

17

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA,
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PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen, we were able to fit this in this morning which, as you know, I try to do alternatively if I can but House business usually prevents us being evenhanded between the afternoon papers and the morning. You will be interested in the report which I have just tabled in the House of Representatives from Mr Terry Winter on the use that can be made by the Australian Government of the powers which we are seeking at the Referendum on 8 December. Mr Winter was a member of the ACTU Executive for many years; he was appointed by the Menzies Government to the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. There have been several Cabinet Committee meetings this week but only a short one of the Cabinet itself. The only announcement that I can make now - there will be some at the end of the week - is of the Defence Force Ombudsman. You will remember that in my policy speech last November I undertook to appoint a military ombudsman. Mr Barnard has actively pursued this undertaking to the stage where legislation is being prepared and we expect that it will be introduced in the autumn session next year. In anticipation of the passage of the legislation, the Government has decided to name the first defence force ombudsman. He will be Mr David Hay, CBE, DSO, who, as you know, is the Permanent Head of the Department of External Territories. He is a man of very considerable accomplishments - he is well versed in matters of Government, had a distinguished war record with the 2nd AIF from 1940-1946, and has taken an active interest in community affairs. The Government is confident that together with his military experience Mr Hay will bring a very desirable blending of administrative capacity and balanced understanding of service life to the office. There will also be an Australian ombudsman whose appointment will be announced later on. The Winter Report, that was the one I was referring to there. To give the long title - Power Over Prices and Incomes - Report to the Australian Government on Certain Matters Relating to Power over Prices and Incomes. Mr Winter acted as a Task Force in the same way as Dr Coombs did on the inherited governmental commitments. Are there any questions.

QUESTION: Why was the Winter Committee kept secret, seeing as you are under criticism during the referendum campaign for not spelling out what you will do with prices power. Why didn't you announce that the committee was meeting and would come up with some report?

PRIME MINISTER: It was intended all along that its report would be published. I asked for it by the 23rd of this month, it came to hand on that date, copies have been made, it has been tabled and now released at the first opportunity.

QUESTION: Do you condemn the killing on the Syrian front in the October war of 24 bound and gagged Israeli prisoners?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know any facts on this but obviously we condemn any breaches of what should be accepted standards of the treatment of prisoners of war.

QUESTION: The European countries and Japan have been pressured by the Arab States into adopting a much harder line on Israel and in particular into demanding a complete withdrawal - a unilateral withdrawal to the 1967 borders without any guarantees as to the future security of Israel - without any guarantees of secure borders. What is the Australian Government's position on this now? Do we go along with the position as stated by the Europeans and the Japanese?

PRIME MINISTER: I will not comment on your version of what the western European countries and Japan have done on this subject. I do not endorse your version of it; I don't refute your version of it; I speak on behalf of the Australian Government. As I said in answer to a question without notice this morning, the attitude of the Australian Government is the same as that of preceding Governments. We have supported the Gorton Government, the McMahon Government, the present Government have all supported the proposals made by the Security Council unanimously in 1967 in its Resolution No. 242. The Australian Labor Party summarised that Resolution and made it part of its Party Platform at the last Federal Conference in Surfers Paradise in July. I will read it to you again as I did in the House. "The situation in the Middle East remains the greatest threat to the peace of the world. There can be no peace until the Arab States respect and recognise Israel's sovereignty and right to exist. Equally, there can be no peace until Israeli forces have been withdrawn from occupied territories to secure and recognise boundaries and a just settlement of the refugee problem is achieved".

QUESTION: How much longer can you afford the luxury of being criticised by the Federal A.L.P. President, Mr Hawke, and in view of his latest public criticism of you and your Government particularly on the Middle East, do you believe these statements are damaging to the Government's standing and do you propose to take steps to have him silenced by the Federal A.L.P. Executive?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Hawke has made it quite plain - he has been at pains to emphasise, and I repeated this in the House in answer to two questions without notice this morning, that on this subject he is speaking as a private citizen. He is expressing personal views. As the Leader of the Government I have to carry out the government's policy. I have just read it to you, it happens to be the same policy as our predecessors had. Australia's policy on the Middle East is bipartisan. It has been for a quarter of a century.

