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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: I have a few announcements which I regret I couldn't give to you or my fellow members of the Parliament before this. Some of the announcements I have relate to decisions by the Executive Council and while the Executive Council used to sit on Thursdays and we brought it forward to midday on Tuesdays, one still has to wait till it concludes, before one can make any announcements of the decisions which the Government recommends to it. Secondly, some of the decisions have to be received by the Premiers before one can announce them and there again this has not been done - the messages to the Premiers - they would not have been received by the Premiers very long ago.

There are some appointments in the transport field. The Secretary of the Department of Transport has been appointed as a sole Commissioner under the Royal Commissions Act to inquire into the whole of the Maritime Industry and the development of transport policies. I will circulate the terms of reference of the Maritime Industry Commission of Inquiry which Mr. Summers will conduct. I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Summers for his acceptance of this completely new national task, there is no-one in Australia who knows so much about it, and who is so well equipped to discharge it. As you know we are resolved to amalgamate the Departments of Transport and Civil Aviation. The new head of the Department will be coming from Canada, Mr. C.C. Halton. He was born in Britain and he has had a most distinguished career in private industry in Britain and in public service in Canada. Mr. Jones met him when he was in Ottawa earlier this year, and I met him when I was there for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. He has experience in many fields of transport, he is a distinguished economist, it is a very great advantage to Australia to have a man who is aware of the similar federal system in Canada and who has operated within it, and also is acquainted with the system in the United States. Mr. Jenner will be Acting Secretary of the Department from 30 September until Mr. Halton's arrival. Sir Donald Anderson, the present Secretary of the Department of Civil Aviation will become full time Chairman of Qantas on the 1st October. Mr. R. Phillips will be Acting Director-General of Civil Aviation until his Department is merged with the Department of Transport. Mr. Jones can give you further details about Mr. Halton, the first Secretary of the amalgamated department.

The Auditor-General was involved in a car accident and Mr. W. Scott will act as Auditor-General while he is off.

We have decided to expand the services of the Australian Legal Aid Office, which was announced last July. In view of the demands already being placed on the Office, the Government decided to allocate an additional \$750,000 for the Office in this financial year.

There are two other inquiries which we will be setting up. One is into Government Procurement Policy and I can circulate the terms of reference to you. We expect to announce the membership of the Committee of Inquiry in the next few days. We have also decided to set up a F.M. Radio Inquiry. The Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, recommended that there should be a new inquiry into F.M. broadcasting. Senator Douglas McClelland, Minister for the Media, made a submission to Cabinet along the same terms, and I have a brief note of the purpose of this inquiry. We want to set up F.M. We want to know what bands it should operate in or what bands other media might have to operate in. A very great deal of expenditure is involved, so we want to be sure that the correct decision is made.

Are there any questions?

QUESTION: Do you believe you are bound, under whatever circumstances, to fulfil your election undertaking to give a 35 hour week to the Commonwealth Public Service?

PRIME MINISTER: As my colleague, Mr. Cameron, pointed out so effectively at Question Time in the House this morning, it becomes very difficult to carry out this particular promise in the Policy Speech, because we have so effectively, promptly and fully carried out the other promise to remove unemployment. You remember that in the Policy Speech, I said that in the lifetime of this Parliament, the 28th Parliament, the working hours of all Commonwealth employees will be reduced by 1½ hours to 35 hours. I am the Minister responsible for the Commonwealth Public Service, I can redeem this promise by making a recommendation anytime in the next two years.

QUESTION: Do you accept Mr. Cameron's argument in Parliament this morning that it might be impractical to do so?

PRIME MINISTER: I won't make any commitments to two years ahead.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, I understood that you had made commitments two years ahead, do you now expect to honour those commitments?

PRIME MINISTER: It would be more difficult, but I won't say that I won't honour them. I acknowledge that I made the commitment. That is in the lifetime of this Parliament.

QUESTION: Did Cabinet yesterday, discuss the Industries Assistance Commission? If so, what was the result and what was the attitude of Dr. Cairns?

PRIME MINISTER: We did discuss it. I expect to be introducing the bill this week. Might I say, Mr. Haupt, that I was a bit disappointed in an article of yours this morning in the Financial Review which misrepresented what I had said - you said, referring to my speech in Adelaide last Friday - "After berating the business community on Friday, for masochism, schitsophrenia and phsychological sabotage". I beratted the stock market, not the business community. I was quite precise in the people I beratted.

QUESTION: How do you react to Bob Hawke describing you and the Cabinet, of accusing you of political imbecility and political insanity?

PRIME MINISTER: I have no comment to make on these remarks.

