

THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P., ADDRESSING THE
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, HOTEL CANBERRA, CANBERRA,
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QUESTION: Following your conversation in Peking with Prince Sihanouk, can I ask you what is the Australian relationship now with the Royalist Government in Cambodia? Has Prince Sihanouk been given any assurances? Has he been told, for instance, that his Government will be recognised if the Lon Nol regime were to fall?

PRIME MINISTER: Australia maintains relations with the Lon Nol Government. As I said in Peking, and many of you were there when I said it, it will continue to do so as long as that Government is in the United Nations and Pnom Penh. Prince Sihanouk knows that that is our attitude and that while he is the Government-in-exile he can't, of course, expect to be recognised as the Government of his country by the Australian Government.

QUESTION: What are the areas about which there is still speculation following your visit to Japan. Is your statement that we would aim for and desire 100 per cent ownership of our four energy resources. Could you clarify what you meant by that? Are we intractably wed now to a policy of developing those resources without foreign equity, and do you believe we can do that?

PRIME MINISTER: I hope that we can do it; we will certainly try. It ought to be possible to strive for that objective, i.e. for 100 per cent Australian ownership of uranium and oil and natural gas and black coal.

QUESTION: In the last twelve months you have travelled more than any other Prime Minister in a similar period; you have achieved possibly all your major immediate policy objectives. I understand that next year you intend to visit South-East Asia early in the year and also Europe later in the year. Do you think now that Senator Willesee could be given these two missions while you concentrate on domestic matters at home?

PRIME MINISTER: I would add that I expect to visit the United Nation in about September. I will be making these visits and Senator Willesee will be continuing to make no fewer visits than he has been making throughout the year. A head of government these days inevitably has to make a great number of visits. I don't believe that I will be making fewer visits than I had intended to make in any case.

QUESTION: My question follows on that asked by David Barnett and it is in relation to a statement that was issued in Peking by Prince Sihanouk. To clarify the position one step further, Prime Minister, has Australia cut military and economic aid to the Lon Nol regime, has it limited its diplomatic presence there, and are you looking forward to Prince Sihanouk being installed back in Pnom Penh?

PRIME MINISTER: In respect to the last question, it is not for me to express a view. It is for the people of Cambodia, I hope, to choose their government without outside interference. I will read what I said in Peking at the press conference in answer to your question on this subject:

While I was in Peking where Prince Sihanouk resides, I welcomed the opportunity to have an exchange of views with him. He is the acknowledged spokesman of GRUNK AND FUNK. He is the only representative of either who is known to me or to the ambassador or to Australians in general. It was a valuable opportunity to hear at first hand his views on the situation in his country and in the region. I was asked: "It doesn't suggest any change in our recognition of the present Lon Nol Government". I answered: "No, as long as the Lon Nol Government is in possession of the capital of Cambodia and is in the United Nations the present Australian attitude towards it will continue." I was asked: "How are we voting in the United Nations". I answered: "We have been abstaining on the procedural issues." I was asked: "Will we continue to abstain?" I answered: "When the question of the seating of the Government arises, we will vote for that Government with which we have relations but we are abstaining on the procedural matters. We did not oppose the inscription of the item. Our concern in Cambodia is that the people of Cambodia should have a government of their own wish. We will do all we can to put an end to the hostilities and to deter any supplies from outside. It is the only part of Indo-China where there has not yet been a ceasefire or an agreement or an accord. This is all the more deplorable since, for so many years, from the Geneva accords of 1954 until the invasion of Cambodia by and from South Vietnam in March 1970, Cambodia had enjoyed an undiminished peaceful identity."

There was one specific question you asked me about military and economic aid. The military aid ceased last year within a couple of weeks of our coming to office, as it did throughout Indo-China. The economic aid, in the sense of support for the currency, will end at the end of this year. Colombo Plan aid continues, and will.

QUESTION: May I take your mind off foreign affairs? The Senate has rejected, unacceptably amended or unreasonably delayed items of important Government legislation. The prospects are that it will deal in a similar fashion with the National Health Scheme or the Schools Commission. In this sense, the Senate is preventing your government from implementing important matters which you pledged in your policy speech. How long can your Government tolerate a hostile Senate, and what do you propose to do about it?

