

THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 8 MAY, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: I only have one Cabinet decision to give you. The other decisions were given to you last Sunday because Cabinet sat last Sunday, since the usual meeting time, Tuesday morning, has been occupied by a meeting of the House of Representatives. The decision that I now give you was made last Sunday but there had to be consultations with other countries. It concerns controls over strategic exports. The Government has taken a decision on a report by departments on the question of strategic export controls over commercial trade. It's been decided that Australia will no longer maintain on commercial trade with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba restraints different from the restraints on commercial trade maintained on any other country. The controls which have been maintained by Australia have not proved in recent years to have much relevance to our production and it has therefore been decided to treat trade with all countries on a similar basis. It's well known that controls by other western countries have been progressively reduced and the United States and European countries are selling highly sophisticated material to the communist countries. We have notified a number of our closest friends of this decision and have assured them that Australia will not be a means towards circumventing any controls which they may maintain over their own production. This decision has no bearing on the controls which are maintained by Australia over the export of arms and war-like stores and atomic energy material.

The embargo on trade with North Vietnam is being removed and we consider this is appropriate in view of the establishment of relations with that country.

I might also inform you that Professor Gruen, Professor of Economics at the Australian National University is taking up an appointment as consultant to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The appointment will be on a part-time basis. Professor Gruen will continue in his position at the University but will be available for advice and consultation to the Department and to the Prime Minister on economic assignments. Professor Gruen has occupied his present position at the Australian National University since December 1972. He was formerly Professor of Agricultural Economics at Monash.

Are there any questions?

Q: Does Professor Gruen's work supplement that of Dr Coombs, Sir, or replace it...?

PRIME MINISTER: No, supplements it.

Q: Sir, on the announcement you've made about trade with various countries, can you tell us if this will affect our trading relations with Rhodesia, South Africa. Are we saying that trade with any country will now be O.K.?

PRIME MINISTER: There is an exception in the case of Rhodesia because the United Nations has passed resolutions - the Security Council has passed resolutions - on that subject. I should of course have added that those controls will be strictly applied.

Q: What are the strategic exports that will be now allowed to be exported to these countries?

PRIME MINISTER: The trade with those countries will be the same as with all other countries. The restrictions on trade with these countries will be the same as the restrictions on trade with other countries, namely war-like stores and atomic energy material.

Q: Prime Minister, following the national wage case decision today, Mr Cameron issued a statement in which he said there was no justification in this decision for manufacturers to put up their prices. In the light of the community's great concern about prices and inflation generally and your meeting with the Premiers this week on this subject, are you prepared to ask as Prime Minister that manufacturers not immediately put up their prices, and that perhaps unions might consider the increase they got today as perhaps something that they can go along with and stay their hand for a little while?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not going to say anything more on this subject. I'm of course preparing quite busily today and tomorrow what I'll be saying at the Premiers' Conference on Thursday. And Mr Cameron - I saw his statement - I've got nothing to add to it.

Q: Did you approve that statement Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q: Prime Minister, since your Government has expressed the intention of closely co-ordinating inter-departmental policies on protection, could you tell us what action has been taken to co-ordinate the protectionist policies at this stage?

PRIME MINISTER: A new Protection Policy division has been set up in my Department. IT was approved by the Executive Council the other day. Vacancies will be advertised in the Gazette this Thursday and some senior positions in the daily press. There is an inter-departmental committee on assistance to industries which will be the focus of departmental and inter-departmental co-operation in work on tariffs and other selective forms of assistance to industries. This committee will be chaired by my Department and also it will have as members the Treasury and the Industry Department or Departments relevant to the particular matters it's considering. Other Departments such as Labour or Defence will be co-opted as appropriate.

Q: You said last week that this week's Cabinet would be discussing details of the Trade Practices legislation...?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I was too optimistic. It didn't.

Q: Last week, Prime Minister, you said that you weren't sure about when you would table the report by three Australian scientists about the French tests. Are you any more sure now?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q: When will you be?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm no more sure.

Q: When will you be any more sure than you are now?

PRIME MINISTER: I tabled four reports - I think it was last Wednesday - on the consequences of atomic tests. That was last Wednesday.

Q: ... but now the three Australian scientists?

PRIME MINISTER: I made a reference to their report in it.

Q: You didn't table it?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q: Will you?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm thinking about it.

Q: Prime Minister, can you give us any progress report on the talks between the French scientists and the Australian scientists?

PRIME MINISTER: They've proceeded throughout today. They may go into tomorrow I'm told.

Q: Will we be given any statement on what's been discussed?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so.

Q: Are they making any progress, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know.

Q: Prime Minister, supplementary to that other question about the report by the three Australian scientists, you did in answer to my question last week say that you couldn't table it because of the case of ours being prepared in the International Court of Justice, and yet you did table the others. May I ask then why you can't table the one by the Australian scientists?

PRIME MINISTER: I took all the advice on this matter about the four that I did table last Wednesday. You must appreciate I've got to be quite careful as to what is released pending these proceedings which may take place before the International Court of Justice.

Q: Sir, why won't we be told what's happening between the scientists?

