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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 29 MAY, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: I thought it might suit you to have another conference in the morning. The Cabinet met yesterday morning and afternoon and most of the Ministers concerned issued statements to you. There was one which wasn't issued so perhaps I can give you the gist of it now. Cabinet approved the establishment of a task force to draw up uniform national housing standards in co-operation with the States. You remember this was forecast at the Premiers' Conference about three weeks ago.

An expert technical unit will be established in the Department of Housing and we have invited the States and local Government authorities to co-operate with the Australian Government in establishing a national Housing Standards Committee. Mr Johnson is releasing a statement to you on it and my Press Office will release the text of my letter to the Premiers later in the day, that is after they have all got the letter themselves. Are there any questions?

Q: Do you oppose the United States bombing in Cambodia? Do you intend writing to President Nixon protesting against this bombing in similar vein to the protest over U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, and if not, why not?

PRIME MINISTER: My general attitude about the withdrawal of American bombers from Thailand where this operation is based is well known. It's known to all the relevant authorities.

Q: Do you plan to go to Washington later this year? If so will your visit be official or unofficial? Do you intend to go to Washington even if you are not invited there by President Nixon?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I'll be going through the United States. As you know there is a meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Ottawa early in August. As you also know, I was able to accept one of the invitations from Latin American countries to make official visits to them. I accepted the one to Mexico that will be late in July. Clearly, going from Mexico to Canada, I will go through, or across the United States. I have many invitations to address bodies in New York and Washington. Now, I think, if I may say so, it's about time people took these things a little more rationally. The relationship between Australia and the United States or the relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom are so long-standing and so intimate that a Head of Government does not wait for an official invitation. That may be the case, for instance in some of the other visits that I am making this year, such as Indonesia or India, where I am going next week, or Japan, or China later in the year. Visits by Australian Prime Ministers to the United Kingdom and the United States are common place.

Q: Has Cabinet reached a decision on the size of the Army and will Mr Barnard be making a statement to Parliament this week?

PRIME MINISTER: I expect Mr Barnard will be making a statement to Parliament on this subject this week. The Cabinet is making the following recommendations to the Caucus so that the planned growth of the regular Army - that is the volunteer regular army - should be increased from 31,000 to 34,000 over the course of the next three years. The field force should be organised on a divisional basis of six regular battalions, in three task forces of two battalions each, with combat and logistic support. These task forces should be at Townsville, Ennogergera and Holdsworth. There should be a further major review of ground force capability in 1976.

Q: How important is it to you to be invited to see President Nixon when you are in Washington. Do you have specific matters you wish to discuss with him and if so could you tell us what they are? Are you concerned with the appearances as far as the Australian electorate is concerned if you don't get an invitation?

PRIME MINISTER: I would be very happy to discuss with President Nixon anything that he would like to raise and I imagine he would be happy to discuss with me anything that I would like to raise. But I repeat official invitations are not necessary in these circumstances. I would hope that when the Australian Prime Minister was visiting Washington it would be as natural for him to discuss matters with the President as it used to be in Sir Robert Menzies' time. All this hooah that has accompanied visits by Sir Robert Menzies' successors is psychophantic.

Q: You said that you would hope that it would be natural for the Australian Prime Minister to discuss things with the President while he was in Washington. There has been speculation from Washington that you won't be getting an invitation because the President is still angry with the Australian Government over protests by Australian Ministers on the bombing of Vietnam. Do you think there is any basis for that speculation and certainly do you think it would look that way if you don't get an invitation while you are there?

PRIME MINISTER: Speculation is the operative part of your question. There is no change in any of these circumstances - I have not said anything on any of these subjects for a very long time. Now President Nixon doesn't hold press conferences. He doesn't answer to Parliament. I can't be expected to be any more forthcoming in these matters than he is in these circumstances. I give him credit for being mature and courteous.

Q: In the discussions on the size of the Army was there any proposal that a task force base or some Army base be established in Perth or Western Australia.

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q: Senator Murphy said some time ago that he intended to introduce the trade practices legislation this Session. When in fact will it be introduced?

