

THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 6 MARCH 1973

PRIME MINISTER: This is very much more pleasant lighting and accommodation. I might mention it's by favour of the President that we are able to use this Committee Room.

Gentlemen, the Cabinet this morning made some appointments. First of all, there were two vacancies on the Board of the Commonwealth Trading Bank within the Commonwealth Banking Corporation. One of the retiring men, Sir Brian Massy-Greene, has been reappointed. The other position has been filled by Mr Bernie Williams.

Four appointments have been made to help Professor Henderson with his poverty inquiry. They are Professor Gates, the Professor of Economics and Head of the Department of Economics within the University of Queensland, Professor Sackville, one of the Professors of Law within the University of New South Wales, the Reverend George Martin, Superintendent of the Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission, and Mr R.T. Fitzgerald, the Chief Research Officer of the Australian Council for Education Research and Editor of the Quarterly Review of the Australian Education, a member of the national Committee for Social Science Teaching. Mr Hayden can give you the details of that inquiry and the augmented terms of reference. A new administrator has been appointed to Christmas Island. It is Mr Francis Scott Evatt who has been with the Department of External Territories since November 1959 and has been Acting Administrator since last July. The Governor-General mentioned in his speech that the Government proposed to establish a Protection Commission to advise on assistance for both Primary and Secondary Industries. You will remember that the general outline of the Protection Commission was announced about ten months ago and its relation to the functions being carried out by the old Department of Trade and Secondary Industry and the Department of Customs and Excise and of course relevant matters from the Department of Primary Industry.

On the first of this month, I wrote to Sir John Crawford inviting him to advise on the establishment of the Protection Commission. Yesterday Sir John replied agreeing to do so. He has begun work on it. While Sir John is not going to conduct a public inquiry, he has indicated that he would be prepared to receive written submissions. Anybody wishing to take the opportunity to put these forward should direct them to Sir John through the Secretary of my Department by the end of next month.

There are several visitors coming this month, the first half of next month, Mr Patolichev, the U.S.S.R. Minister for Foreign Trade will be here between 11 and 18 of this month; Tun Ismail, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, will be here between the same dates; Mr G.W.S. Malecela, the Foreign Minister of Tanzania, is arriving on the 9th for some ten days; Mr Bijedic, the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, will be here on 20, 21 and 22.

He is making a visit to many countries in the region; President Hammer de Roburt will be here from 3-5 April returning the visit which the Special Minister, Senator Willesee made on behalf of our new Government to celebrate the 5th anniversary of Nauruan independence, and Mr Arnold Smith, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, will be here from 3-16 April.

There were a very large number of decisions by the Cabinet and I think if you want any further information on them, you can ask me or ask my staff afterwards. We approved the drafting of legislation to implement the Montreal Convention relating to Protection of Aircraft, 1971; legislation to amend the Marriage Act - no consent required if you are 18 or more; legislation to implement the 1966 International Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination to which the Governor-General made reference in his speech opening the Parliament; legislation to change the terminology of magistrates to enable new Tasmanian legislation to come into operation, the Companies act on the Securities and Exchange Commission, Restrictive Trade Practices Monopolies and Consumer Protection legislation - those two items are initial drafting to take advantage of the presence in Australia for some months of two United States experts whom Senator Murphy recruited, but the general framework has to go to the Economic Committee of the Cabinet; legislation to incorporate the National Gallery which was approved in principle in the Parliament before last and not mentioned in the last Parliament; legislation for further amendment of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, the principal matter being to limit the variation from the quota of electors from 20 per cent to 10 per cent. It will be remembered that in 1958 the Constitution Review Committee consisting of 6 Labor, 4 Liberal and 2 Country Party members unanimously said that 10 per cent was sufficient to cover all variations between censuses and so we are implementing that recommendation and we will be putting to the Parliament that the criteria for distribution should virtually be restored to what they were until 1964-65, that is one starts from the point of view of the quota; legislation to cover the new Departments - Appropriations legislation to cover the Stevedoring Industry, to adopt amendments to the I.L.O. Constitution, to introduce the general insurance legislation which was tabled last Parliament; some further technical amendments to the Income Tax Law. We'll be moving to reappoint the Joint Committee on the A.C.T. We've approved amendments to the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisations Charter which were approved at the Conference last year. We are establishing a Commonwealth Occupational Health Service, grants to the States for water projects, amendments to the National Regional and Urban Development Authority Act - it will be the Cities Commission Act, acquisition of freehold land in Darwin, and at Oaks Estate and Hall and Tharwa. The general principle of publication of reports by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Bureau of Transport Economics, Bureau of Roads, will be publishing all those reports. Amendments to the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation - there are quite a number of them - I haven't purported to give the details of them. I have the submissions here.