QUESTION: You have said at least twice in the last week that the bulk of Australia's present inflation is due to trends imported from overseas. What evidence do you have for this statement?

PRIME MINISTER: There is a very great demand, this season, for exports for instance, in meat. That is the developed countries, such as the United States, which had previously placed restrictions on the import of our meat are now anxious to get as much as they can. This is a very clear case where the price of meat had been put up. More and more the inflation is spreading between all developed countries. I give you that instance.

QUESTION: In the wake of Parramatta, do you plan to relinquish the Foreign Minister portfolio, so you can spend more time at home to concentrate on domestic politics?

PRIME MINISTER: I will tell you if I have any changes, when I have decided to make any such changes.

QUESTION: Did Mr. Byrant discuss with you, his move to send his wife to Maningrida? Who covered her expenses on that trip?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know.

QUESTION: Again in the wake of Parramatta, you said that the Galston decision was one that may have gone against you, or maybe the reason why there was such a swing against the Government.....

PRIME MINISTER: Of course it was.

QUESTION: Do you also accept Mr. Whelan's assessment that the public relations campaign of your Government has broken down and that the policies of your Government are not getting through to the people.

PRIME MINISTER: I think that's right - the public haven't seen the whole picture this way, that will obviously be cured by the time of any general election.

QUESTION: The Melburnians today are reported to be very.....

PRIME MINISTER: Melburnians? What, the citizens of the city of Melbourne?

QUESTION: Exactly. It was reported today that they.....

PRIME MINISTER: I thought you were referring to a Category "A" school.

QUESTION: ..are reported to be extremely nervous today about the presence of an alleged El Fatah terrorist in their city.

PRIME MINISTER: He's left.

QUESTION: You said in answer to a question on notice from Mr. Lynch that you had discussions with General Romulo about the trial of Senator Aquino in Manila. Could you give us the substance of your discussions or could you give the Australian Government's position on Senator Aquino's trial.

PRIME MINISTER: Senator Aquino's trial is now, I gather, to be in public. I don't want to comment on internal matters. Senator Aquino is very well known to Australians. There would be no Filipino, even the President himself, who would be so well known to Australians. Accordingly, his trial will be followed with very great interest by a great number of people, in Australia, including myself.

QUESTION: Will you elaborate on Azzam's whereabouts.....

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: Can you say why you can't do that?

PRIME MINISTER: The reason is obvious. Ladies and Gentlemen, I will not make comments on security matters. And there are many security implications in the question you asked. If it is known how he's travelling, when he left, where he's going, there are security implications for a great number of people, including Australians, in transit or at their posts. Ladies and gentlemen, I don't want to have to always say the same thing about security matters. I will not comment on them.

QUESTION: Will the Australian Government recognise the new Government in Chile?

PRIME MINISTER: Not yet.

QUESTION: Some months ago I asked you whether it would be possible to announce cabinet decisions to Parliament before announcing them at the Press Conference. After today's events, do you think it would be a good idea to announce them each Tuesday morning when Parliament is sitting?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't. I have already told you it's impossible to announce some of these decisions. Cabinet was going all day yesterday. We have the Executive Council meeting from now on, ordinarily at midday on Tuesday. Obviously, I can't announce decisions of the Executive Council, such as the appointments, the terms of reference of the Royal Commissions, when Parliament sits because it sits, at present, before the Executive Council meets. Again, there are some matters which I have to convey to the Premiers before I can announce them publicly.

QUESTION: Sir, you said this morning that you would have gladly announced, brought in your list, I think you said, if Mr. Snedden had asked you earlier in Question Time...

PRIME MINISTER: There are some matters I could have announced then, yes. There was for instance one matter which came out in answer to a question by one of the members on my side, Mr. Hansen, the Member for Wide Bay asked a question concerning his electorate. I doubt whether the decision had yet been received by Mr. Bjelke-Petersen, at the time the question was asked, but that is an instance where I could have announced in the Parliament if the question had been asked at the beginning of Question Time instead of right at the end.

QUESTION: Do you plan to do this in future?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Did you want the Press Conference today not not?

QUESTION: Yes Sir, but I would rather have the press announcements made earlier, so that perhaps we could think of more intensive questions to ask you.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I did a week ago hold it in the morning. I wasn't able to hold it this morning for one reason of course, there were several of these things that had to be confirmed by the Executive Council or conveyed to Premiers, but you haven't asked me about the ones that have been conveyed to Premiers.

QUESTION: Well Sir, I was just going to ask that one. I don't know if it was concerning the Prices Referendum, but I was going to ask you, have any eastern State Premiers in recent days offered to cede to you temporary powers on prices and incomes?

