

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
TUESDAY, 16 JULY 1974

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen, I have no particular announcements to make to you. Many of you, however, have asked me directly or through my staff about the prospects of a joint sitting and what procedure will be applied upon it, where it will be held, at what hour, on what day, under what rules and with whom in the Chair. I can only repeat what I have said to you earlier that I am inclined to assume that a joint sitting will be necessary to secure the passage of the six bills, or any of the six bills, which were the grounds upon which Governor-General Hasluck granted the double dissolution on 11 April last. I am not taking it for granted that the new Senate will continue the pattern of obstruction of the old Senate. I have taken the view that commonsense, good Constitutional practice and the decision of the people would prevail. Statements by members of the Opposition indicate, however, that my faith may be misplaced.

These statements imply that the people did not express their will about the six bills, or that the grounds on which the former Governor-General granted the dissolution were trivial or irrelevant or, at best, merely formal.

This attitude pays scant credit to Sir Paul Hasluck's grasp of his constitutional responsibilities.

Sir Paul's decision involved serious consideration of both the causes behind my request and the consequences of granting it.

There is no necessity for joint sittings, interesting as the prospect may be to all of us as students, recorders or practitioners of politics. The smooth running of the business of Parliament and government suffered sufficient disruption through the events of April. The people's decision of May ended the need for further disruption in July.

We have been without a Parliament for three months. There is an accumulation of legislation. Are there any questions?

QUESTION: Why does Australia still maintain a ban on new sales contracts for uranium, and how long will this ban continue?

PRIME MINISTER: The whole question of the uranium sales, exploitation, processing, is still under consideration. As you know the principal ministers concerned and I, myself, toured the uranium province about three weekends ago. There are many aspects, some environmental, some Aboriginal land rights, some foreign ownership, the opportunities of processing the uranium, all of which have to be resolved.

QUESTION: I understand the Leader of the Liberal Movement has written to you asking for extra staff and there is a precedent for this. Have you given consideration to it and will you grant it?

PRIME MINISTER: I've given provisional consideration to it. I told Senator Steele Hall that in addition to the secretary which every non-office bearer in the Parliament has, he would be entitled to have a Private Secretary, and that Private Secretary would have the right to travel between Adelaide and Canberra and the right to allowances in Canberra. I haven't concluded consideration of the matter. There are two matters involved. The Senate has recognised Senator Steele Hall as the Leader of the Liberal Movement. The Senate Hansard so records it. Accordingly, he is entitled, I believe, to a Private Secretary. It is particularly important that he should have assistance of his choice in considering the backlog of legislation. I do, however, hesitate to say that we should have staff to conduct his activities as Leader of the Liberal Movement outside, apart, from his isolated work in this Parliament. There is no other member of his party in this Parliament so therefore a very great burden falls upon him. He ought to have assistance in discharging that burden. But clearly the Australian Government should hesitate in paying for organisational assistance apart from Senator Steele Hall's duties in the Parliament.

QUESTION: What proposals regarding economic powers did Mr Dunstan make to yourself and Mr Crean on behalf of the State Premiers; are they acceptable to the Federal Government and, if not, what sort of proposals would be acceptable?

PRIME MINISTER: You had, I think, a conference with Mr Dunstan and also Sir Charles Cutler, who was still acting as Premier of N.S.W. also made a statement. Now the State officials and our officials are considering what matters could be the subject of arrangements between the seven governments. They haven't concluded their discussions. They were holding them, I think, yesterday. They might also have been holding them today.

QUESTION: Will there be a Premiers' Conference?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is very likely.

QUESTION: Mr Uren said in the House this afternoon that he and you had not yet heard from Sir Robert Askin on the subject of accepting the Commonwealth money for lands and the Lands Commission or Council or Board. However, Sir Robert said at his press conference yesterday that by delaying accepting this \$28 million for a year he had won significant concessions from the Government. Can you tell us what these concessions are?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not aware of any proposals that the N.S.W. Government is receiving in this matter which the other five governments have not also received. Reading the papers I gather that this matter was to become before the N.S.W. Cabinet this morning. Sir Robert Askin might have sent me a message, I haven't received it, since that meeting.

QUESTION: The arrangements between the Australian Government and the N.S.W. Government, assuming the N.S.W. Government accepts it, now would be exactly the same as between the Australian Government and the South Australian Government?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

QUESTION: Can you tell us when we can expect a decision by the Government on the IAC report on the motor industry?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't put a date on it. I would think it might easily be a couple of months or even longer. We have made the report available as promptly as it was physically possible.

QUESTION: What is the latest information your Government has received on the situation in Cyprus and what is your Government's attitude towards recent events there?