PRIME MINISTER: I won't put our opponents out of the position where they have to wonder about this. The situation has arisen, as you know, that whenever we like we can have a double dissolution. The objectionable feature of the Australian constitution and of most of the State Constitutions - it has never been applied in Australia - is that the Upper House can send the Lower House to the people without going to the people itself. The Upper House in the Australian National Parliament can do that twice a year. It can do it before the end of November when the Budget for the financial year has to be passed; it can do it before the end of June when the interim supply up until the end of November has to be provided. I can do that at any time. If it does it, it will go to the people - not only the House of Representatives. That position is available to the Australian Government.

QUESTION: On page three of your statement, you said in illustrating your foreign policy, that you start with the basic thesis that the crucial factor governing the well-being of the West Pacific region is the relations between China, Japan and the United States. There is another great power, sir, which has a coastline in this particular area, the Soviet Union. It also has a great deal of shipping in the Indian Ocean region and in the North West Pacific. To what extent do you take the role of the Soviet Union into account in this basic premise of yours, and what role do you think Australia should and does have vis-a-vis the Soviet Union?

PRIME MINISTER: I am speaking of the passage you quote about the relationship between Australia and Japan. It is there that Australia can help very greatly in relationships between Japan and China and between Japan and the United States. When we were there over two years ago, relations between Japan and China were almost as bad as they were between China and America and China and the Soviet Union. Also, in the interim, relations, particularly on economic matters, Australia's relationship with Japan can help relationships between all these three. Australia does not have the same leverage or influence with the Soviet Union as it has with Japan or as it has with the United States. However, there is the situation that a detente to a considerable extent has been established between the United States and the Soviet Union. It might have been badly shaken by the Middle East war but it seems to have been restored. The centre of Soviet power and influence is not in the Pacific. Obviously, the centre of Chinese and Japanese influence is in the Pacific. The fact that Russian shipping of both naval and maritime kinds is to be found in the Pacific and in the Indian Oceans is a completely natural and expected development because the Soviet Union is the second largest economic force in the world.

QUESTION: Why did you feel it necessary to stand down as Foreign Minister. Do you regret the decision?

PRIME MINISTER: The answer to the second one is yes. Of course, I would have liked to have been Foreign Minister; I have been the greatest that they have had in the last generation! The fact is that it is not just the paper-work that takes up your time, which is what people usually say; it is the number of calls that one has to receive. Quite frankly, if you look at the number of visitors coming to Australia - many times as numerous as has happened in any previous year - it is just beyond me to receive as Foreign Minister the number of foreign ministers who call. Senator Willesee was doing an immense amount of this work but he will now have to do it all.

QUESTION: May I clarify what appears to be some ambiguity in your central statement in Tokyo concerning foreign investment in our energy resources, mentioned by Mr Barron - uranium, oil, gas and coal? You spoke of the possible need for more foreign money for exploration. Will foreign capital be permitted to explore all those energy resources in Australia and if they find these energy resources in Australia will they be permitted to own and develop them?

PRIME MINISTER: It may be necessary or desirable to have overseas interests participating. It largely depends on the cost or the skill of finding resources. We don't really need much assistance from outside to discover uranium or black coal resources. We obviously could not by ourselves have found all the oil or natural gas resources. This much is clear: that whatever participation there may be required, permitted or desired in exploration, there will be Australian control in the exploitation, the development; and that is understood. I wish those who so easily fall for handouts from public relations people in Australia or from some companies in Japan would face up to the fact that the Japanese have wondered why we have taken so long to do in our country what they long ago - always, in fact - had determined to do in their own.

QUESTION: In the areas where the Commonwealth, quite clearly, asserts control, in the Northern Territory in the off-shore oil region, when these leases expire, is the Labor Government going to impose conditions that those who tender for it will have to be Australian owned? In other words, where you do have unquestionable control, are you going to insist upon, at this stage, 100 per cent Australian control and ownership of exploration of our energy resources?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think I need add anything to what I said in Japan, handed out there and tabled in the Parliament yesterday.