PRIME MINISTER: There again, I will take advice on this in the light of any proceedings which may ensue.

Q: Prime Minister, on the question of French nuclear tests, can you tell us one way or the other, do you support industrial action by Australian trade unions against the French Government and their carrying on with the nuclear tests?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't encourage it. If it takes place there's no more we can do about it than our predecessors.

Q: Do you then endorse it though Sir, when you say you don't encourage it?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't encourage it.

Q: Prime Minister, in the light of the appointment of Mr Gruen as mentioned today in the establishment of the new Protection Policy division, do you anticipate that your Department...?

PRIME MINISTER: He's not necessarily associated with the new Protection Policy division...

Q: No, I appreciate that, but they are both appointments in the economic policy area...?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q: Do you anticipate your Department taking on the sort of major economic policy role that Mr Chifley anticipated in the Prime Minister's Department some 25-odd years ago when he lost an election?

PRIME MINISTER: The Prime Minister's Department is the appropriate Department to co-ordinate matters, and of course, there are quite a number of matters which have to be co-ordinated in the protection field. Up till now there has been no adequate investigation of claims for protection in primary industry. There has been very little co-ordination, if any, in the protection given at the instance of the Department of Secondary Industry as it now is, or the Department of Customs and Excise by-law exemption, and accordingly, if there is to be proper co-ordination in the two Departments which have had responsibilities in protection up till now and also in respect to Primary Industry naturally the Prime Minister's Department should provide that co-ordination.

Q: Do you anticipate the Prime Ministers Department actually initiating the policy proposals?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't anticipate that. The title of the Department is the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and accordingly it is the natural Department to co-ordinate matters between other Departments, and, as you know, I am now technically responsible for the Protection Commission which Sir John Crawford is investigating.

Q: Mr Whitlam, are you opposed to Ansett having 24 per cent of the national airline in Papua New Guinea?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm only concerned in this - what Ansett Transport Industries does in Papua New Guinea insofar as that affects other Australian airlines. What the Government of Papua New Guinea does is its affair except insofar as Australian companies or instrumentalities are concerned. So, in isolation I don't object to Ansett Transport Industries having 24 per cent. I would think it wrong however for Ansett Transport Industries to have a predominant role over the roles of other Australian airlines.

Q: Sir, do you believe that an Australian Government should be able to dictate to the Government of Papua New Guinea on the composition of its airline?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't believe that, and I don't believe the reverse either.

Q: As the Prime Minister, you are aware no doubt of today's report by the Committee on Commonwealth superannuation. When will the Government act upon this?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, this is being given to Cabinet for information but we haven't considered it yet. You will appreciate that we are tabling reports practically as soon as we get them. Now, that is before we have decided an attitude about them. We are quite happy to get people's views on those reports. Other people can see them almost as quickly as we do.

Q: Sir, is there anything to announce about your tour to India or your tour to Africa? Progress at all?

PRIME MINISTER: We're leaving on Sunday the 3rd. It will take us all day to get there and we're leaving on the return trip from New Delhi just before midnight on Wednesday the 6th, so we'll be in India for three complete days.

Q: Prime Minister, the Bishop of Sandhurst has advised his flock not to vote for the Labor Party at the Victorian elections on the abortion issue. Do you think it's appropriate for the Bishop of Sandhurst to give this advice, and secondly, will you be voting on the Abortion Bill on Thursday or will you have to avoid that ordeal because of the Premiers' Conference?

PRIME MINISTER: I expect, if it's at all possible, to be voting on the Bill, and I expect that the other Ministers at the Premiers' Conference will be voting also and in the same way. I have no comment to make on this Stewart except that the Bourbons would have been proud of him.

Q: As Bishop Stewart has advised his flock to vote against the Labor Party but not against the Bill in the Victorian State elections, would you consider providing subsidies for those people who want to indulge in politics outside the Church in the same way as subsidies are provided for those inside the Church. I'm thinking of the religious subsidy of rate-free land etc.?

PRIME MINISTER: The Commonwealth gives no subsidies to any Church in respect of rate-free land or any other respects.

Q: It does in the A.C.T. perhaps...

PRIME MINISTER: Does it...? I don't think Bishop Stewart would get a see in the A.C.T.

Q: Today the Government declared the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill urgent. Do you regard it as being so urgent and important as to seek a double dissolution if the Opposition twice rejects it in the Senate?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes. This would be a Bill of substance. Obviously if the Senate were to reject this Bill, then that is one of the Bills whose rejection we would seriously consider in the context of a double dissolution.

Q: Mr Whitlam, do you agree that airport development funds should be withheld from Papua New Guinea if Ansett has 24 per cent of the national airline?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Jones and Mr Morrison are going up to Port Moresby on Friday of next week to discuss this matter with Mr Somare. I've nothing further to say on it.

Q: Supplementary to the question on protection policy, the Department of Secondary Industry is encouraging the production of industry panels....?

PRIME MINISTER: Wait till Sir John Crawford has made his report.

Q: You wouldn't favour this.....(inaudible).

