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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Well ladies and gentlemen, I have tried to get some of these conferences in time for the afternoon papers. This is one of the few occasions when I have been able to do so, but I will have to rush off because of the Federal Executive resuming at 2 o'clock and then - I am sorry to have kept you waiting - I came as quickly as I could get something to eat after the Cabinet meeting.

First then, the Cabinet decisions:

Senator Wriedt will be making a statement at 5 o'clock - or if he makes it before that it will be embargoed until 5 o'clock - concerning adjustment assistance for rural industries. The embargo is required because the Premiers have to receive the contents of the Cabinet decision before they hear it otherwise. It has been announced to the members of the Agricultural Council who have been meeting with Senator Wriedt and, of course, Mr. Enderby, the Minister for the Northern Territory, this morning and yesterday. Senator Wriedt - partly because of the preparations for the Agricultural Council meeting - was unable to prepare by Friday (which is the closing date for Cabinet agenda items) proposals for conducting the referendum on merino exports. He hopes to have that next Tuesday. He has discussed it with the State ministers on the Agricultural Council.

There were two Tariff Board reports concerning by-law admissions by Senator Murphy as Minister for Customs and Excise. There was an inter-departmental committee set up by the previous Government - it hasn't met - it has been reconstituted and its membership broadened. It is to have membership from the Prime Minister's Department, Treasury, Customs and Excise, Overseas Trade and Secondary Industry. It will cover the whole question of the effect of imports under by-law exemptions and the effect they have on costs and on protection.

There were seven submissions by Senator Murphy, as Attorney-General on extradition treaties with Germany, Australia, Italy, Israel, Sweden and the United States, and amendments to our extradition legislation. Further details on these matters - by-laws and extradition - can be got from Senator Murphy.

There was a submission by Mr. Barnard concerning the use of V.I.P. aircraft. The present rules were tabled by Senator Drake Brockman in September 1970. New rules will be tabled when the Parliament sits. In essence they amplify the old rules in two respects. Firstly, it will be plain that a V.I.P. aircraft can only be used when there are not appropriate other commercial forms of transport available. I should add, that there has been no suggestion that any of the V.I.P. applications by ministers could have been fulfilled by commercial aircraft. The other amplification of the rules is, in effect, that if

members of a V.I.P's family - other than his wife - are sought to be included the case must be referred to the Prime Minister for consideration. In the same context, perhaps I should mention that when - the week after next - I go on my visit to Indonesia I will be accompanied by my daughter who, hitherto, has lived with us and is dependent on us and who was invited by the President to accompany us. Also, as unofficial members of the party, there will be the President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Sir Richard Kirby, and his wife, and Mr. Bruce Grant.

Sir Richard Kirby is coming in the party because he represented Australia on the Good Officers' Committee in the 1940's and is remembered with affection in Indonesia and is visited by any distinguished Indonesians who come to Australia. And Mr. Bruce Grant, as you know, has long been interested, academically, in Indonesia and has written several books on it - the first when President Sukarno was still in office.

It is very likely that you have heard of the A.B.C., matters about possible Australian representation in Hanoi. I might therefore state that the Government's consideration for legal and practical questions associated with possible Australian representation in Hanoi is nearly complete. I expect to be instructing officials to seek to start discussions with the North Vietnamese shortly. We have already informed a number of neighbouring and associated countries of our intentions.

Once it is clear that the ceasefire has been established and that there may be a contribution in aid by Australia, we can give further consideration in the light of requirements - the aid requirements of the countries concerned, the likely contribution from other donors and North Vietnamese willingness to accept aid.

Gentlemen, those are the only announcements I have to make.

Q. Sir, why did you move the motion at yesterday's Executive to congratulate the Cabinet on the prompt and effective steps to control the price and volume of mineral exports? Was it designed to strengthen your hand against any Minister, in particular Dr. Patterson, in any action you might take?

PRIME MINISTER: Proceedings at the Federal Executive of the party are in the province of the Federal Secretary, Mr. Young, to announce. He's already made statements on this and answered questions about it. The resolution to which you refer arose out of an agenda item on the Federal Executive's papers. You mention about Dr. Patterson: at the Cabinet this morning it was agreed that Mr. Connor and Dr. Patterson would confer before any further statements were made on the export of minerals.

Q. Sir, the A.L.P. Platform attacks the former Government's refusal to inform the Parliament and the public of the general purposes and possible consequences of the joint defence installations and facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar. Will you arrange for the press to have an unrestricted tour of Pine Gap and Nurrungar so that we may inform at least the public of the general purposes and possible consequences of those bases?

PRIME MINISTER: I thank you for quoting what the Party says on this. You'll notice that we have criticised the former Government's failure to inform the Parliament and the public. We will be informing the Parliament and, through it, the public, including the Press.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, also quoting the Party Platform which says: "Australian forces should not be committed overseas except subject to clear and public international agreement." Will there be such an agreement covering the logistic force in Singapore?