Are there any questions?

Q.: Prime Minister, Mr Barnard is present with you at today's Press Conference. Sir, is it proper to ask questions of him?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course.

Q.: Then, Mr Barnard, if I might direct a question to you, you tabled in the House of Representatives today a statement by your Permanent Head, Sir Arthur Tange, concerning the matters relating to Mr Lloyd's resignation from your staff. Do you accept Sir Arthur Tange's version of these affairs completely?

MR BARNARD: There are some reservations that I would want to make. Generally the statement is his version of what occurred at the time.

PRIME MINISTER: Next question.

Q.: Mr Whitlam, either to you or Mr Barnard, whichever you think is more appropriate: on the question of overseas bases, can you now explain to us why it would imperil the further use of these bases to tell us the general purposes as you promised the Labor Government would? Can you tell us how it would be conceivable that joint control should be exercised by the Australian Government over them, I mean does this mean we intercept American signals, we have a hand on the switch to turn the power off, what does it mean, and finally can you tell us something which was rather obviously left out of Mr Barnard's statement - to what extent would these bases be targets should the Americans become involved in a war which did not necessarily concern us but which was a conflict with another nuclear power?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't intend to elaborate on the statement which Mr Barnard made after Cabinet and Caucus consideration last Wednesday. I've quite satisfied myself that to state the general purposes of the satellites related to Pine Gap near Alice Springs and Nuringa near Woomera would be to render the function quite futile. I don't propose to state the purposes of them. I've satisfied myself as regards those two facilities and also I imagine everybody is satisfied as regards the facilities at Amberley and Alice Springs that they are not part of any weapon system. They can not be used - any of them - to make war on any other country. I don't know - nobody knows the full implications of the North-West Cape Station for which legislation was passed in 1963. There are to be negotiations on that matter.

Q.: Mr Hartley said the other night that the North-West Cape Station should be subjected to political control by the Australian Government. Will that be discussed in negotiations with the Americans?

PRIME MINISTER: The fact that this would be discussed has been announced by the Minister.

Q.: But will that point...

PRIME MINISTER: The Minister has stated what he will be discussing.

Q.: Mr Barnard, you said you had some reservations about Sir Arthur Tange's statement that was tabled today. Could you tell us what those reservations were?

MR BARNARD: You have the statement now and it does give Sir Arthur Tange's version of what happened at the time. I quite frankly admitted this afternoon that I only learned last night and this morning that there were some circumstances which apply to this matter which were not previously known to me. But what I do want to make clear and want to emphasize is that when the question of

the discussions were first raised with me - I'm now referring to the discussions which were to take place with Lord Carrington - I sought advice from the Departmental Head about protocol, and the information that was given to me was that it was not usual because there may be some matters involving questions that were the concern only of the two countries involved that it was not normal for members of a Minister's staff to attend those discussions, and at the time I accepted that advice. I subsequently thought about it and believed it was in my own interests to have a member of my staff present at the discussions and at that stage I advised Sir Arthur Tange that there should be a member of my staff present and I named Mr Woolner.

I named Mr Woolner because he was my research officer and he had attended a number of the discussions with me. That is, on the question of the rationalisation of the aircraft industry, when I have had discussions concerning the D.F.R.B., Mr Woolner had been with me and so I suggested that Mr Woolner should accompany me to the discussions. Well, when I saw the report in the newspaper the next day subsequent to Mr Lloyd's decision to resign, that it was because he had not been invited, or had been told that he should not attend the briefings between Lord Carrington and myself, I immediately raised this question with Sir Arthur Tange. I said 'did you advise a member of my staff that he should not attend' and the answer that I received was 'no'.

Now it is quite clear that some matters have been made clear to me which were not made clear to me at the time. All that I can say to you further to this is that that position will be rectified. No departmental head will advise any member of my staff about their duties and I want to make that perfectly clear. In the same way I have also indicated that so far as decisions concerning the policy of this Government are concerned I will make them. As a result of the decisions of the Government, the Prime Minister and the Government, I will make them - not the Department. Now I think this ought to be clearly understood.