QUESTION: The indications are that your Government has suffered a severe drop in support since the election. Do you accept that this has happened? If so, how do you account for it and what are you going to do about it?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, there has been some drop in our support. If there is an election, whenever it is, we will regain it. Anybody reading or listening to the censure motion a couple of weeks ago will see my grounds for optimism and assertion in that respect.

QUESTION: It would not have escaped your attention, sir, that Mr Barton has offered you membership of the Australia Party. Have you got any observations on this? Also, can you confirm or deny the very strong and persistent rumours that the Liberal Party has also offered several of its leading members membership of the Australia Party?

PRIME MINISTER: I have to answer no to both of those questions.

QUESTION: Did you discuss in Peking with either Mao Tsetung or Chou En-lai the question of Sino-Indian relations?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

QUESTION: What were the discussions - what was the tenor of the discussions?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't want to go into any detail about what was said there. It was a general course of informing each other of our respective attitudes over recent years and at the present time but I don't feel free to go into any further detail on such matters. I think we discussed every country in Asia except, thinking over it, Iraq.

QUESTION: Can you explain why you see a need to have a senior party official on the staff of the Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: I need and welcome the best men to work for me that I can get. I believe I have got them.

QUESTION: Your joint communique issued after your talks in Peking suggested that Australia and China regarded all nations, small and big, as equal and respected their rights to maintain their territorial integrity. Well, with your Middle East policy, one could be forgiven perhaps for believing that some nations are more equal than others, particularly if they have oil. Do you regard that as a fair interpretation?

PRIME MINISTER: It is not a fair interpretation, and I wouldn't have believed that anybody covering the scene in the Australian capital could hold that view. The Australian Government has been neutral in the Middle East, and preceding Australian Governments were neutral too. I am not reflecting on McMahon, Gorton, Holt or Menzies because they were all neutral - their Governments also. The Australian Government has maintained the policy, traditional in Australia, of neutrality in the Middle East dispute. We were in a position to be of particular effect because the Australian ambassador to the United Nations was in the chair in the Security Council during the crucial month of October and I would like to pay tribute to him for what he did, because the final solution, it will be remembered, came from the non-permanent members of the Security Council and he was instrumental very largely in bringing about that solution.

QUESTION: Were any of the United States bases in Australia at North West Cape, Pine Gap or Woomera put on a normal alert prior to the general American alert of its overseas bases? If so, were you told and when were you told? Secondly, when all the American overseas bases were put on a higher level than normal alert, when were you told and was it before the NATO partners were told?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know if they were put on alert. I wasn't told. I believe the announcement was for domestic American consumption.

QUESTION: Both Bob Hawke and Dr Coombs have suggested that an increase in direct taxation would help curb inflation. Are you considering this, and do you regret that you made an election promise that you wouldn't increase taxation?

PRIME MINISTER: I will not be drawn on making promises, yes or no, on any fiscal matters. Dr Coombs, as is well-known, did suggest an increase in taxation as a means of curbing inflation as far back as June or July. His advice was not accepted. Mr Hawke's advice was not sought; it will not be sought. The Government makes up its mind on this matter. The President of the Federal Executive of the Labor Party does not determine such matters; he is not consulted in such matters; he doesn't speak for the party on such matters; I doubt if on this matter he speaks on behalf of the trade union movement.

QUESTION: Can you tell me why you have offered a post on your personal staff to the former Federal secretary of your party, Mr Mick Young?

PRIME MINISTER: I answered a previous question on this. I said that I want on my staff, working with me, the best people available in Australia, and I believe I have them. The combination of Young and Whitlam was superb, and it will continue to be.

QUESTION: Many people would think it was unfortunate that you used the term "final solution" in relation to what the United Nations was doing. I wondered if you could say something more about what you claim is a neutral policy. Firstly, why is it necessary for you to so carefully refuse to condemn what was quite clearly the Arab initiation of warfare on Israel? Secondly, I wonder if you would answer a question about whether Australia had urged the United States not to re-supply the Israelis with arms and equipment when the Russians were re-supplying their allies there? And, finally, could you tell us whether you raised with the Chinese the question of their wholehearted support for the Palestinian terrorist movement by way of propaganda, training and armaments?