PRIME MINISTER: Next Session. Gentlemen, there have been

more Bills introduced and in fact more Bills passed in this Session than in any autumn session in the Parliament's history. It's just not possible to introduce and I don't think undertakings were given to introduce all the Bills to which the Government is committed in this first Session.

Q: As your Office was involved were you consulted on the Everingham expulsion, and further, as the man's livelihood is involved and also the prospect of future employment, would you consider asking Mr President or Mr Speaker to re-examine the situation so that he can if he so desires bring any evidence that he may have to (inaudible)? Would you also consider if that course is not followed would you consider asking Mr Speaker to reconsider the severity of the penalty as it could involve the man in possible employment for a very long time?

PRIME MINISTER: Both the President and the Speaker consulted with me I suppose it was some six weeks ago at any rate on this matter. It happens that Mr Everingham was found in my office I think it was the Wednesday - it might have been the Tuesday - before the last polling day. At any rate it was the day after I'd spoken at the National Press Club and no member of my staff was in my office when he was there. The only member of my staff who had been in the office had left shortly before he was found. He was found there when she came back. The fact that it was my office is immaterial. Members of the Press Gallery are given the freedom of this building more than any other of their citizens. If a member of the Gallery is found in a room where he is not prima facie entitled to be found I believe it is incumbent upon him to give an explanation. He has not given me an explanation. The explanation that he has given the presiding officers I would not regard as satisfactory. But it's immaterial that it is my office. Every member of Parliament could be equally concerned.

Q: Mr Connor, the Minister for Minerals and Energy, announced I think it was last week that there would be a national pipeline grid and he said that it would extend virtually right across the country to Port Hedland and across to Sydney and down to Melbourne and up to the Queensland coastal towns. Is this plan subject to some sort of feasibility study of the economics of it - his only justification amounted to about eight or 15 paragraphs in the Second Reading Speech.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, anything that the Government does is done on the basis of proper investigations which are made public. Mr Connor I am certain would be very happy to dilate further to you on this matter.

Q: Supplementary to Mr Thomas's question, has a feasibility study been made or will it be made before the Government acts to go ahead with the scheme.

PRIME MINISTER: You had better ask Mr Connor. I don't think one has been made but I think one will be made. I would be certain that one would be made. The Pipeline Authority Bill as you know is the necessary legal basis for these things but the Government has taken the quite clear attitude that in respect to all public investments for which it is responsible wholly or in part that there must be a proper economic and environmental study and that that study should be published. Nobody doubts the economic aspects of the pipeline from South Australia to New South Wales which will be the first enterprise undertaken

by the Authority. The environmental aspect is still under study by the appropriate New South Wales authority and the relevant Australian Ministers had evidence or submissions made to that New South Wales authority. It's decision I believe has not yet been delivered.

Q: Have you made any representations to the British Government about their treatment of the State Premiers or their representatives in London? Have you reminded the British Government that there is only one Australian Government and that it resides in Canberra?

PRIME MINISTER: I hope you'll forgive me if I don't want to say what representations pass or in what form representations pass between me and other Heads of Government. I believe that the British Government takes the attitude today that it has for a long time past - that there is one Australian Government. It becomes farcical if the British Government were to deal individually with such members of the Commonwealth as are federal nations such as Canada, Australia, India and Malaysia. International business becomes anarchic if national Governments don't deal with each other.

Q: Just to revert back to resources policy, yesterday in Sydney the Chairman of Queensland Uranium told his annual general meeting the Whitlam Government had written after December 2 assuring his Company that all the agreements in respect of Naborlic entered into by the previous Government would be honoured by this Government. Now this seems to cut across your policies expressed at the election in respect of the environment - I understand there is something about national parks up there and also in respect of Aborigines - I just wondered what the position is in respect of Queensland Uranium. Is it correct that your Government will honour these agreements?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't see the statement. I don't remember writing to them. I don't remember having any conversation with any of their representatives. But as a general proposition naturally the incoming Australian Government honours obligations which its predecessors entered into. There are some cases, and Mr Connor is the proper one to give you the details, where there were arrangements between the preceding Australian Government and some of the State Governments with various companies. And as I understand the position those companies haven't honoured their part of those arrangements. They have failed, or in fact refused, to give the information to the State and Australian Government, which they undertook to provide. Mr Connor very properly is requiring that information to be given. I don't remember the Naborlic instance.

