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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 1 MAY, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen, this morning Cabinet made several appointments, or at least approved recommendations for appointments to the Executive Council. The Executive Council won't be meeting until Thursday probably and so I can't announce them yet. My Press Office is releasing two statements this afternoon. The first announces that the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, at the invitation of the Australian and New Zealand Governments, will visit New Zealand and Australia in the first quarter next year. The second is announcing the discontinuance of bonding of staff in the Commonwealth Public Service.

Cabinet today decided to refer the Meat Board Report on meat prices to the Joint Committee on Prices. That's the Parliamentary Committee which will operate once the opposition parties have chosen their members. Cabinet authorised Senator Wriedt to release the Report. Cabinet spent a considerable amount of time discussing various proposals concerning prices. When finalised, these will be announced at the special Premiers' Conference on Thursday next week. A preliminary draft of legislation to establish the Prices Justification Board was also considered today.

Are there any questions?

Q: Mr Prime Minister, was the Government serious when it asked a producer-exporter dominated Meat Board to bring a recommendation on meat stabilisation, and is it prepared to carry the question on further, such as asking its officials in the Department of Primary Industry to bring down their own scheme?

PRIME MINISTER: The Meat Board is the only statutory body responsible for the Commonwealth. Therefore it was the only body (only official body) on whom the Australian Government could call for advice. You can see the Report as it is. Obviously the Government will also get advice from its officials on these matters.

Q: Gordon Bryant has been reported several times in the last couple of weeks as saying that the Australian Government will not hand over the Torres Strait Islands to New Guinea and that there'll be an enclave arrangement adopted. Is this the firm policy of the Government?

PRIME MINISTER: I will not answer questions based on summaries of what other people have said whether they are my colleagues or not. As I've said very many times to you and also in other public places the border between Australia and Papua can at the moment be determined by the two Governments if the Queensland Government will co-operate. The Queensland Government shows no signs of co-operating. In fact all the actions it takes seem designed to inflame the issue. When Papua New Guinea is

independent the matter will fall for determination through international channels such as the International Court of Justice where only the Australian and Papua New Guinea Governments will have the right to be heard.

Q: Sir, on that subject I asked you several months ago actually at your first press conference whether something could be done about what's called the Offshore Legislation in time for the conference on the Law of the Sea, and I now ask you again when you think the Commonwealth is likely to put up its own legislation so that the test case can be made so that some of this stuff can go to International Courts?

PRIME MINISTER: The legislation was approved by the Legislation Committee of Cabinet this morning. I expect it will be introduced this week or next week. I'm not so optimistic that we can in this Session introduce the companion legislation about fisheries, but the basic legislation incorporating the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill which was brought in on behalf of Mr McMahon three years ago this month I think - that will be brought in this week or next.

Q: Does it go much beyond the Bill which was brought in by the previous Government?

PRIME MINISTER: It includes mineral legislation too, other than oil, which is the subject of existing legislation.

Q: Sir, you aim to put that through this Session?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q: On the question of the executions, Sir, are you contemplating any action against Mr Bijedic for not contacting you or the Department of Foreign Affairs over the matter of executions and if not, why not?

PRIME MINISTER: This was, as I said in the Parliament, both the Attorney and the Ambassador assumed that the other would tell the Foreign Affairs Department. Now I'm certainly not contemplating any action against either. This was a misunderstanding. Of course the proper procedure should be for the Ambassador to approach the Foreign Affairs Department. I notice in some of the papers while I've been away that there was the allegation that I'd been too busy to see the Ambassador or had declined to see him. There is no truth in this whatever. Nobody from the Embassy asked the Department or my Office to see me, and we checked with the Embassy and they agree that there was no approach to see me or the Department at any time.

Q: Prime Minister, why then did they go and see the Attorney-General? Do you have an explanation for that?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I can only assume that since they didn't approach me and I was away that weekend and Senator Willesee was abroad with ECAFE that they approach the third Minister who had been involved in all the discussions when the Yugoslav Prime Minister was in Australia.

Q: Sir, are you perfectly satisfied with Senator Murphy's handling of the whole situation regarding the Yugoslavs, beginning with the ASIO raids and concluding with the fact that he did not inform you of the executions?

PRIME MINISTER: You've already heard me and I've got nothing further to say about the ASIO. About the other, Senator Murphy should have told me or should have told the Department - it doesn't have to be me. But as I said in the House, these are all side issues. They don't affect any major issue between Australia and Yugoslavia or within Australia. It was quite irrelevant.

Q: Mr Whitlam, having spoken to Senator Murphy last night do you accept that the information was given to him unofficially?

PRIME MINISTER: No information between an Ambassador and a Minister and a Minister's Office can be unofficial.

Q: Sir, are you confident that this will not occur again? Have you taken steps to ensure it will not occur again?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm certain that their Ambassador and other Ambassadors and the Attorney and other Ministers will see that the information which they wish to exchange comes to the notice of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Q: Prime Minister, was this issue discussed in Cabinet this morning? If so, what was the tenor of that discussion and can you tell us what was said when Senator Murphy dropped round to your Office yesterday to welcome you home?