PRIME MINISTER: I discussed the question of the Middle East in Peking. You have been told that that was so; I was asked a question in Parliament about it yesterday. The attitude of the Australian and the Chinese Governments is known and it is unchanged. It was discussed; it is unchanged in each case. Now it is quite spurious than one can come to any sound view or one can produce any solution to the disputes in the Middle East by looking at any one particular date. The fact is there is a situation which has continued there for quarter of a century and there are certain features of it which have to be solved if it is to end. One is the question of recognition of the existence, the sovereignty, of Israel. One is the question of the occupation of Arab territories by Israel. And the one which people mention least is the Palestinian problem - not just the question of Palestinian terrorism, but of people who lived in what used to be called Palestine and no longer live there.

QUESTION: What about the other questions I asked you?

PRIME MINISTER: The attitude of the Australian Government was made known before I went to Japan and China on this. I said at question time there that there should not be supplies from outside and that applies to both. The war would never have broken out, it would never have continued, but for supplies from outside - by the Soviet Union and the United States; and they both recovered their sanity in time to save us all.

QUESTION: Some months ago you said you did not believe that the Watergate scandal could happen in Australia, referring to the fact that the Executive was answerable to the Parliament. Do you believe that the machinery for mid-term elections under parliamentary democracy would prevent such events happening in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: I frankly don't see the link between the statement I made some time ago and the position that you are now putting. I don't see the link between them. What I was referring to some months ago was the fact that I believe that the situation in America, whereby the Head of State and of government is isolated from the legislature and very often from the press and gatherings like this, means that that head doesn't discern trends in public opinion in time. I am under no illusions that questions that you gentlemen and ladies ask me are your own inspirations, created in isolation. It's very useful for me to know what you have in mind. It warns me of things in time. I believe there are virtues in the British system which save us from a position such as the Watergate scandal.

QUESTION: Yesterday a Senate Committee was very critical of the operations and limitations of the Government's much-vaunted Prices Justification Tribunal. Could you tell us whether you intend to take any action to overcome these criticisms and to make the tribunal more effective?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't read the Senate report on this matter. There have been some criticisms made of the Prices Justification Tribunal; I don't believe they are justified. I believe the appointments we have made to the Prices Justification Tribunal, Mr Justice Williams, President Chambers and the lay members, have been excellent appointments and I believe the tribunal is developing procedures which are of very great benefit to the Australian people. There have already been many price rises projected or sought which have then been abandoned because of the existence of this tribunal. I admire the way the tribunal is carrying out its functions. I see at this stage no reason at all why its statute should be altered. If however, it is in any way defined, then, with the powers I expect to get on 8 December we will reinforce the act so as to buttress the tribunal. It is a very fine tribunal indeed. It deserves our support and the support of the Australian people. We are all very much better off because of its operations, already. After all, it has only operated for four months; it has already had a very salutary effect indeed.

QUESTION: You have visited almost every important capital in the world except Moscow. Do you feel in view of the sensitivity of relations between China and the Soviet Union, Soviet leaders might feel justified in believing they have been left out in the cold by the warmth of your welcome in Peking? Do you have any plans to visit Moscow?

PRIME MINISTER: It has been brought home to me that the Soviet Government does have some feeling that they are being neglected. There are limitations even on the most active head of government. I was asked earlier whether I would be visiting Europe. The capital of the Soviet is in Europe; I expect to be visiting it together with several other European capitals in the date mentioned in the question, i.e. about next June. Perhaps it would be useful to bring together for you the pattern of the visits I have made this year. They are very largely dictated by geographic propinquity or by particular events to which Australia would be expected to subscribe. I first went to New Zealand; I then went to New Guinea and Indonesia; I then went to the South Pacific Forum and for various constitutional reasons to Westminster and Windsor, and - to keep the ecclesiastical balance to be completely ecumenical - I visited Rome, and on the Orthodox Good Friday, Rhodes. Then North America because there was the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Ottawa. Before that I visited Mexico - the first Latin American country ever visited by an Australian Prime Minister - and Washington and New York. I should have mentioned India just before that. Then Japan and China. It will be seen, I believe, that there has been regard paid to priorities of geography and traditional associations.