Q: In view of your statement last week that the Federal Liberal Party had to get on the wave length for the future....?

PRIME MINISTER: I was quoting I think what Mr Snedden said the first time he contested the leadership of the Liberal Party. Isn't that right? I think Mr Chipp was his public relations man at the time and devised that memorable phrase...

Q: Do you think that Mr Fraser would be a disaster as leader of the Federal Liberal Party?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think one ought to engage into speculation or at least it must be relevant speculation. As I understand it Mr Fraser's nose is at present out of joint because a romance has developed between the old prostitute of the Country Party and the D.L.P. He was aiming to be the head of a great conservative coalition in Australia. Now frankly gentlemen, I don't want to speculate as to who is going to be head of the household when the old harlot is churched.

Q: (Overseas Press - Fingleton) ...

Q: Overseas Press?

Q: Well in this case with your indulgence... his Lordship as it were, the Baron of Fleet. You have just mentioned prostitutes and harlots Sir. You've disowned the State Premiers.

PRIME MINISTER: No, wait a bit, I'm not saying any of them have fallen into that category. It was a memorable Premier of Victoria, Sir Henry Bolte, who described the Country Party as a prostitute. Not only in that, but an old one.

Q: Sir, have you seen fit to warn the Premiers at present in London of the inherent dangers that lurk there?

PRIME MINISTER: I think the only Premiers there are conservative ones and it's the Tories who seem to fall for the threats in London.

Q: They've found out- let's put it that way. Sir, that's not my question. The British Prime Minister, Mr Heath visited Paris last week. Did you get the impression during your talks with Mr Heath in London that he would strongly support the Australian-New Zealand protest against the French nuclear tests. The London Daily Times which is owned by his Lordship says editorially that it doubts whether he did convey to the French any serious criticism of the tests. It says further, the British cultivation of good terms with France combined with British sensitivity to the charge of hypocrisy since Britain already possesses nuclear weapons. Did Mr Heath give you any encouragement? Did he, to use a word of Mr Chifley, duchess you? And finally Sir, the last question - the ban on French trade. Does this mean the end of the Concorde as far as Qantas is concerned?

PRIME MINISTER: On the Concorde: that's an English as much as a French aircraft. I don't want to express a view of the Concorde. It's a matter which I presume the Government will consider in due course. Now Mr Heath did entertain me very well. He's a good host. He's been cordial to me when he was Leader of the Opposition when I was. And he is now, and this has been so when he's visited this country as Leader of the Opposition. Now that we are both Prime Ministers we get on civilly, courteously, cordially. But I didn't make more than passing reference to the French nuclear tests in our atmosphere. In my conversations with Mr Heath I was more concerned there with the matters of the abolition of appeals to the Privy Council, Britain no longer making her courts available for the determination of disputes between Australian litigants.

I discussed the matter of Britain's responsibility in this region with Sir Alec Douglas Home and Mr Anthony Royal. the men from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. There were

officials around and so on. I didn't put the point of view on behalf of the Commonwealth countries in the South Pacific in the South Pacific Forum - Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Nauru, the Cook Islands - who'd asked me to take it up. I didn't put it on the basis that Britain has to argue our case. After all we are independent States. We are able to do this and we should do it ourselves. The argument that I did put on behalf of the South Pacific Forum to Sir Alec Douglas Home and Mr Royal was that Britain had responsibilities in respect of non-self-governing territories in the region. Pitcairn Island, insignificant I suppose in terms of population, but to the east of Mururoa Atoll, and also the Gilbert and Ellis Islands colony, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. Now, I put on behalf of the Forum that Britain internationally had to speak for her wards in those territories. And I stressed that in our view she should do so. There may be another form of embarrassment of course - that Britain carried out these tests without any great Australian sensitivity twenty years ago in the Montebellos ...

Q: Was there any harm?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, there was. As you know it has only just been possible in the last year or so for people to land on the Montebellos, and then they also did so at Maralinga, and they also did so at the Christmas Islands in the Pacific - not the Christmas Islands in the Indian Ocean. So I think Britain has a certain sensitivity on this because she was doing earlier, without complaint, as America did earlier again in the ..... and so on, what France is now doing to the dismay of everybody in the world, not just in the South Pacific.

