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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE AT ALBURY-
WODONGA THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks ladies and gentlemen.

Q. Your figure of 300,000; was this in agreement with the Premiers; would they have said that it may have been less?

PRIME MINISTER: I think there was the difference between 250,000 and 300,000 which is minute in this context. The fact is that we all have confidence that a very large inland city can now be created through our co-operative efforts.

Q. Could you put a price on this development?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I think one can take a general assessment that development of a new city like this will cost less per head than a development of Sydney or Melbourne to accommodate a similar number of people. It costs Governments \$10,000 to put a new resident in Sydney or Melbourne. It costs Governments \$7,000 to put them in a new place like this.

Q. Prime Minister, in the Communique you say after the Governments have examined the report of preliminary study. Have you set a date for the start of that report and when you want its findings?

PRIME MINISTER: The study may easily be done within a couple of months we are informed.

Q. Prime Minister, do you or are you able to estimate the cost of the early studies of this particular project?

PRIME MINISTER: It is quite a small amount really - a couple of thousand dollars.

Q. Will it be done by Government departments or will you get outside opinions?

SIR ROBERT ASKIN: It is being done by N.U.R.D.A. but with the co-operation of the State Planning Authorities of New South Wales and Victoria.

Q. Has the Commonwealth given any commitment that it will send public servants - Commonwealth public servants - to live in the Albury-Wodonga area?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Every Federal Department has been asked to report on what number of public servants, in what sectors of the Federal public service can be efficiently established in Albury-Wodonga.

Q. Is there any stage where that could possibly run to several thousand public servants coming to live here?

PRIME MINISTER: I think we can expect that there will be several thousand public servants living in the designated area.

Q. Sir, has any cost been put on the acquiring of the land in the area?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Sir, how quickly would you like the feasibility study to be completed and the steps taken towards achieving this goal which you decided on today?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I think I have already said that it will probably be done within two months. You will notice that the Ministers concerned Mr. Uren, Mr. Fuller and Mr. Murray-Byrne can meet before there is any legislation. They can do that straight away and, furthermore, the three officials who will constitute the interim committee, they can meet straight away. It is not necessary to pass legislation through the three parliaments before the Ministerial Council meets and operates and before the Interim Officials Committee meets and operates.

Q. Could you say, Sir, when you believe there will be 300,000 people living in this area. How many years?

PRIME MINISTER: In my lifetime.

Q. In about 25 years?

PRIME MINISTER: You flatter me.

Q. Were there any discussions on other development regions in either New South Wales or Victoria, like Bathurst or Orange?

PRIME MINISTER: In passing, yes. Sir Robert Askin and I are issuing a statement about a feasibility study on the Bathurst and Orange region in which the Commonwealth and New South Wales are sharing the cost.

Q. Did Victoria go for any other development regions?

PRIME MINISTER: No. There was no specific commitment to any other development regions. The great significance of this region in whose heart we are meeting today is that it seemed a clear centre where there was every prospect for success. Therefore, we could get the boosting of morale to show that Governments, in fact, can create a great new inland city at this time. It was also an area where you had two State governments able to co-operate and the Commonwealth for various historical and geographic reasons can also make a very significant contribution, so this was an excellent place to start it. If this is a success, as we all believe it will be, then there are good hopes of success for other regions including inland Australia.

Q. Your commitment to Orange-Bathurst, is this only in the feasibility studies or is it in the development.

PRIME MINISTER: No, in feasibility studies. We are anxious to know the facts, and if the facts show that it is a good prospect then we will be in it as a Commonwealth.

Q. Did New South Wales give you any feasibility facts today on Bathurst-Orange?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Will you be stopping the building of Commonwealth buildings in Sydney and Melbourne before you get the results of this feasibility study?

PRIME MINISTER: Well we have already announced that the Spring Street project in Melbourne is being re-examined and, as you know, the Public Works Committee of the Federal Parliament rejected a proposal for a Woolloomooloo project for Commonwealth public servants. This is really another aspect but where Commonwealth buildings are to be sited is one of the terms of reference of a Federal Cabinet committee at this moment. And we will, of course, bear in mind not only regional centres such as Albury-Wodonga but also new cities - new regional centres - in the existing metropolitan areas of Sydney and Melbourne.

Q. And Canberra?

PRIME MINISTER: Well that has already been done in Canberra.

Q. Will it stop growth in Canberra?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Canberra would now grow if the Commonwealth never undertook a further commitment, but there will be further commitments which the Commonwealth clearly will undertake in Canberra. Canberra is now well and surely launched. It could carry on under its own steam if that was necessary.