PRIME MINISTER: No. That's why I've sought advice from Sir John Crawford on this and other matters. I don't propose to pre-empt the advice.

Q: Prime Minister, may I seek clarification of an answer you gave me earlier? I asked you if you believed that Australia should dictate terms to Papua New Guinea on the composition of its airline...?

PRIME MINISTER: I've got nothing more to say on that. As I've said...

Q: You don't want to even explain what you said earlier Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I would have thought it was quite clear. It was to everyone else.

Q: You've said that controls will remain on arms sales from Australia. What guidelines has the new Government laid down on arms sales and what restrictions, and could you give us examples, say, when you sell arms to Brazil, the Philippines, Taiwan, India, Pakistan...?

PRIME MINISTER: The guidelines and the regulations themselves are unchanged from since last year when we took over.

Q: Sir, can you tell us what sorts of things we couldn't export to the countries you mentioned before which we now will be able to export? Can you name some of the goods?

PRIME MINISTER: You will remember all the controversy there was over the steel and tallow in previous years. Permits were always given for them to be exported but there had to be the procedure of seeking the permits, so all that the procedure involved was more paper work. The net result was the same.

Q: Mr Whitlam, on this occasion, you said earlier that you would be technically the Minister in charge of tariffs. Does that mean that some other Minister or Ministers will be in practical terms the Minister, or do you take on the burden of running the whole of the tariff policy on your shoulders?

PRIME MINISTER: I've told you the Inter-departmental Committee will take the burden off my shoulders. My Department will chair that Committee. This will be a collective responsibility. Any instrumentality has to be responsible to some specific minister. The Tariff Board at present is - the Protection Commission I guess will be - responsible to the Prime Minister because the Prime Minister and his Department co-ordinate the activities where several ministers or several departments are concerned.

Q: Sir, have you reached the stage now where you have divested yourself of the burden of Foreign Affairs?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I find it most exhilarating.

Q: Prime Minister, have you had any response from the Yugoslav Government to your protest note? Secondly, have you had any response from the Chinese Government on your protest note on the nuclear testing?

PRIME MINISTER: The protest to China was oral, so there'd be no written response. The protest to Yugoslavia was oral also but it was in terms which were set out by me in writing and there have been further discussions between our Ambassador in Belgrade and the Yugoslav Foreign Office on this general question of dual nationality. Last week - it was Wednesday I think - I gave the House the names of some twelve persons about whom we had sought information from the Yugoslav authorities - ten names I think there were. Eight, - as far as I know - information has not yet been given. The other two - it came out - I mentioned one case - and there was another case which came out in the paper the following day. I think there are still eight cases about which information is still being sought. I think you were told weren't you after the Cabinet meeting on Sunday that when the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is established (I guess it will be today) I shall be asking it to inquire into the subject of dual nationality.

Q: Prime Minister, do you expect to have any trouble in getting the Territorial Sea Bill through the Senate and will your determination to push ahead with it be affected by opposition from Labor Premiers, and do you class that legislation in the same category as the industrial legislation in the context of a double dissolution?

PRIME MINISTER: I would expect that the Senate would pass the legislation. After all it is the same legislation as the previous government promised. It was in the Governor-General's

speech opening the last Parliament. It was in the Governor-General's speech opening this Parliament. I would imagine therefore that all except half a dozen senators would, one way or another, have been committed to that legislation. Accordingly the question of a double dissolution wouldn't arise.

Q: Sir, a two-part question: first of all, some weeks ago I asked you about whether the Premiers' Conference would be open to the Press, and you were going to check up on what the likely thing was going to be. Can you say now whether it's going to be open or whether you'll be recommending that it will be open; and secondly, why is the Press conference going to be cut off after 25 minutes?

PRIME MINISTER: On the first, it's the Premiers' Conference itself decides whether it's to be open to the Press. I'm quite happy for it to be open to the Press. The second one, anybody who's rising is doing so for the second time, including yourself.

Q: There has been quite a bit of discussion in the last week or so about the Convention which allegedly governs access to and use of Cabinet documents and ministerial correspondence and that sort of thing. Could you explain to us your interpretation of that Convention, as it operates in Australia and perhaps explain why the Whitehall Convention doesn't operate here - why it's not good enough for Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: The Whitehall Convention applies to Cabinet documents and it has been observed in Australia. There isn't a Whitehall Convention concerning correspondence. The correspondence which has been published bears upon matters which are of very great public moment. It's obviously of concern to the public to realise as this correspondence has revealed that our predecessors were at loggerheads over these matters which we are tackling unitedly. There can be no doubt that the correspondence which has been revealed doesn't tally with what some other Liberal Ministers have now been saying.

Q: Are you prepared to reveal correspondence between your Ministers?

PRIME MINISTER: The question hasn't arisen.

Q: Could I just have your reaction to the Croatian newspaper report published in America saying that the executions of three Australians took place on April 10, the day after Senator Murphy was informed?

PRIME MINISTER: This is a completely unsubstantiated report. Nobody in fact will take the responsibility of verifying this journal which is a notoriously polemical journal on the right in America. I think it is even, I'm told, being investigated by the F.B.I.