QUESTION: Sir, do you honestly believe that a man in high public office can suddenly take off the mantle of that office and speak for himself? Also, do you believe that foreign embassies based in Canberra will accept that in their reports back to their home offices, and do you accept the same right for yourself that you could speak privately?

PRIME MINISTER: No. As head of Government I can only speak in accordance with Government policy and it is my duty, which I try to discharge without let up, to carry out that policy. I believe that embassies and High Commissions in Canberra know what the Government's policy is.

QUESTION: It was my understanding that uranium leases in the Northern Territory would not be renewed until the report of the Woodward Commission was finalised and that understanding was confirmed when you said in the House on 18 October that: "I believe we should wait for its further report so that any legislation which the Government puts before the Parliament will be as invulnerable as is possible to anticipate". I now understand that a Cabinet committee meeting yesterday decided to renew the exploration permits in the uranium province of the Northern Territory. Could you explain that apparent change in policy?

PRIME MINISTER: There are two matters I should point out. One is, there is some confusion - you seem to suffer it too - between leases and licences. The second is that Cabinet committees may meet on subjects, and they are meeting on this subject, but the decisions are made by the Cabinet. The Cabinet has not considered this matter.

QUESTION: Do you see any need to conserve or perhaps ration Australia's fuel supplies at this stage?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Mr Connor answered a question without notice on this yesterday.

QUESTION: What's the situation today regarding the Government's efforts to solve the TAA standoff. If it continues for any length of time, do you have any estimates on how soon TAA will have to stand down other staff - people who may not be able to withstand a long stoppage as well as the pilots?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't discussed this with my colleagues since last night. I haven't discussed it for, I suppose, 14 hours now. I would imagine that the pilots will be going back to their duty and that they will observe safety standards without complaint from now on.

QUESTION: Going back when?

PRIME MINISTER: I have no more information on this.

QUESTION: Could you tell me what your attitude is towards the announcement by the ACTU that they will seek an increase of \$10 a week in the national wage and an increase in the minimum wage from \$60 to \$70?

PRIME MINISTER: This matter has not been considered by the Government yet, and I would make no comment until it was.

QUESTION: Having in mind that last week the Senate rejected the motion of a joint sitting to decide where the new Parliament House should be, has your Government made any fresh move on this?

PRIME MINISTER: We haven't discussed it.

QUESTION: Do you think it will be decided this year before the Parliament rises?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is most unlikely. I imagine that both Houses will be debating other matters until they adjourn for Christmas and I see no chance of the Government discussing this matter with the agenda it has.

QUESTION: Have you accepted the resignation of Senator Cavanagh as Minister in Charge of Government Business in the Senate, if not, do you intend to, and thirdly, so that the matter can be clarified, who in fact is in charge of Government business?

PRIME MINISTER: I am sorry, I have no more to tell you on this.

QUESTION: Last week you were quoted as saying that you expected that any minister who wished to challenge a decision in Cabinet back in the Caucus would inform the Cabinet first and you referred to two offenders. Have you done anything further about this?

PRIME MINISTER: No. You are referring to an answer I gave to Mr Laurie Oakes in an interview which was published in the Melbourne Sun last Friday or Saturday. I have done no more since then.

QUESTION: Recently a staff memorandum circulated between some departments, said that in view of the Government's support for the United Nations sanctions on Rhodesia that public servants and ministers would not be able to travel to or through Rhodesia and citizens would not be able to go to Rhodesia on official or diplomatic passports. This has been interpreted as meaning that public servants may not go to Rhodesia even in a private capacity, and I understand the decision was taken when you were Foreign Minister. I ask does this in fact mean that public servants may not go on private visits to Rhodesia and if it does mean this, do you think this in any way affects their civil rights as citizens?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't remember the details of this now, it was some months ago. The general attitude would be that public servants and military officers have responsibilities to the Government which they advise or, in many cases, represent. They cannot detach themselves from their official position.