PRIME MINISTER: I will say nothing of what happened on either occasion. You know I wouldn't.

Q: Prime Minister, you mentioned that these were side issues which did not affect our relations with Yugoslavia. A number of people however are concerned that the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia visited and had discussions with you only three days after the executions. Does that not affect our relations with Yugoslavia? Will you make a further protest that he didn't inform you then?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I will not make a further protest on this. I was asked in the House about this matter and I pointed out as everybody knows that the Yugoslavian Prime Minister had left Yugoslavia some days before the executions took place. As a result of the discussions that Senator Willesee, Senator Murphy and I had with the Yugoslavian Prime Minister we have now got information which we hadn't got before. The incursion into Yugoslavia took place in June or July last year and no information could be elicited before in fact they came here. As a result of the discussions that took place when they did come here we now have all the information which has come out.

Q: Wouldn't you agree, Sir, that he was less than frank however in not telling you that these men were about to be executed when he left Yugoslavia?

PRIME MINISTER: I think he could have said that they'd been convicted - yes.

Q: Sir, will you consider any form of compensation to the families of the executed men?

PRIME MINISTER: This hasn't arisen.

Q: Will it arise?

PRIME MINISTER: Wait till it is raised.

Q: It was raised in the Senate this afternoon, Sir.

PRIME MINISTER: It hasn't been considered by the Government. One can't assume - one just doesn't know - but one can't assume that the convictions were wrongly based. What we object to is the fact that people whom we claim to be Australian citizens were not put in touch with Australia's representatives in Yugoslavia. That's what we complain about, and it's what my Government has complained about all along, and now at last the issue is being discussed between our Ambassador in Belgrade and the Yugoslavian Ministers there following on the discussions which took place between the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and the Assistant Foreign Minister when they were in Australia.

Q: Sir, as these trials which culminated in the executions were in secret and we have a number of citizens of Yugoslav extraction, would you approach the Yugoslav Government to ask at least that diplomatic representatives be present at these secret trials, that which we protested in countries other than Yugoslavia?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know whether they were secret trials. They were certainly not publicised. I don't know who could attend the trials. None of us know that. It's something we're trying to find out. But of course we are trying to ensure that whenever any persons whom we acknowledge to be Australian citizens are arrested in Yugoslavia then our representatives will be informed. As I said in the House this question of dual nationality with the dominant nationality being that of the country where people are residing at the moment this is not just a matter which concerns Australia and Yugoslavia. It also concerns Australia and Italy, Australia and Greece, Australia and the United States. Those other three countries as well as Yugoslavia have always taken the attitude that if a person whom they regard as one of their citizens and whom we regard as one of our citizens visits one of those countries then he can be called up if he is in the proper age group for military service. Now this is not nearly as serious a matter as a trial and an execution. This is just the latest, the gravest manifestation of this problem of dual nationality. It affects a great number of our naturalised citizens. Now it might help if I were to say at this stage that there is provision under Yugoslavian law for Yugoslav citizens to renounce Yugoslav citizenship. There is provision for that and any Australians of Yugoslav origin who want to renounce their Yugoslav citizenship should take steps to do so. The Yugoslav Government takes the attitude and so too do other Governments which adhere to this principle of dual nationality, that it is not sufficient for the person and the Government of the country of his adoption to agree that he should renounce his original citizenship. That must also be terminated by agreement between the person and his country of

original citizenship. People should take these steps, and it is available under Yugoslav law.

Q: Do you think Sir that the renunciation has to take place on Yugoslav territory or can it be done...?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so. I think it can be done through the Yugoslav Consulates and Embassy in Australia but this is something where if anybody in Australia is concerned he should seek the advice of the Department of Immigration. Mr Grassby has been very actively considering this matter.

Q: Have you seen or spoken to the Yugoslav Ambassador since your return?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q: Well through what means do we know that Mr Bijedic thought that Senator Murphy had told the Foreign Affairs Department? Has he spoken to Foreign Affairs since then, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know the exact details of what communications there have been. I've been away as you know for a fortnight. I saw Mr Bijedic at his request on the 16th. I left that night.

Q: Sir, do you know whether any other people in similar circumstances are being held in Yugoslavia?

PRIME MINISTER: Well we are trying to find out.

Q: You don't know?

PRIME MINISTER: No, if we knew, we would tell the people concerned - the relatives - and if they wished we would announce it publicly. But we don't know. We are trying to find out.

Q: Sir, it's more than a fortnight since you sent off your protest to Yugoslavia. You still haven't had a reply I think?

PRIME MINISTER: No, on the contrary, we have had some information and further action is being taken. For instance, as a result of the protest which I think went on Friday 13th and as a result of the interview with Mr Bijedic on Monday 16th I have got the information which was given to you yesterday and which I read in the House today, namely the date of the executions. I wanted to know that of course because there are Australians who will want to have that information for legal purposes quite apart from the point of view of setting their minds at rest and that information has been secured, and I announced it in the House in full and some of it was given to you yesterday.