PRIME MINISTER: We have no official information about the situation in Cyprus except from our police who are there. They are reporting it through their own situation but they are not in the capital, so we are no better informed than anybody following the media. It appears that the President may still be alive. We have shown ourselves anxious to co-operate with the U.N. Peace-keeping force in Cyprus. We have been there now for many years and we are grateful for five of the State Governments for maintaining their contributions to the police from Australia in Cyprus.

QUESTION: Could you give us your attitude to the very heavy buying of wool by the Wool Corporation in the last two days?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: Could I ask whether the Government will consider the question?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, if there is a submission on it.

QUESTION: Assuming that Sir Robert Askin and his Government accepts the money for the Loan Council, when is the earliest they can receive it, now or wait until the September Budget?

PRIME MINISTER: Isn't it on the Notice Paper now. It's about to come in. Isn't it on today's Notice Paper? At any rate, that will depend on the terms of their agreement.

QUESTION: You had some fairly harsh criticism of multi-national corporations during the election campaign and you foreshadowed amendments to the foreign takeovers legislation. You also intend to act on the Federal Conference resolution of last year calling for an official inquiry into multi-national corporations, their impact on the economy and the employment situation.

PRIME MINISTER: We have for many months past had Sir Ronald Walker representing us in the United Nations and also in the OECD on the inquiries which they have been conducting into this very matter. You will remember that Sir Ronald Walker was Ambassador in Paris and then in Bonn and was a Professor of Economics before that, so he was ideally qualified to conduct such inquiries and to contribute to inquiries in those international bodies I have mentioned.

QUESTION: Was the Overseas Trading Corporation considered by Cabinet today and was any decision reached on it?

PRIME MINISTER: We didn't consider many submissions in Cabinet today. The most of this morning's deliberations were in the legislation committee, approving the form of bills which have been introduced. As you notice there have been a very great number introduced today so we were doing those and there will be some further ones introduced tomorrow, so that is what we were mainly doing today. There were only two matters which we concluded in Cabinet today. I believe Mr Enderby, the Minister for Manufacturing Industry, will be briefing you about one of those, the committee to inquire into the workload for the Government Defence Act. And the other matter was largely machinery concerning the election of the first free elected Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory. We also put through at the Executive Council this morning the ordinance for the Legislative Assembly, the first fully-elected representative body in the Capital Territory.

QUESTION: Will this legislation include increases in personal services....

PRIME MINISTER: The Cabinet has never considered this matter. It has had no submission before it.

QUESTION: How long will the Government allow the Senate to consider the six bills, four days, six days, three days or....

PRIME MINISTER: That is up to the Senate.

QUESTION: The Government itself hasn't set a time, like say four days?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: When will the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly be ready to...How long will it take to set up the Assembly and how many members will it have and what will it be? What can you tell us about it?

PRIME MINISTER: You had better get the details from Dr Patterson, I think it is 19 members. The distribution of electorates has already been done, but it has to take effect in the context of a fully elected Assembly. The electorates upon which it is suggested that that election will take place are ready I believe for presentation.

QUESTION: One of the pieces of legislation introduced today concerns the Prices Justification Tribunal. It does not contain any sections relating to the making of decisions of the Tribunal mandatory as was foreshadowed during the election campaign. Can you again explain why this hasn't happened? Do you think there will be any further changes in the near future in Prices Justification legislation particularly any following the move which was made in the Caucus about changing the criteria for justification inquiries. And, just a separate question, will the Cabinet be considering the Vernon Report on the Post Office before that report is made public within the next fortnight?

PRIME MINISTER: The first one, not this sessional period. The second one, no.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the Post Office should pay its own way and that if necessary postal costs should be increased to make certain that it does?

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that all Government businesses should pay their own way. That should be no surprise to you that that is my view. I don't believe taxpayers should, without very good reason, support Government enterprises or private enterprises. But, in any case, I stated that at the Premiers' Conference. I commended that attitude to the Premiers, I said we would apply it ourselves. You mention the Post Office. There is, of course another way on which the Post Office is I'm assured acting diligently and that is to restrict the amount of public money going into its services. There are certain governmental activities in Australia, roads and telephones being among them, which we regard as having a lower priority than some other form of government activity. The approach we are pursuing is that the taxpayers should not provide more for P.M.G. services in the forthcoming Budget than they did in the last.

QUESTION: Mr Dunstan, Sir Charles Cutler and the Victorian Acting Premier, have all made conflicting statements over what powers they believe the States could be ready to concede to the Commonwealth or co-operate in the exercise with the Commonwealth, so that seems to indicate that the States are not ready to agree, therefore why have a Premiers' Conference?

PRIME MINISTER: You assert that they have made different statements. Well they might have but I haven't checked all the reports which said....

QUESTION: Well, you read Sir Charles' statement?