Q.: Mr Prime Minister, do you consider that your statement just now not to reveal the general purposes of the Pine Gap and Woomera bases conflicts with Labor policy which states that general purposes shall be revealed?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course I don't. I don't think it conflicts with anything in Labor policy.

Q.: Do you accept that the Labor policy does state this?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't got the text here.

Q.: Sir, could I then end with this: Do you agree with Mr Barnard's statement in the House today that when he says that the Government will make the decisions and that the Government will give due consideration to the Party's decisions, do you consider this conflicts with the policy which states that the Conference is the supreme body which binds Party members?

PRIME MINISTER: I put the Party's policy for this Parliament in my policy speech. That stands. If the Party changes its policy then the changed policy will be put to the people at the next elections.

Q.: Sir, what progress has the Government made towards beefing up the A.I.D.C. in its role of reducing foreign ownership of Australian resources?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sorry. We did do that this morning. I haven't got the thing here. We approved a considerable number of amendments to the A.I.D.C. Act to enable the drafting to proceed. Some of them require final form after consultation between Dr Cairns as the Minister for Secondary Industry and the Treasurer and the Attorney-General. This is because there are some matters of detail concerning the loan raising by the A.I.D.C. which have to be considered in the context of the financial agreement and the gentlemen's agreement which cover loan raising by the Commonwealth on behalf of the States and loan raising by semi-Government authorities with the approval of the Loan Council. Also there are some details which have to be carefully drafted in the light of the constitutionality of them. For instance, the A.I.D.C. could no more carry on some activities in its own right than the Commonwealth could carry on those activities in any other form. But the Commonwealth can carry on practically any activities if they're in the context of financial corporations as phrased in Section 51 of the Constitution. But there are quite a number of amendments which have been approved - Dr Cairns can give you the details if you like - I suppose I can send for them now. They were in the Cabinet's Economic Committee file which I didn't bring down.

Q.: Mine is on the question of the secrecy under which A.I.D.C. operates. Is this being...

PRIME MINISTER: No, the amendments were ones to carry out practically the full range of policies for the A.I.D.C. which were mentioned in the policy speech. They are quite extensive amendments, but you'll see the nature of them if you read the policy speech.

Q.: Mr Barnard if I may, I wonder if you could tell us, Sir, on what grounds you yesterday offered a differing explanation...?

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen, I'm not going to have any more of the Conference taken up on this. I'm not going to be party to fomenting differences between the Minister and former members of his staff or the Minister and the Head of his Department. It can be done separately.

Q.: Sir, we were told by one paper today that the main event in Cabinet was to be a go-woe contest between Mr Crean and Dr Cairns on the subject of inflation or expansion. How did that match finish?

PRIME MINISTER: Nothing in the Cabinet or the Economic Committee of Cabinet bore any relationship to the forecast. I have mentioned, I think, the subject of every matter which was debated in the Cabinet this morning.

Q.: Mr Barnard, has the U.S. Government cut down on the amount of information that it's supplying to Australian Defence experts as alleged by Mr Hartley and does this information also apply to information also supplied by the British Government?

MR BARNARD: No.

Q.: Mr Whitlam, has the Yugoslav Government been notified of what Senator Murphy is going to say in the Senate this week about Croatian terrorists? If not, will it be notified, how and when? And finally, will the Yugoslav Prime Minister be having talks on this subject when he comes to Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it's very likely that the Yugoslav Prime Minister will refer to the acts of political terrorism which have occurred in Australia for many years past and the outrages against Yugoslav diplomatic and consular premises in Australia. We have been in touch with the Yugoslav authorities, our Ambassador in Belgrade, and their Ambassador here about the movements of which we've been able to get some indication - we can't assess how many people of Yugoslav origin who have lived in Australia have left in recent months on group tours for Europe. There have been some reports that the number involved - we don't know the number involved - but that there have been some such movements has come to our notice and we have conferred in Belgrade and in Canberra about them. As I made plain in my policy speech, we are determined to do all we can to stamp out this political terrorism which has continued too long in Australia, to the discredit of Australia.

I have this A.I.D.C. submission, but I think probably it'll suit you if you get it from Dr Cairns. There were two submissions and there are quite a number of recommendations, one of them has three paragraphs and another has about 10 I think.

Q.: Sir, have you written to the Queensland Premier asking Queensland to hand over Queensland's Aboriginal reserves to the Federal Government? Has the Queensland Premier replied, and refused? And if he has refused, what's the next step in view of what you, through the Governor-General, said last week?