Q. Prime Minister, a personal question. You have been virtually living with Albury-Wodonga, in that even you have called Whitlamabad for five years I think. How do you feel now after this - what you call historic talks today. Is this how you really always imagined it. Have you got what you really wanted?

PRIME MINISTER: My word. This has been a very great experience for all of us. Sure I have mentioned this complex for quite some years and so has Mr. Uren but the two State governments have also had this in mind and there have been reports in which it has been expressly cited. Now what has happened is that we have all got together and we have found how much easier it is to do it jointly. Now I don't want to eject the name Whitlamabad but this was the one question in which we didn't come to an agreement. I had suggested Ashinville and then it was suggested Kamerton. Both the eponymous heroes declined the honour. Someone suggested Urenopolis or some less seemly variation still, but if you insist I will accept Whitlamabad.

Q. Sir Robert, you expressed what might be termed as some reservations this morning in your opening speech. Are you satisfied with the decisions that have been made today?

SIR ROBERT ASKIN: I don't remember expressing reservations. I referred to the need for a careful examination of some of the propositions that were expected to be put up. As to whether I'm satisfied or not, I said before the conference that I felt it was an experiment in co-operation between the three parties, and I said at the conclusion of the conference in paying tribute to the Prime Minister in convening the conference and the way he conducted it that I felt the experiment and co-operation had been eminently successful. I don't think we could have covered anymore ground and arrived at so many decisions of principle and quite a few on major detail in such a comparatively short time having in mind the enormity of the project that we have set about launching today.

PRIME MINISTER: Sir Robert mentioned that he had made some gracious remarks about me, and I appreciate what he said and I'm glad to acknowledge it here publicly, but I think that perhaps we should say that we all, at the end of the conference, paid tribute to the advisers that the three Governments have had here and those that they have had in their capitals, because it would have been impossible to have covered so many matters and to have decided so many matters but for the very fine public servants and advisers that the three Governments have available to them. The 70 per cent of the Australian people who live in areas over which the three Governments here represented preside are well served by their public servants.

Q. Will the Federal Government accept the New South Wales invitation to consider reducing steel prices in some form?

PRIME MINISTER: As you know, the Federal Government hasn't made any representations to Mr. Justice Moore in his inquiry. Sir Robert Askin mentioned this matter to look at. It is certainly a relevant matter. Some of you in the Federal Press Gallery may remember that I did raise this question in about August 1971 - the fact that steel prices were fixed at capital city rates and any provincial centres including say, so large a one as Townsville which is right on the coast, had to pay so much more, although the delivery cost from say Port Kembla or Newcastle to Townsville is no greater than it is to some other places where the steel costs less. And the answer I got from the Minister for Trade and Industry at that time was that it was a matter for the commercial determination of the company concerned. I don't accept that proposition myself but it is too soon for me to say anything about it. Clearly one of the things we have to look at is the availability of basic products in new centres, and governments can do a certain amount but it is certainly incumbent on large corporations to play their part as well. It is not fair that people should have to spend so much more for the particular commodity you mention or for other basic commodities outside the State capitals.

Q. Sir Robert Askin has indeed indicated that Bathurst and Orange would like to see some accelerated development. A question to Mr. Hamer or Mr. Byrne:

What areas would they like to see next developed in Victoria?

MR. HANMER: Well we have already designated five areas for accelerated development of which Wodonga was one and the reason for designating Wodonga as one of the five was because of its potential for growth jointly with Albury of the sort which we have now determined on today. So the remaining four, therefore, which are Ballarat, Bendigo, the Latrobe Valley and Portland are the areas we have already designated for accelerated development and in some respects they are already achieving it.

MR. UREN: I have had discussions with Mr. Murray-Byrne and there is another one underway so as to balance the budget between Victoria and New South Wales. I don't want to name it because there might be speculation in the area.

Q. Leaving the Loan Council and the Premiers Conference aside, would you describe today's meeting as a successful exercise in federalism?

PRIME MINISTER: My word, I would.

SIR ROBERT ASKIN: Yes I support that too.

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen, both the Premiers have planes waiting for them - of course, my plane doesn't arrive back until tomorrow morning - so are there any more questions?

Q. I have one further question about the Orange-Bathurst area. Many people still feel that you did come here today hoping to get something for your project in Orange-Bathurst and that perhaps you may tend to take the attitude that you weren't prepared to fully support Albury-Wodonga unless you got more support for Orange-Bathurst?

SIR ROBERT ASKIN: That would be one hundred per cent wrong.