PRIME MINISTER: There has been no change from the position at the Constitutional Convention.

QUESTION: Have you agreed to the latest request for a conference of Australian political leaders on inflation?

PRIME MINISTER: I think the suggestion came in a telegram from the leader of the L.C.L. in the South Australian Parliament. And as I said when I was asked this morning about this, I had a discussion with him on Friday night.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what your answer was?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't believe that the time would be well spent. National economic policies are only effectively carried out by the National Parliament.

QUESTION: Could you tell me how many inter-departmental committees are presently operating? Will you make public a list of the inter-department committees set up by your Government? And also would you make public a list of inter-departmental committees set up by the previous Government, which are still operating?

PRIME MINISTER: No. There is a question what ones my Department are involved in and I expect to give an answer to that this week. It would in fact take a very long time to compile that list. There are many more such committees than there were when we took over. And this is one of the reasons why the Public Service, well at least in my Department, has had to be expanded, is to answer correspondence and to answer questions like that. And I have to take into account whether the time, the money is well spent. I try to answer all the letters that come in, except when they are part of a campaign such as that one which we were subjected to a few months ago, I don't bother to answer that sort of claptrap, but apart from that form of syndicated pressure, I receive well over a thousand letters a week, and a very great amount of manpower and womanpower is involved in answering those letters. So I can't responsibly put aside people to get an answer to the question that you just asked me.

QUESTION: Would you tell us what you have written to the Premiers about?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I would probably write 10 letters to each Premier each week.

QUESTION: When are you going to hold a special Premiers meeting to discuss changes to the Constitution over the composition of the Loan Council?

PRIME MINISTER: Probably on 11 October. I had suggested Friday 12 October, which is not a sitting day, that didn't suit one or more of the Premiers, and it is pretty sure now to be on Thursday the 11th. The Premier of Queensland will not be here, but the Acting Premier, Sir Gordon Chalk, is willing, at some inconvenience, to come. So I think it will be the 11th.

QUESTION: Will you investigate or find out who did pay for Mrs. Bryant's trip?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: And do you consider this to be unusual practice?

PRIME MINISTER: No I am not going to inquire. I assume that this was justified. Certainly, I am not going to inquire into such matters.

QUESTION: My question relates to the purchase by the National Gallery of the Jackson Pollock painting.....

PRIME MINISTER: A masterpiece.

QUESTION: For \$1,340,000. Were you consulted before the painting was purchased? Do you agree with its purchase? Would you agree that the money could be better spent on purchasing Australian works both here and overseas. And finally, as the former owner Ben Heller was on the point of tears as he talked about it last night, about his pending parting with the painting. Would you consider authorising the Director of the National Gallery to sell 'Blue Poles' back to Mr. Heller at a modest profit?

PRIME MINISTER: If we are going to sell it, I have no doubt that in a year or so we could make a handsome profit on it. If one likes to regard it in that light, investment in art is very profitable indeed.

Pollock is one of the great figures in modern American art and this is regarded as his masterpiece. I knew of the proposal. It came to me from the Gallery Acquisitions Committee, which took over when we took over, from the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, a recommendation came from that body. I am not going to overrule the advice of such bodies when we are able to enact the National Gallery legislation, then of course, they will have the right to spend the appropriation as they see fit. I know this is quite a contribution in overseas aid to redress the American adverse balance of payments.

QUESTION: Could I clear up the question of the Premiers. Were you talking in general terms about problems of communication with the Premiers week by week or were you talking about some specific thing that you put to them today?

PRIME MINISTER: Some specific thing.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what it was?

PRIME MINISTER: No. I am not going to volunteer these things. I did identify one because it came out in Question Time.

QUESTION: Control of doctors' fees seems to be one of the major problems facing the health scheme, and I wondered if the prices referendum was passed, if it would give the Government power to control doctors' fees - whether this had been discussed?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't believe that the prices referendum would.

QUESTION: What about incomes?

PRIME MINISTER: That would. I would expect that would.