PRIME MINISTER: I have written about the reserves. I don't think I put it quite so directly that they should be handed over. I don't think a reply has come yet. However I will reassert what the Governor-General said in his speech that the Government is determined to carry out the full range of responsibilities in respect to the Aboriginal people that were given to the Australian Parliament in the 1967 Referendum. I mentioned that the Cabinet had authorised the drafting of legislation to carry out the 1966 Racial Discrimination Convention. There is some legislation of the Queensland Parliament which is contrary to that Convention. I have written to the Premier of Queensland about it. I think I wrote about it in December, but I don't think he's replied.

Q.: Sir, you haven't spoken to the Queensland Premier since you took office I don't think....

PRIME MINISTER: No, he's the only missing Premier.

Q.: ... In view of the considerable conflict which has been running is there any chance of you initiating talks with him - picking up the phone to talk to him?

PRIME MINISTER: There's been no difficulty in communication each way with any other Premier or, in fact, with the Deputy-Premier of Queensland when he has been acting Premier. For instance I don't know whether this is characteristic of the only and the last Country Party Premier in Australia, but last Friday, for instance, there was a very fruitful, successful conference between the two Liberal Premiers, Sir Robert Askin and Mr Haker and Mr Dunstan and me - the first significant variation in the River Murray Waters Agreement since it was first drawn up in 1915. We did that last Friday morning. No difficulty whatever. I don't know what's wrong with Mr Bjelke-Petersen.

Q.: Prime Minister, at the last public Press Conference, Sir, we discussed the question of troops being retained in Singapore after the withdrawal of the batallion - we used the figure then of 500 to 600 troops you expected would be retained...

PRIME MINISTER: I think in answer to questions I have said that, yes.

Q.: Subsequently, Sir, you were quoted as having said at the background conference that these troops were being kept there to cover the presence of the Australian Signals Unit. Since the presence of the Australian Signals Unit is now of world knowledge, do you still intend to keep 500 to 600 troops in Singapore?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not going to forecast the number of servicemen because it's not just soldiers involved in Singapore. The two crucial items are well known. The batallion and the battery will not be replaced when their terms expire which will be in January. Furthermore, the Defence Signals Division Unit which Australia operates in Singapore will be brought back as soon as possible. The other numbers can emerge during this year. There is no great urgency or panic about this question.

Q.: If there is no urgency or panic about the question of the Defence Signals Unit, I'm not sure in my own mind why this was an off-the-record briefing which you gave when it could have been cleared up so simply and quickly by yourself, Sir, and furthermore why some people, myself and my friend Jack Fingleton, who is not perhaps a security risk and nor am I, were excluded from it, Sir?

Q.: ... Sir, before you answer that, because my question is also along those lines...

PRIME MINISTER: Go ahead.

Q.: I want to congratulate you on the number of Press conferences that you have given. You've been extremely generous with them. Indeed I think it's true to say that already you've given more than Sir Robert Menzies, Mr Holt, Mr Gorton and Mr McMahon in twenty years. Sir Robert I might observe has done well. As my colleague, Mr Harris says, a few weeks ago you cancelled your usual Press conference and invited yourself or had invited for you a special group of journalists who mostly represent the three largest daily newspaper groups that almost monopolise this Press Gallery. Excluded: Mr Harris of the London Times, myself, the A.B.C. and certain other people of news-gathering media. Now does this mean that you yourself regard us as untrustworthy, or possibly poor class journalists. As a Labor Prime Minister, I'm sure you will recognise the important industrial concept that's inherent in this. May we assume that in future press conferences we'll be invited along with the rest - Mr Harris, myself and the A.B.C.?

PRIME MINISTER: I undertook at the last time you invited me to the National Press Club that on any Tuesday when I was in Canberra I would have a press conference. That I have done with two exceptions. One was last Tuesday when I think it would be conceded that it would have been impracticable on the day of the Opening. The other occasion was two weeks before. On that occasion the Cabinet sat all morning. It had to sit that afternoon. I had a

dinner engagement at which I was to speak in Melbourne that night. I put to the Chairman of the Gallery - do you want a briefing today or a press conference later in the week. He chose the briefing that day. It had to be in my office, the one which I inherited - the temporary office and it is impossible, as anybody who's been in the office would know, to have radio or television equipment in it and accordingly the Australian newspapers were there. A record was taken and any of the other media who wanted to have the text of the record were able to get it in the usual way and many availed themselves of it.

