

7

THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 10 APRIL, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks ladies and gentlemen. There were a few procedural matters. There were about a score of decisions which I can tell you from this morning's Cabinet meeting. It will save your time here if I tell you the names of the Ministers from whom you can get the details. They are expecting your questions. There are a couple that I can give you myself.

Yesterday Mr Hamer, the Premier of Victoria, telegraphed me with the suggestion that we might follow up what Mr Crean had said about State jurisdiction in matters of prices by having a Premiers Conference to discuss a national incomes and prices policy. The Cabinet accepted the suggestion this morning. I have telegraphed Mr Hamer. I think he has released the telegrams at 5.00 this afternoon. I was proposing to but I was in the House as you know. We've suggested that there should be a Premiers Conference to discuss prices and incomes matters and all other aspects of inflation. I have suggested Friday, 4 May. That is the earliest week-day that my overseas commitments or the sittings of the House would permit me to attend. I've suggested that Mr Crean and Mr Enderby (because he has jurisdiction over the territories) should accompany me.

Cabinet also decided to hold again this year the usual economic consultations, presumably in June. The same organisations with whom consultations were held last June will be invited to have consultations. We shall, however, ask the various consumer authorities and associations to confer with us.

We decided on the forms of revaluation assistance to secondary industry. They will be on similar lines to the scheme already announced to primary industry and will be limited to cases of hardship. Dr. Cairns will give you the details. Mr Bryant will give you the details on the establishment of an Aboriginal Land Fund. Also on the system of mining royalties on Aboriginal reserves in the Northern Territory. Senator Murphy will give you the details of a scheme for a \$2 million grant to the States to supplement legal aid services this year. Also details of legislation relating to offences at sea. The situation is that if somebody from Australia were to take a pot-shot at visitors, in say, the Gulf of Carpentaria beyond the ordinary territorial limits, there is no Australian legislation making it an offence. Mr Jones will tell you about the foreign ownership of air service organisations and airport business concessions. Mr Daly on proposed legislation to provide two seats in the House of Representatives for the Australian Capital Territory, and two senators from each of the Territories - those senators to be elected on the proportional system and to be elected, both of them, on the same date as there is an election for the House of Representatives. Dr. Cass on the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Environment.

Mr Stewart will give you the details of legislation to regulate the operations of travel agents. Also amendments to the Public Works Committee Act so that the Committee only has to deal with works which are estimated to cost \$2 million or more. The establishment of a national archives system. Those two latter matters - Mr Stewart will be representing Senator Willessee. Senator Bishop will give you the proposals for reasons to be given for the decisions under the Repatriation Act and the Seamen's War Pension and Allowances Act.

Also the expansion of the capacity of Repatriation hospitals to allow their use for non-repatriation patients. Mr Crean will tell you of income tax treatment of domiciliary care benefits. Senator Cavanagh on behalf of Senator Wriedt will tell you about amendments to the Fisheries Act and the Continental Shelf Living Natural Resources Act. Mr Bowen, the proposed amendments to the Posts and Telegraph Act. Mr Hayden, additional computer capacity for the Department of Social Security, and Dr. Patterson the joint study with Western Australia on the Pilbara.

Are there any questions?

Q: Prime Minister, if I could refer to statements made by you in the House last Thursday that an ASIO representative had given a wrong report on an inter-departmental meeting held on 2 March, what consideration is being given by the Government to protecting ordinary citizens against incorrect reports about them by ASIO, and in the case of a person seeking employment in the Public Service but is rejected because of an adverse report from ASIO, would the Government give that person the opportunity of examining information in the report and the right of appeal against any errors in it?

PRIME MINISTER: The Government is committed as you know in the terms of the Australian Labor Party's platform to providing a means of judicial appeal against decisions which are based upon security reports. We won't be able to bring in the legislation this session, but you will remember what the platform had to say about that, generally in the context of the proposed Superior Court. Perhaps I should say this: the reports which ASIO makes are given to, say, the heads of Commonwealth Departments and also to the Department of Immigration respectively for prospective public servants who are to be appointed or existing public servants who are to be promoted and migrants who seek naturalisation. The Heads of the Departments make what use they think fit of those reports. The ASIO isn't an executive body.

Q: On the prices and incomes question: do you favour the national prices income policy - that of the national Labor Government?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll discuss that in more detail after the meeting with the Premiers.

