be considering it tomorrow?

PRIME MINISTER: No. It wasn't mentioned today. It's not on the Agenda.

Q. Have you had any estimate of the magnitude of economic stimulus that would be provided by the welfare measures you've announced, and do you feel further stimulus to the economy will be required soon?

PRIME MINISTER: I think you had better speak on this to Mr Crean and Mr Hayden who prepared the submissions. The welfare measures will be quite a considerable stimulus to the economy because they will put purchasing power into the hands of people who have the smallest purchasing power in the community and who purchase necessities.

Q. How much will the increased pensions and unemployment benefits cost?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Hayden will give you that.

Q. I notice in the list of Cabinet Committees which was handed out before you arrived that while Mr Enderby is listed under both of his portfolios..

PRIME MINISTER: Oh yes, thanks. I'm sorry.

Q. ... Dr Cairns is listed in the Economic Committee only as Minister for Secondary Industry. Does this mean a reduction in the importance and in the policy advising role in the Department of Overseas Trade, and if so, for what reason?

PRIME MINISTER: I thank you for raising this. I meant to say we appointed five committees. Their names are: Economic, Welfare, Foreign Affairs and Defence, Urban and Regional Development and Legislation. You ask specifically about Dr Cairns appearing as Minister for Secondary Industry in the Economic Committee and as Minister for Overseas Trade in the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee. The point is that Dr Cairns is on each of those Committees. The Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee will not be confined to the affairs within the jurisdiction of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence. It will cover the whole field of investment, overseas control, resources, trade, international banking and it is for this reason that the Treasurer is on it. The Minister for Overseas Trade, who of course is responsible for the international ramifications of the Departments of Secondary Industry, Primary Industry, National Development and while, of course, both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister are on it and the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate are both on it there is an additional significance in Senator Murphy being on it as Attorney-General, because we lay so much emphasis on the reinforcement - the application of international law and order through conventions, the World Court and so on. So Dr Cairns is on in the Foreign Affairs and Defence one because Overseas Trade obviously bears on a very great number of these matters and he is on in Secondary Industry because this concerns so much the internal economy. Perhaps I should say a bit more about it - time's getting on - and

- I should have mentioned this earlier. The procedure will be that when submissions for Cabinet come to me from individual Ministers I will send them to the relevant Committee. The Committee will hopefully make a recommendation on them, they will then be listed on the Cabinet Agenda and the recommendation also listed and unless anybody wants to debate it further automatically the recommendation will become the Cabinet decision. The members of the Committees are under an obligation to attend the meetings of the Committee but any other Minister will be entitled to attend and hopefully will do so when on the documents of which every Minister will receive a copy, he sees that his Department is involved.

Q. Sir, could one assume that the Department of Overseas Trade will not make recommendations to the Economic Committee?

PRIME MINISTER: No, this is largely academic because the Minister for Overseas Trade will, of course, be attending meetings of the Economic Committee because he is also Minister for Secondary Industry.

Q. Will the Economic Committee draft the Budget Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: The Cabinet will do that, but I imagine the Economic Committee will have quite a deal to do with it in preparations, but, obviously, all these things and particularly a matter of such overwhelming importance as the Budget is a matter which I would expect the whole Cabinet will discuss. I'd be quite surprised if the Economic Committee's recommendations on the Budget were not further discussed by the whole Cabinet.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, is there anything more concrete on the move for talks with the Queensland Premier about the Torres Strait boundaries?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm still awaiting a reply. Perhaps I should say - I'm going from memory here - that I wrote to Mr Bjelke-Petersen on the Torres Strait Island question on the 15th of last month. The suggestion I put to him was in the same terms as the suggestion that was made to Mr McMahon by his Ministers. So I wouldn't have thought there was any political difficulty federally in putting these suggestions. They were proposed to my predecessor - I made the decision to send them on.

Q. Second question, Sir. Do you agree with Mr Gordon Bryant on the need for a referendum of some sort among the islanders and the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't comment on remarks made by my colleagues, but frankly I'm not going to get into the habit of commenting on reports which are made of or attributed to my colleagues.

Q. R. Sorby, Financial Review... In outlining your list...

PRIME MINISTER: Your one of the few members of the staff still on the Financial Review aren't you? Oh, are you under offer too? I mean John Fairfax has been very good to us - Jim Osmond and all these other members of the staff of the Financial Review.

Q. The initiatives you outlined for the next few months... you didn't put down any priorities on them? Have you any priorities for the legislation itself? Which particular one will be first off the rank, and secondly, on the offshore mineral question - offshore sovereignty - to what extent does this effect the offshore petroleum legislation?

PRIME MINISTER: It won't affect it. You'll notice the wording was quite careful. Broadly, it would combine the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill of 1970 and the Minerals Submerged Lands Bill mentioned by Mr Swartz I think it was acting on behalf of the then Foreign Minister, Mr McMahon, at the same time. Now, you ask what priorities there are here. We have naturally been concerned at having as much legislation drafted as we can for this coming session or period to carry out our program, and the fact that I have mentioned certain things today doesn't mean that these will necessarily be the first to be implemented. Obviously those in the Social Services field will be brought in. They'll be brought in, in the first day or so. There ought to be no difficulty in drafting them, but some of the others such as the offshore legislation mightn't come in until just before Easter or after Easter. But we're hopeful of getting all the Bills that I've mentioned and many others which will keep us similarly busy I imagine at Cabinet meetings this month and next in the first session. The Ministers have all been asked to identify the items of the Program which will require legislation. They have been asked to do that, I think, by the end of next week I think it is. Also, they have been asked, by a week later, to suggest the references that should be made in the Governor-General's speech opening the Parliament to their pieces of legislation.