QUESTION: Do you mean that they couldn't even get a private passport, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: If you want anything further on this I will have to give you a considered reply to it, but I don't remember the details. Public servants or military officers are not entitled to compromise a Government. Now if you want further information, give me a written question and I will give you a written reply.

QUESTION: The Arab oil producers have taken to ranking different nations according to their friendliness and favourableness such as the Dutch and the Japanese etc. Has the Australian Government had any official communication about the standing of the Arab oil producers?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't believe so. I haven't inquired, I haven't been informed. There has been some speculation about why Mr Haig visited the oil countries - the Gulf States and so on. I will take this opportunity to point out that he visited the area weeks before the outbreak of the 18 day war and the arrangements for his visit were made many weeks before that.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that some of your ministers are being unnecessarily provocative at question time with the length of their answers. I ask the question because of an aside from the Speaker to you during Question Time in which he appeared to be asking you to pull some of them into line and it also appeared from the Press Gallery....

PRIME MINISTER: When was this, today?

QUESTION: During Question Time. There was a comment which came across the loud speakers, in which he said you ought to tell some of your ministers....

PRIME MINISTER: I don't remember him saying this. I didn't hear him say this?

QUESTION: It came over the earphones.

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't hear it, I am sorry.

QUESTION: Are you concerned at all?

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that ministers naturally enough reply in a tendentious way sometimes to questions which are asked in a tendentious way. Questions without notice transgress the Standing Orders constantly. All you ladies and gentlemen would realise that one would not be allowed to put on notice a question in the terms which are constantly used in questions without notice. There are some very offensive terms and implications used in questions without notice, and there is no such offence given in the replies.

QUESTION: Mr Hawke said last night that he thought about 50 per cent of Caucus agreed with his point of view and he said that he would also do his best - he thought he had a duty to do his best - to influence people to his point of view. Do you think Mr Hawke has a right to influence or perhaps try to organise Caucus to try and change the Party's policy on the Middle East?

PRIME MINISTER: Any person has the right to influence opinions of Members of Parliament. The Australian Labor Party has declared an attitude on this matter in the terms I have just read out to you, and all of us are bound by that until the Federal Conference alters it. It is, I reiterate, substantially the policy which Governments have pursued for the last quarter of a century in Australia - Australia has a bipartisan policy, a policy of neutrality in the Middle East, and the Australian Labor Party's Platform on this matter is a summary of the United Nations Security Council's unanimous Resolution of 1967 No.242. That resolution provides the basis of a settlement in the Middle East and the various interests which have to be safeguarded - Israel's existence, the Arab territories, the rights of the Palestinians, can be best asserted and vindicated if that unanimous Resolution of six years ago goes into operation. It is very fortunate now that there is going to be this meeting, these negotiations in Geneva next month.

QUESTION: You have set such a cracking legislative pace that you have hospitalised some members and caused bad backs all round the House.

PRIME MINISTER: Bad backs are not on our side.

QUESTION: I was wondering, Sir, apart from the damage done to the inhabitants of Parliament House, do you think this cracking pace is damaging your image with the public and perhaps confusing them?