PRIME MINISTER: There is. Gentlemen, there is - I'm sure you know an agreement published in the Australian Treaty series two years ago the Five Power defence arrangements - a summary of them was included in my Policy Speech, and perhaps I should read that to you.

"Pending neutralisation we will honor the full terms of the Five Power Arrangements under which Australia agrees to provide Malaysia and Singapore with personnel, facilities and courses for training their forces and assistance in operational and technical matters and the supply of equipment. We will be willing to make similar arrangements with Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Fiji. The Five Power Arrangements do not require an Australian garrison in Singapore; the battalion and battery there will not be replaced when they complete their tour of duty."

I've noticed many references to the Party's policy in this matter. Therefore, may I quote the relevant passages from the 1971 revision of the Platform. Many people quote the Platform or resolutions as they left earlier conferences in 1969. I will quote the two passages which bear upon this subject in the 1971 Platform. First under the heading of Defence: "A strong defence capability can be further enhanced by participation in mutual defence arrangements with other nations in South-East Asia and the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas consistent with the requirements of the United Nations Charter and the objectives of existing treaties". And secondly under Foreign Affairs: "Australian forces should not be committed overseas except subject to clear and public international agreements."

There is a clear and public international agreement. Under it we are fulfilling and continuing to fulfil the obligations which the Party Platform envisages - which the Policy Speech reiterated. I'm surprised that there's been a great number of figures given as to the number of soldiers that will remain. I was asked last time whether there'd be 500 or 600. I said "Yes". That's the total number, and that's all forces.

Q. Does this include the Air Force?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Singapore includes the Air Force - yes.

Q. Your interpretation of garrison, Sir. A lot of people have interpreted...

PRIME MINISTER: There will be no combat troops there.

Q. But a garrison under the strict definition doesn't necessarily mean combat troops... 500 or 600 people could be termed a garrison. In your interpretation it's not a garrison?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, yes. These are logistic and other training matters in the terms of the agreement. I pointed out the agreement did not refer - require the presence of a battalion or a battery. That is the combatant ones. And they'll be coming out at the end of their tour of duty and, as I was told in an answer to a question last year: "4th Battalion R.A.R. and 106th Field Battery. Both will complete their tour of duty in Singapore as part of ANZUK force in January 1974." You might find other relevant matters in this in that answer on the 17th October last.

Q. Was this matter discussed at Cabinet this morning.

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. Do you expect it to be discussed tomorrow at the Caucus Meeting? Do you expect it to be endorsed at the Caucus Meeting?

PRIME MINISTER: The Caucus Meeting tomorrow is being called under the Standing Orders as stated in the telegram I despatched summoning the meeting to discuss projected legislation and, accordingly, Ministers will be putting to the Caucus the subject matter of legislation which the Cabinet has asked to be drafted.

Q. Sir, After the battalion comes back in early 1974, will another battalion go out on location for a month or two or something like that?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

PRIME MINISTER: There may be training exercises, yes, and that may be a two-way thing.

Q. But it has not definitely been decided yet?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Nobody wants to be precise on these things. The Malaysians, the Singaporeans, the British have made no proposals this way. But, as you know, as we've stated for years we are very happy to have joint exercises and training and communications and procurement programs with not only Malaysia and Singapore but with all our neighbours as I stated in the Policy Speech on the last occasion.

Q. Prime Minister, could you give us a breakdown of the 500 or 600 troops that are going to remain there in Singapore?

PRIME MINISTER: No. No, I can't give that.

Q. Can you tell us, Sir, whether the Five Power Agreement has been jeopardised in any way by Australian policy?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. It hasn't?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. The Lord Carrington talks made no difference?

PRIME MINISTER: I had quite a time with Lord Carrington last Thursday and last Friday and there was no suggestion of any jeopardy to the arrangements for all five nations and, of course, I discussed them with Mr. Kirk two weeks ago, and they suit all five members.

Q. Mr. Whitlam, you said that it was agreed that Mr. Connor and Dr. Patterson would confer before making statements on the export of minerals. Was that an agreement reached by the two men, or was it an agreement made by the Cabinet?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, there was a discussion and they agreed. I've got no more to say on that.

Q. Does it apply to all exports of minerals or only those that come from the northern ...

PRIME MINISTER: I said the export of minerals.

Q. Why is it necessary for two Ministers to come to that agreement? Why not just ...

PRIME MINISTER: Well I've got no more to say on this.

Q. Sir, would you care to comment on the Queensland Government's decision to oppose your decision to have the export control of all minerals?

PRIME MINISTER: They're entitled to take any action which commends itself to them. We will of course resist any such claims. I've no doubt we'd win in the courts.