Q: Last week Prime Minister, you stated that you believed in a career public service. Could you explain to me then why the job of scientific adviser in your own Department is not being advertised?

PRIME MINISTER: I thought it was being filled from the Public Service. I don't know. Thank you, I'll ask about this straight afterwards. Frankly I don't know the details of individual positions like this.

Q: Mr Prime Minister, on May 18 Mr Enderby said he would try to increase the margarine quota for the A.C.T. and continue to work for the abolition of the quota system. What is your Government's attitude to the margarine quota system. Are Mr Enderby's moves an attempt by your Government to break down the margarine quota system considering Marrickville Holdings can export margarine to other States?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Enderby and I think Senator Wriedt have also been asked questions on this subject over the last fortnight. These matters have not been discussed in Cabinet so I can't express a collective view on it and I'm not ministerially responsible for it, but perhaps you would appreciate my expressing a personal view: I think it's quite absurd that a wholesome product in popular demand should be artificially denied to Australian consumers. As I understand it it's quite possible to make margarine in Australia from Australian products.

There can be no question that it is a healthful food, that it's not deleterious. I have no patience with those who want to restrict the production of proper foods from Australian products.

Australia is way behind the times in this. There are a great number of other dairying countries where the percentage of consumption of margarine vis a vis butter is, as I understand, much higher than in Australia. Now if a product's good it doesn't need rival products to be suppressed. Now that of course is a perfectly personal view.

Q: What will happen at budget time to the present unique system of Ministers being required to virtually submit their Cabinet submissions to Caucus committees before these submissions go to Cabinet?

PRIME MINISTER: It is impossible to summarise the procedure as briefly as you've done. Obviously there are practical factors which modify the summary that you've used.

Q: Senator Townley remarked yesterday or he was quoted as saying that he would be calling on Mr Barbour from ASIO to appear before this Senate Select Committee. Has Cabinet considered the question of calling public servants, not only this Committee, but any other subsequent committee, has it reached an attitude - have you reached an attitude yourself on this. I believe there's been some approach in the past about this?

PRIME MINISTER: The Cabinet hasn't discussed this matter. If any Parliamentary Committee seeks the attendance of public servants then the relevant Minister would consider the position, if he was in doubt he would, I expect, consult his colleagues in the Cabinet. Now whether the Committee of which the Senator you mentioned is Chairman - he is not the Committee - whether it seeks the attendance of the distinguished public employee whom you mention still has to be determined.

Q: The Premiers in London are seeking an advisory opinion from the Privy Council on the legality of the Federal Government's offshore legislation...?

PRIME MINISTER: Have they? They haven't told us.

Q: ... this is what they've said their aim is. If they do that, will the Federal Government put a case to the Privy Council, and, secondly a related matter, the Opposition has decided to delay this legislation for three months in the Senate. Would you regard such a delay as very important and, if so, what...how serious?

PRIME MINISTER: Do you mean to say the Opposition or some portions of it have resolved not to pass this legislation? That is, there will be another failure to pass... Which part of the Opposition has decided this?

Q: The Liberal Party with the agreement of the others I understand.

PRIME MINISTER: The Senate Liberal Party or the whole Liberal Party. Gentlemen, these are so speculative, some fascinating possibilities arise and I certainly will watch them.

Q: May I ask you a personal question that's not serious...?

PRIME MINISTER: All the previous subjects that you've raised - I hope they're not taken too seriously on this occasion...

Q: You're putting me off a little... when you became Prime Minister of this great country, you also became ex officio a member of the Royal Canberra Golf Club...

PRIME MINISTER: Did I?

Q: Indeed you did. It's the most picturesque course in Australia. Its woods abound with galaxies of glamorous and glorious birds - this sort not that sort...

PRIME MINISTER: So my wife's told me. She plays there.

Q: They keep on asking up there Sir, when is he coming. Will you give thought in the recess to making your first appearance at this royal course - and I hope the term royal doesn't put you off...?

PRIME MINISTER: This is the first invitation I think I've had. Jack, take me there.

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