PRIME MINISTER: But he sent me a copy. Sir Charles sent me, by telegram, a copy of his press statement. He also, I noticed, gave a TV interview. He may easily have said some things in that television interview which conflicted or appeared to conflict with what Mr Dunstan said in the same medium or what he, himself, had said in his press statement of which he sent me a copy by cable. Now, I am not going to assume that you are just to them. You are fair to them in saying that they have made conflicting statements but this at least is clear: that we have all agreed to have our officials discuss what methods we, as Heads of Government, can discuss and when that package or program comes from the officials I expect that the Heads of Government will get together and discuss them. There was one instance which was given on the pattern of what was done in the late 1940s under National Security Regulations. It was the control of building materials. I was delighted that this matter had been discussed between the Premiers and Acting Premiers. It seems to me a matter in which they show a very natural interest because just as our program for welfare housing has been limited by the shortage of materials or rather the diversion of materials to say skyscrapers so the State Government's programs for say schools and hospitals have been similarly limited by a diversion of building materials for skyscrapers. Now it well may be that State Governments of all political complexions would think that priorities require that there should be enough materials for those essential public works. We would agree with them. It is a matter upon which they can very clearly make laws, just as clearly as a matter upon which we can't.

QUESTION: Due to the importance of Indonesia in Australia's foreign policy, are there any plans in the immediate future to re-conduct the talks again between you and President Soeharto which was postponed last May, and, if so, would you care to comment on the value of these talks within the framework of Australian/Indonesian relations?

PRIME MINISTER: There are discussions going on at the moment between Indonesia and Australia for me to visit the President. I was to visit him, you remember, in the very weekend after the Parliament was dissolved. I thought in that case it should be postponed. I hope we will be able to arrange a visit by me to Central Java, I expect, that was where the venue was previously suggested, maybe at the end of August or early in September. Discussions are taking place. I am actually anxious to accept the President's invitation as soon as possible because we know each other well enough to transact a very great deal of business, to exchange views on a great number of subjects. The President likes this form of discussion with people whom he knows fairly well. He has recently, of course, done it with President Marcos and Prime Minister Tun Razak and I was to be the first, well I will be the third now, so I am very anxious to have this discussion.

QUESTION: Is the Government still committed to the Australian Assistance Plan? Is this proposal under any sort of re-consideration or recasting?

PRIME MINISTER: Well we are still committed to it naturally. The form it takes is under constant review.

QUESTION: At the Premiers' Conference you warned of the stringent attitude the Australian Government would be taking when framing the coming Budget. If you can work out with the six State Premiers a satisfactory package to fight inflation, would you see this as an alternative or an addition to the Federal Government's stringent attitude to the Budget and in the important discussions you have had twice now with senior ministers at the Lodge, have you formed some sort of attitude about whether that stringent stance would be as tough as you thought at the time?

PRIME MINISTER: What the Premiers and the Treasurer and I would discuss would be a supplement to what has already been announced. There has been a very great gap in the fight against inflation in Australia in that the States have not exercised their constitutional powers in many respects. Very clearly they have the constitutional power, the Australian Parliament doesn't have the constitutional power to regulate land prices or the availability of building materials. There is some hope now that the States will exercise their constitutional responsibility in such respects.

QUESTION: Would you explain in brief the relations between Australia and Cuba and Latin America?

PRIME MINISTER: Our Foreign Minister, Senator Willesee, has recently visited several countries in Latin America. He is the first Australian Foreign Minister, I believe, ever to have made an official visit to any country in South America. I was the first Prime Minister to ever visit a country in Latin America but I visited the northern most one, Mexico. It is quite likely that I shall be visiting some others in the steps of the Foreign Minister maybe or the Caribbean countries before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which may be held at the end of April in Kingston, Jamaica.

You ask me about our relations with Cuba. I haven't had the opportunity to refresh my memory about this. At the time of liberation,

in December 1972, there had been an application by the Cuban Government to establish Consular relations with Australia. This was far too difficult a problem for our predecessors to solve, it was probably even too embarrassing for them to discuss. Nevertheless, when I was in Tokyo last October where the approach had been made by the Cuban Ambassador to the Australian Ambassador, I took the opportunity to ask our Ambassador to convey to the Cuban Ambassador our willingness to establish such relations. I am not sure that the arrangements have yet been consummated but if you want the full details then I can get them for you.

QUESTION: Could you tell us if you are completely in favour with the amendments to the Prices Justification Tribunal Act along the line of the amendment moved in Caucus last week by Mr Willis?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not at all adverse to it, but we could not have drafted it in this sessional period. There is a further difficulty. One of the criteria was related to productivity and as you know Australian statistics on productivity are absent or where there are any, they are deficient. Now it would be a colossal task for any Parliamentary counsel to draft a criterion of productivity in such a situation of statistical and economic derth in our country.