Q. Sir, just before the election Mr. Barnard suggested that Australia should seek access to ocean surveillance information gathered by U.S. satellites and U.S. aircraft in return for America's use of Australian bases. Has the Government taken this up with the U.S. authorities and, if so, with what results?

PRIME MINISTER: The Government has. I've not discussed this with Mr. Barnard.

Q. Sir, since the last press conference, you apparently have received formal requests for a Premiers Conference. Could you tell us whether you've given any further consideration to this and whether there will be a Premiers Conference in February or March?

PRIME MINISTER: There will not be a Premiers Conference in February or March. My general attitude to these matters is that if any variation is required in the financial arrangements for any particular year - any variation of the formula or of the arrangements made at the regular Premiers Conference, then it should be backed by a proper submission - that there should be some headings and some documentation to justify them. Up to now Premiers Conferences have had an agenda - in this area there's been a one-line entry - Commonwealth/State Financial Relations. The new Federal Government will require something more explicit than that. Our general attitude is that there should be proper investigation

of all Government expenditure which the Commonwealth undertakes or which it is asked to underwrite. We want to seek advice, and in many cases we will be making that advice public. Now there have been some statements that there was a firm undertaking to have a Premiers Conference this month. There was no such firm undertaking. I was interested to notice that when Mr. Snedden, who was the Treasurer at the time, made a comment on this subject a couple of days ago he didn't assert there was a firm undertaking. He knew there was not a firm undertaking. I reiterate what I said a week ago: There were proposals put by all the Premiers - in some cases orally - in other cases in writing - largely in the context of employment - creating work, but sometimes also in connection with programs which were announced for this financial year in the Party's Policy Speech. In each of those cases the Premiers' propositions were examined by the Federal officials. In each of these cases I have written in reply. Now if there's any variation, I take the basic proposition that if people can't put a case in writing, they haven't got a strong case.

Q. Sir, have you received the report of Mr. Justice Moore on the inquiry into B.H.P.? When do you expect you might receive it, and when you do receive it, when do you think it might be made public? Finally, are you in a position yet to tell us the name of the company which followed B.H.P.'s example with a request for an investigation?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't yet received Mr. Justice Moore's report. I don't know when I will receive it. I would expect that I would release it very soon after receiving it. I would obviously want to show it to the Treasurer and to the Attorney-General because the three of us drew up the terms of reference for Mr. Justice Moore. I haven't followed up whether I can release the name of the company which did apply, but without their permission I don't think I could release it.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, according to Lord Carrington the Australian Government has not had time to consider the question of nuclear ships entering Australian ports. When is this likely to be considered, and what is your attitude?

PRIME MINISTER: The Government only considers matters which come before it by way of Cabinet submission and the procedure is for these to be given to me on the Friday at the latest and then I can list them for the next Cabinet on the Tuesday. There's no submission on this subject. Mr. Barnard and I were pretty fully briefed about this matter before Lord Carrington arrived because we knew that he would be wanting to discuss this matter. We are looking at it in the general context of the safety for Australian ports and the people living near them or using them as far as nuclear-driven ships - naval and mercantile - are concerned. It's not just ships such as submarines. It's also ships like the 'Savannah'. I think the West Germans also have a nuclear-powered ship. There is an international agreement concerning nuclear-powered ships - mercantile ships - merchant ships. The whole question is being examined. We will of course have in mind the safety of people living near our ports or coming into them.

Q. If asked by the Federal Executive, will you accept the position as Federal President?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll wait till I'm asked. I never knew of the proposition until I read it in today's papers. I'm immensely flattered at the suggestion, but I would think it could be more appropriately held by persons other than members of the Parliament and that it should rotate every couple of years. Look, I haven't been asked.

Q. With the decision of the New Zealand Rugby Union to go ahead with the Springbok tour, is our position absolutely unchanged and do you see that this might place in jeopardy the Commonwealth Games; and will Australia do anything to help or hinder the actual staging of those Games?

PRIME MINISTER: There has been no reconsideration sought of the Government's decision to deny entry or transit to racially selected sporting teams. I fear that if the New Zealand football authorities persist and succeed in having a visit by a Spring bok team this will very seriously truncate the Commonwealth Games which are to be held in Christchurch later this year. The Australian Government hasn't taken any steps - it's not likely to take any steps - to prevent Australians playing what they like and where they like. I am, however - already asked our missions in all Commonwealth countries to ascertain the effects of a Spring bok tour of New Zealand on the Commonwealth Games in New Zealand. It's quite clear that half the Commonwealth countries would not be able to participate in those Games because half of them depend on Government assistance to participate. That Government assistance would be withheld if New Zealand condones - the New Zealand Government doesn't - but if New Zealanders appear to condone the racial discrimination policies which the South African Government imposes on South African sporting teams representing South Africa, then there can be no question that the Commonwealth Games will be in peril and all of us interested in sport or interested in the Commonwealth will be disadvantaged by the stubbornness of that single section of the New Zealand population.