Q: Do you feel in any way that this is merely a pre-election gimmick by Mr Hamer?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I do not. There are different views of course on the efficacy of prices and incomes policies but in the short term such as President Nixon brought in for I think six months and then extended for a further period, there is good reason to believe that they can be effective, but I want to make it plain

that we don't believe that prices and incomes policies are the only cure for inflation. There are a very great number of aspects of inflation, some, of course, within Federal jurisdiction such as various forms of subsidies or deductions, and some in the State field. Clearly however, in our Federal system, if there is to be an effective policy on inflation - and you'll notice we'll use the phrase "all other aspects of inflation" - it is necessary to have a combined Federal and State program. Mr Hamer for instance said "with the relevant constitutional powers divided as they are between the Federal Government and the State Governments, the implementation of such a policy could only be effective given close understanding and co-operation between the Commonwealth and the States". He is quite right.

Q: Sir, how about incomes? Nobody has the constitutional power in respect of incomes, do they?

PRIME MINISTER: No. The Federal Parliament could not pass laws freezing incomes except for its own employees. State Parliaments could only pass legislation freezing incomes in respect to people covered by State awards. There would be an immediate application to the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission for any persons whose incomes were so frozen.

Q: Do you favour an overall freeze Sir? Incomes...?

PRIME MINISTER: Let me discuss it at this meeting.

Q: Mr Hamer's been the one who's called most for a Premiers Conference. Do you think in view of his coming election that he will try to bring up the whole matter of finances and...?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no. He's not suggested that in the telegram he sent yesterday or the letter which, I presume, might have come today, but which the telegram yesterday embodied.

Q: Would you be prepared to discuss these matters with them, since....?

PRIME MINISTER: The meeting will be on the subjects of the telegram.

Q: Will the Premiers Conference chaired by you be open to the Press?

PRIME MINISTER: They always are. Even my predecessors had Premiers Conferences open to the Press.

Q: It's very rare...

PRIME MINISTER: Aren't you thinking of the Loan Council?

Q: No, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I'll see what the Premiers Conference says on this.

Q: Sir, can I ask you a question about your visit to London please? I think you said some time ago it's not possible for the State Parliaments to abolish appeals to the Privy Council. That would need the approval of the Queen on the advice of the British Government, Sir, will you be asking the British Government

to advise the Queen to abolish appeals from the States to the Privy Council?

PRIME MINISTER: We will be discussing this - Mr Heath and I - and I hope that we will arrange - we mightn't be able to arrange it during the brief time I'm in London - but I would aim to promote the position where this is determined by arrangements between the British and the Australian Governments.

Q: Prime Minister, another question... (British Broadcasting Corporation) ... on the eve of your visit to Britain, how would you characterise in general terms the differences between your Government's attitudes towards Britain and that of the previous Liberal Government?

PRIME MINISTER: I suppose I'd better be getting used to these general questions... it was the German T.V. last week that asked a similarly wide question. I think Britain should realise that the change of government in Australia after 23 years of unchanged government has brought to a head a whole number of matters which it accumulated over many years. It's true that in many respects, economic matters in particular, trade matters, the links between Britain and Australia are much thinner than they used to be, but I don't think that Britain should think that there's any lessening of the other ties - the ties of sentiment - between Australia and Britain. Australians regard Britain with very great affection, but very obviously, for geographic, historic, commercial reasons, the ties are less formal, less institutional than they were.

Q: Can you be slightly more specific, Prime Minister. What is the future of the British investment in Australia in the light of what's been called the new nationalism?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, there'd be no difference in the Australian Government's attitude towards investment from Britain than there is towards investment from any other country. Britain, I don't think, any longer expects to have any particular privilege or immunity in Australia. Britain realises that Australia is a completely independent country and Britain would, I'm sure, realise that the attitude towards overseas investment in Australia from whatever source is much the same as the attitude towards overseas investment from overseas including Britain became in Canada under Diefenbaker and his successors. Very obviously Australia wants overseas investment where that will give her access to skills which she hasn't got in sufficient quantity herself or give her access to markets which she can't penetrate adequately by herself, but we are becoming more selective in investment from overseas. Australia is a very safe place for investment. We believe that we ought to have some say in where the investment goes.