Perhaps I should announce that arrangements have now been made for me to make a visit to New Zealand... Where is that? (press comment) Across the Tasman.

PRIME MINISTER: God, you'll make sayings of the year. I'll be visiting New Zealand from 20-23 of this month. The New Zealand Secretary for Foreign Affairs will also be visiting Australia commencing next Thursday for discussions with Foreign Affairs officials. My visit will coincide with the anniversary of the Canberra Pact made between New Zealand's Prime Minister Peter Fraser and our John Curtin in 1944. It was Norman Kirk's happy thought that we should have the meeting on that anniversary.

Q. Has your Government had any approaches made either through the Minister or from parents for assistance in any way in claims for help and against Distillers company by parents of thalidomide children?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't heard of them but this would be a matter where I think you should ask Dr Everingham. He'd be the Federal Minister who might have some information on it.

Q. Is it a matter which you think the Government should or would intervene?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't express an opinion off the cuff. I mean, quite frankly, you don't expect me to express opinions on matters which can end up in the courts.

Perhaps I should, for the sake of the international press here, mention that Mr Grassby has completed his consideration of the case of the Rolling Stones and they'll all be arriving.

Q. Have you yet decided whether Mr Anthony should have his status and his salary upgraded? It is now below Mr Lynch?

PRIME MINISTER: This is a painful matter. I don't think I could usefully say anything to resolve the differences.

Q. Have you yet received a letter from Mr Anthony asking you to consider it?

PRIME MINISTER: To arbitrate? No. I've had letters from them about their staffs, and I expect to be discussing this with them. There are some things here which are, quite frankly, no affair of the Government. It's the Speaker who allocates accommodation, and there is legislation which describes persons in terms which the authors never expected to bear upon their own fortunes. I'll naturally be very happy to discuss the legislation but I'd like to have a combined submission.

Q. I'd like to ask what can you tell us about the Commonwealth Police investigations into these two army officers - perhaps Mr Barnard?

PRIME MINISTER: I did see a note that Mr Barnard has on the matter. I'd ask him.

Q. Could we ask him?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, he's here is he? Yes, yes.

MR BARNARD: Well, inquiries are being made into allegations made by a private businessman into or concerning two comparatively senior army officers. It would not be correct for me, of course, at this delicate stage of the investigations, to make any statement that would prejudice either the police officers who are carrying out the investigation or the army officers who have not been charged. However, I expect a report will be available, it will be considered and if charges should be made they will be. There was a sensational statement of course. It involved surplus equipment from Vietnam. There's certainly nothing in the allegations or nothing that has flowed from the investigations so far, that would substantiate such a charge.

PRIME MINISTER: All our top-ranking officers have been withdrawn from Vietnam. I don't think it's very gracious to suggest that gun-running takes place in the Australian Armed Forces. I didn't know... you should have been sitting here - I didn't realise you were here.

Q. Prime Minister, you said that the Cabinet Meeting would continue tomorrow. Can we expect another news conference at the conclusion of it?

PRIME MINISTER: I think I'll just announce the decisions. I'll hand them out. I don't think we'll have another press conference. I think Mr Walsh will give you the decisions. I think that's better. Quite frankly going into tomorrow means that my appointments have to be a bit readjusted and if you'll excuse us?

Q. Which Committee is drawing up the terms of reference into the P.M.G. inquiry, and when would you hope the inquiry would begin and end?

PRIME MINISTER: They're meeting tonight. Do you want to know who the ministers are?

Q. Well, which of these committees, the five committees?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, no, no. This is an ad hoc one. It's just a meeting of half a dozen or so ministers tonight. I'll say who they are if you want to.

They're meeting at 8 o'clock tonight, and they're just drawing up the terms of reference and they've been authorised to approach suitable people to conduct the inquiry but I wouldn't guess as to how long the inquiry would take. We would certainly expect to have advice from the inquiry on some aspects before the Budget.

Q. When you say suitable people, might it be a judicial type of inquiry?

PRIME MINISTER: Maybe judges, maybe senior counsel, maybe junior counsel, maybe economists. I don't think we ought to get the idea that inquiries of this nature should be conducted only by judges. Some of the most effective inquiries conducted in Britain have been conducted by bodies on which there are no lawyers or a minority of lawyers. But clearly some economists and management people would be considered in any panel to make this inquiry.

I notice that there is quite a number of representatives from overseas newspapers. I have, on an earlier occasion, thought it might be helpful if I were to give priority to representatives of the afternoon papers. Now, maybe next week or the week after you might think it suitable - the President of the gallery might suggest to me when - to give priority to any members from overseas papers who want to ask questions. Let them all have one question before any of the indigenous press ask questions. I mention this partly because I've been inundated with requests for interviews by overseas newspapers and I think this is the greatest discovery of Australia since Cook, and I've been unable to oblige all the kind gentlemen concerned as yet.