Q: It wasn't a formal reply to your protest note though?

PRIME MINISTER: There's no written reply yet but this information has come as a result of my discussion with Mr Bijedic on Monday 16th.

Q: Prime Minister, there are reports from Paris today that

the French Government is about to resume its nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll. There are also reports that the scheduled number of tests will be reduced. Do you as Prime Minister have any information on this?

PRIME MINISTER: No. The French Government refuses to give any information to anybody on this subject. Senator Murphy could give it to you more precisely because he received it orally. The French Foreign Minister said personally - he gave his assurance - that the tests would not take place during the scientific discussions which are to take place between French and Australian scientists in Australia next Monday and the following few days.

Q: Sir, how will you decide whether those talks have broken down and therefore you intend to go to the International Court?

PRIME MINISTER: We'd come to this conclusion in a very few days I would expect.

Q: A few days?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q: Mr Whitlam, Mr Barnard announced yesterday that the Supply would go with New Zealand as a last resort...?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q: ... did you endorse the statement and how close will the Supply go to the test zone if it does go?

PRIME MINISTER: I discussed this matter with Mr Barnard when he was in New Zealand yesterday. I don't know how far. This is a matter for discussion between New Zealand and the Australian navies.

Q: Prime Minister, when do you plan to table the Report by the three Australian scientists who went to the French test site?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not sure.

Q: ... why you haven't up till now?

PRIME MINISTER: All these matters bear upon the court case.

Q: Sir, has Cabinet or any of its Committees yet considered the detailed proposals for new Trade Practices legislation?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I hope we'll do it next week.

Q: I think in your absence Sir, Ampol entered into a contract with XL to refine oil and as a result of that XL has substantially cut prices in Melbourne garages. The Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce, I think is the correct title, claims that you were somewhat taken aback by this cut-price war and have proposed a full-scale investigation. Are these facts?

PRIME MINISTER: I've made no such proposal. I wasn't aware of the general situation. I haven't had the opportunity to be taken aback.

My emotions are described in various terms while I'm away. I see I'm angry, I'm furious. I hadn't heard that I was so moderately affected as to be taken aback.

Q: You're not upset at the cut-price war then?

PRIME MINISTER: Not in the least.

Q: Sir, would you like to correct the descriptions of your state of mind while you were away about the Murphy incident?

PRIME MINISTER: As you know I don't bother to confirm or deny any of these emotions which are attributed to me. I don't engage in long-distance controversy.

Q: Did you think it was an anti-climax in the House today - the Murphy uproar?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, completely.

Q: Sir, on that subject...

PRIME MINISTER: I know it's too unsporting of me to disclose what our predecessors have said in writing to each other. I'm supposed to keep that from you as they kept it from the public insofar as they could.

Q: Do you believe that should be made public... this correspondence...?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it's a reasonable reposte for those people that try to insinuate there are differences about us. The fact is that Mr Grassby, Senator Murphy and I are trying to do something about it and we have done something. We want to do more, but we are completely in agreement on wanting to secure the rights of people who accept Australian citizenship or who are given Australian citizenship. Secondly, we are completely at one in wanting to stamp out political terrorism.

Q: Sir, I think you said in the House today that you found out on Saturday April 14 that Senator Murphy had advance knowledge of the announcement about the executions. It has also been reported that you talked to Senator Murphy not long before he left Australia about 7 o'clock on that day. The implication is that you knew about this before he left. Could you say if that's so, and if so did you raise it with him on the phone and if not, why not?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't know before he left. I didn't raise it, therefore with him before he left. I spoke to him on the phone about his mission to Paris about the French nuclear tests.

Q: I got the impression you might have made a mistake when you said the 14th.

PRIME MINISTER: It might have been Sunday the 15th. I don't remember this. It was sometime at that weekend and I learnt as I said from a cable from Belgrade - our Ambassador in Belgrade - and I looked in my diary to see what day it was. I can't be sure what day it was, but it was on that weekend. I think it's

more likely that it's the Saturday, because I notice I was rather freer in my engagements on Saturday than I was on Sunday.

Q: I thought you'd only learned when you say the Ambassador on the Monday?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I might have learned of it on the Sunday. I think it was the Saturday.

Q: Will Australian sailors on H.M.A.S. Supply be in any danger when they go into the French nuclear test zone?

PRIME MINISTER: I hope not. They'll be volunteers so they would be accepting such risks as there might be but I don't know.

Q: When you say they'll be volunteers, they will be asked to volunteer for the trip or what?

PRIME MINISTER: Any persons going into any danger zone will do so as volunteers. There will be no compulsion on any R.A.N. personnel. There will be no orders given to R.A.N. personnel to go into this zone.

Q: But there will be R.A.N. personnel...?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, but I don't know if they'll be in the zone because the French have not said where the tests will be. Their practice hitherto has been I think to issue orders for aircraft and shipping a couple of days beforehand.

Q: Would we break those orders. I mean would we sail within the zone?

PRIME MINISTER: Every nation shares the high seas and no nation has the right to close them to any other nation.

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