Q: Prime Minister, the judicial inquiry that Mr Snedden proposed that you have rejected in the interests of...

PRIME MINISTER: ... the House rejected that...

Q: ...you said in the interests of the former Government. You're not generally quite so charitable. Is there some other reason?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I gave the reasons.

Q: Sir, in the A-M program on the A.B.C. today, Labor Minister Cameron very trenchantly criticised the Treasury wholly on the advice given by the Treasury to the Reserve Bank, and I quote: "Almost every prediction the Treasury and the Reserve Bank make even about simple things usually turns out to be wrong, so don't bewilder me by asking me questions about what the Reserve Bank should have done or is going to do or what the Treasury experts are recommending". Do you share Mr Cameron's views on the inefficiency of the advice given by the Treasury?

PRIME MINISTER: I never doubt the accuracy with which you represent the views expressed by my colleagues. I can't believe that Mr Cameron could have said anything so irresponsible.

Q: It's in the transcript, sir.

Q: Mr Whitlam, how strong is the Labor Party's commitment to low interest rates if the needs of economic management were to dictate perhaps that higher interest rates were necessary?

PRIME MINISTER: The only excuse I can see for high interest rates is inflation. We hope to keep both low.

Q: Sir, has your Government taken any action or will it take action in the United Nations or elsewhere over the gaoling after the secret trial in Salisbury of the journalist, Peter Niesewand, and could I invite your opinion?

PRIME MINISTER: The attitude I must express on any conduct by the rebel regime in Zembabwee is the same as that expressed by my predecessors. Legally it is still a British colony. Accordingly any representations that Australia makes must go through Britain. Britain has already protested. The Australian Government will be supporting all the resolutions which the United Nations has hitherto passed on the Smith regime and I would imagine be supporting any further measures which are found necessary to bring it to acceptable courses of conduct. Perhaps I should make it more pointed there. The Australian Government would not have any communications with the Smith regime. Our predecessors didn't, to their credit. We certainly shall not.

Q: Mr Whitlam, there was an announcement today on the banking arrangements for Papua New Guinea but there was no mention of whether New Guinea should have its own currency. Will this question arise soon and have you any views on it?

PRIME MINISTER: It's only a matter of time isn't it? Of course New Guinea will be having its own currency but it's not my province to express a view on it. This is a matter which is determined between the two countries. Nauru, for instance, still uses Australian currency. Maybe New Guinea will for some time.

Q: In view of the continuing increase in job vacancies will you support an increase in the migration intake in the next financial year.....?

PRIME MINISTER: This hasn't been discussed by Cabinet in the light of the latest employment figures. That report which the Department of Urban and Regional Development has produced and which some of you have secured really comes to the nub of our migration problems. The migrants can't be told where they'll go. They do, in fact, go

to Sydney and Melbourne and the most crucial urban problems in Australia occur in Sydney and Melbourne and one of the big contributors to those problems is migration. In general terms, fewer migrants will be coming to Australia.

Q: Thank you, Mr Whitlam. Does your expression of confidence in Senator Murphy's incident mean that you intend leaving him in control of ASIO or have you considered an ASIO report directly to you in future?

PRIME MINISTER: The administrative arrangements orders make the Attorney-General responsible for ASIO. The phone-tapping legislation makes the Attorney-General responsible for ASIO.

Q: Prime Minister, following on your answer to Bill Norman regarding the report that.....
You said Cabinet had not discussed this in relationship to the latest employment figures. Has it discussed the overall question of migration and do you agree that the Urban Affairs report could point to a suspension of migration for a period?

PRIME MINISTER: No. There'll be no suspension. Do you mean a cessation of all migration? We are concentrating as we promised on family reunion instead of government recruiting. We are not intending in any way to stop family reunion or to deter family reunion. The migrants who are happiest here, the ones who stay here longest are those who already have relatives here and who are sponsored by those relatives, they will still be coming. But we will not, as our predecessors were accustomed to do, sponsor migrants as a Government.

Q: This is finished. We will not be sponsoring any migrants by the Government?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I won't go as far as that, but the emphasis has changed as you know. We won't be stopping migrants who've already been promised a passage or whom their relatives here are hoping to nominate. There are proposals for - there are still programs for the Government paying for people whose skills are needed here but there's not the old blanket, you know, all applicants from some countries being able to get passages and so on.