PRIME MINISTER: I think the cracking pace may be confusing the public in so far as there isn't the opportunity to explain the purpose or the details of the legislation. This year there will be about twice as many bills passed by the Parliament as there has been in any previous year. But when you mention the cracking pace, this is the cracking pace of legislation. I would point out that the Parliament's hours are very much more civilised. While we are sitting more hours in the day, for instance, we are sitting on Tuesday and Wednesdays in the morning as well as in the afternoon and night, and we are also quite often sitting on Monday afternoon and night when it has been very rare indeed to sit on Mondays at all in the past. While all that is true, we don't sit beyond 11 p.m. at night, and I would like to pay tribute to Fred Daly the Leader of the House, the fact that we have kept reasonable hours throughout this year. I think there has only been one case when we have sat after 11 p.m. and that was by agreement just to get something through in the extra 2 minutes which was required to get it through. If you look back to what has happened in previous years - as far back as I can recall (that would mean as far back as any of you can recall) at this time in the Spring Session we would always be sitting well after 11 p.m. and usually after 12 midnight. Now we are keeping proper hours - long hours, many days, but bad backs haven't been caused by late, late sittings. And since I mention this which is not only a relief for members of Parliament, for all the staff and for all of you ladies and gentlemen who have to report the Parliament, there is also the fact that every opportunity has been given for Private Members to raise matters. And if they raise them by way of a motion, a vote is taken on that motion. In previous years whenever a Private Member moved a motion on alternate Thursday mornings no vote was ever taken. It remained on the Notice Paper until the Parliament was dissolved. There is no such motion still on the Notice Paper in the House of Representatives this year. Every Private Members'

motion has gone to debate and vote and on the intervening Thursday mornings there has always been grievance day. So Private Members are not being hustled or excluded. There is a terrific amount of legislation, that's true. Now some of the legislation had to be put through because Papua New Guinea is becoming self-governing at the end of this week; some had to be put through because we had obligations which we wanted to honour by the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the 10th of next month, but most of it, the great bulk of the legislation, was in the party platform and emphasised in my policy speech on behalf of the party last November.

QUESTION: When do you expect to finish now, first week or second week?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is more likely to be the second week but there is no definite decision made on this. You will see from the Notice Papers that there is some substantial legislation which ought to be got through. There again, perhaps I should say, that there has never been under us any bill coming up for debate until there has been an intervening Wednesday morning for the Opposition parties to consider it and usually at least a week. Many of the pieces of legislation have come on for debate many weeks after they were introduced and given the minister's second reading speech.

QUESTION: Will you guillotine the Health Bill, sir?

PRIME MINISTER: You mean the Universal Health Insurance one?

QUESTION: Mr Hayden's?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know how long the debate will take. It is a shorter bill, a simpler and clearer bill than the legislation which it will replace. There has been ample opportunity for Members of Parliament to understand it because you will remember there was the White Paper by Messrs Deeble and Scott in the autumn session; there was the amended White Paper, the definitive one, which Mr Hayden brought in at the beginning of this month, and there has been debate on the Estimates of the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security; there has been a Private Member's Motion which was debated and voted so I shouldn't believe there is an excessive amount of time required. It won't be debated until next week.

QUESTION: Do you see any dangers yet to the Australian economy from the Arab boycotts on our major trading partners, and would you agree that there is a possibility of a world-wide recession next year?

PRIME MINISTER: There is obviously going to be some effect on Australia's trade from the fact that our major trading partners are being hit by the energy crisis and the energy crisis has been made more severe by the prospect, in some cases the actuality, of Arab reduction. There has been a great deal of speculation by economists that there is going to be some recession among the industrialised trading nations of the world. Australia would be more happily situated, both as regards energy sources and also as regards production and trading patterns, than most of those other countries.

QUESTION: Taking foreign policy apart, what do you think are the three or four principal achievements of the Government at the end of its first year in office?

PRIME MINISTER: The biggest one is the transformation we have made in educational opportunities. I haven't thought out what other ones I should mention. I would put next, I suppose, the involvement, the direct relationship, already achieved in many respects and now being sought to be extended, between the national government and elected local government bodies. And probably in that context also, I should mention the more rational arrangements which are being made for the production and sale of our primary products and the emphasis being taken in national plans for urban matters in general, i.e. transport, housing, environment, where most of the people live.

QUESTION: What do you see as your three or four biggest mistakes, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: You always get one of the very earliest questions, and you were told that it was the last one.