QUESTION: You said in your policy speech that referendums would be held to give the Commonwealth power over interests rates and terms and conditions of employment. Can you say when the referendums will be held and can you elaborate on the proposals now?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't ^{now} believe that it is necessary to hold a referendum over interest rates because the significant interest rates can probably be regulated under this Parliament's power over foreign corporations and trading and financial corporations formed within the limits of the Commonwealth. We are going to introduce legislation, as you know, in respect of building societies both terminating and permanent and hire purchase companies and possibly merchant banks. They would, I would think, all be financial corporations formed within the limits of the Commonwealth. The same would apply to various trading corporations so formed. I would expect that the next House of Representatives election there would be a referendum - I think it is very likely, I don't know what other proposals there are and one has to limit the number - but it would seem to me that it would be appropriate to hold a referendum to permit the national Parliament to pass laws on the conditions of work at the next House of Representatives election. As you know, at the Senate election, whether it is for the Senate alone or not, we will be putting referenda to synchronise elections for the two houses of this Parliament to permit this Parliament to refer matters to State Parliaments upon which this Parliament at the moment has the exclusive right to legislate. Also to spell out in greater detail the conditions upon which the State Parliaments can refer matters to this Parliament. Also if this Premiers' Conference on the Loan Council incorporating Local Government representatives proves abortive, on a referendum to amend Section 105A of the Constitution to permit the national Government to make debt arrangements with elected local government bodies.

QUESTION: The appointment of the new head of the Department of Civil Aviation and Transport. Is this an indication that we can expect the Government to look overseas for senior public servants in the future and do you expect any reaction from the Public Service from the implication that there was no one in the Australian Public Service suitable to fill the position?

PRIME MINISTER: We will aim to get the best people available. We believe Mr. Halton is better than anyone available to the Australian Government in Australia, as the first head of the new combined Department of Transport. There are some people from overseas that are already involved in advice to us - Mr. Justice Woodhouse of the New Zealand Court of Appeal.

QUESTION: Is there any right of appeal, in this case?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Not for First Division men. They are appointed by the Executive Council.

QUESTION: The latest figures on industrial dispute show that in the first six months of this year, working days lost because of strikes, have increased by 65 per cent over the same six months last year. Will you tell us why this is so?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not aware of the figures and I won't hazard an opinion on them.

QUESTION: Do you think that this hurts your Government's electoral standing. And why is it, apparently, that your Government is less able to deal with the unions, or create an economic

PRIME MINISTER: Because of the Lynch Laws. Most of the industrial disputes, as I observe them, flow from demarcation issues. There are too many unions in Australia, and one of the reasons why there are too many unions, is the fact that unions take on a different legal status and personality since the same union has to be registered in five arbitration jurisdictions. There are many instances where the same union has to be registered in the Commonwealth jurisdiction, the Queensland, N.S.W., South Australian and West Australian jurisdictions. It doesn't apply in Victoria and Tasmania because the States there rely on wages boards rather than compulsory industrial arbitration. You will remember that it is over four and a half years ago now that the Commonwealth Industrial Court recommended, as a matter of urgency, to all the Attorney-Generals in Australia that they should take steps to amend their laws to permit a single legal entity or personality or incorporation for industrial organisations, and this has still not been done. We tried to do all we could in the Commonwealth jurisdiction, in this Parliament's legislation early this year in the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill. It was thrown out by the Senate. We brought it in in a new form which ought to make it more palatable, but still making it easier to amalgamate unions. I don't know what the Senate is going to do about it.

QUESTION: Do you share Mr. Cameron's attitude on the 35 hour week being given to power workers and do you support or approve of the action being taken in New South Wales at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not going to volunteer an opinion on this. These are State employees, they have a quarrel with a State Government, which happens to be a Liberal Government. But it is idle for me to express an opinion on this. It is not a matter where we can do anything as the employer. We have no right to intervene. It is not a matter where the laws are deficient. It is not a demarcation issue.

QUESTION: Do you agree with Mr. Cameron?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not volunteering a comment on it.

QUESTION: Has Cabinet sought an opinion from the Attorney-General's Department as to whether power over prices can be construed to include power over wages, and secondly, you mentioned a referendum on conditions of work might be held with the next House election. Would power over conditions of work include power over wages?

PRIME MINISTER: Among other things, conditions of work would include power over wages and salaries, it would include leave and a very great number of other industrial matters. But in particular the formula "conditions of work" would cover an increasing matter where awards are being by-passed, where people are not technically employees but contractors. You will remember the distribution of milk changed from a system of employees distributing it to a system of persons contracting to distribute milk. The same system as newspapers have for the distribution of newspapers and this has spread largely in the building industry. Now this form of contract is aimed to by-pass industrial arbitration or industrial agreement and accordingly the word "conditions of work" is the one we usually use now because it would cover all such cases. You also asked if the Attorney-General's Department had been asked for an opinion, whether prices covers wages or wages and salaries. The Attorney-General was asked this in the Senate last week, he said he had not been asked for an opinion. He had not volunteered an opinion, the position is the same today.

QUESTION: Mr Hayden referred at Question Time to discussions he said were going to occur today about housing loan interest rates. Do you think the Government will decide this week on its scheme for protecting lower income earners?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't spoken to Mr Hayden since Question Time.