QUESTION: You were reported to have said that the Chinese crowd that spontaneously greeted you on your arrival in Peking reacted with rapture to the strains of Waltzing Matilda. I wonder whether you would consider extending the sample of opinion that the Bureau of Census and Statistics is going to take out on the Australian population on our National Anthem to Peking, or whether you still personally favour Advance Australia Fair?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm only one voter in this respect. I doubt whether I will be among the 60,000 polled in February by the Statistician on the matter. I find it very difficult to make up my mind between Advance Australia Fair and Waltzing Matilda. Waltzing Matilda I would think is very much the more exciting tune but a very great number of people seem to be worried by the words. I don't think they understood them in China, although realising the economic and ideological basis of the words, it would probably have been even more rapturously received. Many people think it is quite indecent - in fact, subversive - to have a song with words such as Waltzing Matilda. There apparently are people who, whenever they hear God Save the Queen played, decide to sing it. Anthems are mainly for the music alone, not the words, and it is possible to create other words. There are lots of different words for God Save the Queen, the Americans have one set and the Hohenzollerns used to have another set; and it is the same tune. Now what I said in China - in the House yesterday - about Waltzing Matilda being more rapturously received than Advance Australia Fair may be due to one or other of two factors. The one is that when Advance Australia Fair was played in Peking, we all stood to attention; it would have been unseemly to cheer. That broke out immediately the tune finished - it might have been for the tune or it might have been for the Premier and Prime Minister. The other reason may be, of course, that when Waltzing Matilda was played in the Great Hall of the People there were equal numbers of Chinese and Australians present. I couldn't discern which section was more rapturous.

QUESTION: Accepting that you want the best people working for you and accepting that you believe you have them, could I ask you specifically what will Mr Young's role be when the brilliant Whitlam-Young partnership is reconstituted? Could you tell us exactly what his job will be, what his title will be, what his salary will be (as far as you can) and what you hope to see him achieve? Do you see him as the miracle worker who will recover that lost popularity?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know how to describe the role that Mick Young performed last year and the year before - he did it though. I don't know how I will describe his role from now on but he will perform similarly - "superbly" was the word I used, not "brilliantly".

MR OAKES: It was my word.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I will accept it if you say it is your word, but I'm too modest to apply words like that to myself and my closest partner. It was a great combination - the best in Australia political history for the last quarter of a century - and I believe it will prove a similarly superb combination until the next House of Representatives election when, I expect, Mick Young will be a Member of Parliament and, I hope, a minister.

QUESTION: At any time did you invite either Chairman Mao or Premier Chou En-lai to visit Australia and, if so, did either of them accept it?

PRIME MINISTER: I answered this question in Peking and I suppose I could read it out to you but the gist of it is this: Premier Chou En-lai knows quite well that he would be very welcome in Australia as he would be in any country in the world. I think there are over a hundred pending invitations. Our invitation, of course, is less than a year old - he wouldn't have been invited before that. But other people got in ahead. There are some office holders in the world who can't reasonably be expected to accept all the invitations extended to them. It's no courtesy to press an invitation, say, on a President of the United States or the Premier of the People's Republic of China. They can't be expected to accept those invitations. They would, obviously, in each case, be very welcome. There will be visits each way by ministers, and senior officials between China and Australia. We have overcome those inhibitions of the last twenty-three years - that lost generation. At last, relations between Australia and China are as warm as they should have been throughout.

QUESTION: Did you get the impression in China that the Chinese attitude was "You come to us, we won't go to you"?

PRIME MINISTER: Not in the least. As a matter of fact, it was a Chinese minister who visited us before an Australian minister visited China, and there will be just as many visits each way. The Chinese are courteous people. This is not a matter of ideology; it is a matter of historic habit and they don't patronize other people.