Q.: Have you yet come to the conclusion that five portfolios - Defence, Army, Navy and Air Force and Supply, held individually by five Ministers in past Governments, is not too much of a burden for Mr Barnard or for any other Minister for that matter?

PRIME MINISTER: On the contrary, I am quite satisfied that the holding of the five portfolios by one experienced senior man has made for much more prompt and satisfactory decisions. There are a host of instances that can be given of this. The Supply Department for instance was very often unable to place orders because the client Departments couldn't make up their mind. The one Minister now makes the decision. It is promptly implemented. I am satisfied that this is the best form of Defence organisation that the country has had and the Mooreshead Report very largely recommended it. It will continue.

Q.: As the Minister to whom the Tariff Board reports, you would be aware that the Board reported recently adversely on the prospects of performance of one of the A.I.D.C.'s projects - Information Electronics here. Will you have Sir John Crawford to investigate the possibility of extending the Protection Commission's operation to cover the implicit subsidy in A.I.D.C. operations?

PRIME MINISTER: This will be open to him to consider. I hope he does.

Q.: Mr Whitlam, the 1971 Federal Conference passed a resolution protesting at the Federal Government's refusal to reveal the details and possible consequences of Pine Gap and Woomera...

PRIME MINISTER: ... general purposes and possible consequences wasn't it?

Q.: ... general purposes and possible consequences. Do you take that protest to apply to any Federal Government regardless of its political complexion and do you also now agree with the previous Federal Government's decision not to reveal those general purposes and possible consequences?

PRIME MINISTER: I have said that it is not possible to reveal any more of the purposes of Nurunga and Pine Gap than has been disclosed without nulifying the purpose of the Unit - the facilities. I think Mr Chamberlain was next.

Q.: Mr Prime Minister, will you be spending Easter in Paris?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd love to. But I was thinking Rome would be more appropriate. You're referring to the fact that the French suggested there should be consultations between France and Australia about the nuclear tests. We replied that we agreed with this and believed they should be at Ministerial level and



the French agreed to such discussions at Ministerial level in Paris. Now our Parliament - obviously the time which would suit Ministers best to go to Paris would be in a week when the Australian Parliament is not sitting. The first such week - the week after next is too soon for the French. The next weeks when the Australian Parliament is not sitting are Holy Week and Easter Week, those being the weeks before Easter Sunday and after Easter Sunday. It would probably be in one of those weeks that a Minister or Ministers will go to Paris. It may be that a Minister or Ministers might go in one of the intervening sitting weeks. That would be rather inconvenient for Australia but it is a matter of great concern to Australia and if the French would want to have the discussions earlier then we would be prepared to have them earlier even if it was a sitting week.

There has been no discussion, still less decision as to who should go. There has been suggestion that I might go. This is by no means certain. I'd also like to say that there has been speculation that I might not go as originally proposed to the South Pacific Forum in Apia in Holy Week. I do intend to go to the South Pacific Forum in Apia in Holy Week.

Q.: I want to go back to the question that Wally Brown asked about Party policy. Were you saying that if there are policy changes at Surfers Paradise at the Conference that these would not be binding on the Government until the next elections?

AL.  
Policy

PRIME MINISTER: What I'm saying is that I would regard it as inconceivable that the Federal Conference of the Australian Labor Party would purport to change the Party's policy during the currency of a Parliament on the election of which the policy had been placed in the form which the Conference had endorsed in 1971. I don't believe the Conference would purport to change policy in the midst of a Parliament. Of course the Party could change policy but the only proper time to do it would be for the next Parliament. The advantage of the Labor Party's procedures as far as the public is concerned, as far as the democratic process is concerned, is that they are available in print for everybody to read and we were elected on the basis of the Platform which was framed at Launceston in June 1971 and published in July or August 1971. That policy was put to the people in November 1972. The people clearly endorsed it. I don't believe that the Party Conference would purport to alter the policy on which we were elected.

Q.: Given that you do not expect the Conference to change any policy while you have a Labor Parliament in power, what would be your position...?

PRIME MINISTER: Wait a bit. I don't think they'll change Party policy. What I did say is that I don't conceive the possibility that the Party would change the policy for a Parliament during the lifetime of that Parliament. Now is that quite clear? I don't think it's likely that the Party will change its policy but if it does I can only conceive that it would change its policy for presentation to the people at the next elections.

Q.: Given that, what if the Federal Conference orders you to implement the policy as laid down by the 1971 Conference in relation to...

PRIME MINISTER: I think that's a hyperthetical question.