

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

SURFER'S PARADISE

18 NOVEMBER, 1974

PRIME MINISTER: For the benefit of the news persons from the South, I should introduce you to Mrs. Marian Reed, the candidate for the Gold Coast State Electorate, and Bill Darcy, the M.L.A. for Albert. Needless to say, if Queensland's Parliament was composed on a democratic basis there would be twice as many members from this area, because the electorates are the most populace in the State.

One of the refreshing things about visiting Queensland is that I'm able to read the Queensland papers first, and read the Southern ones later in the day. I must say that it was enlightening to read the Sunday Mail yesterday and the Courier Mail today. A front page box in the Sunday Mail warned its readers that Sir Gordon Chalk had admitted wanting to be Premier instead of Mr. Bjelke-Petersen, his National Party coalition partner. What's more he said he'd make a better job of it. This doesn't surprise me because I've said the same things myself. Given a choice between the outgoing Premier's obstructionism and his outgoing Deputy's untried potential for co-operation in the Askin/Hamer manner, any Australian Prime Minister would say it was time for a change. Any sensible Australian Prime Minister would want that change to be in Perc Tucker's favour. I am confident that it can be.

It was still interesting to read the interview Sir Gordon Chalk gave in today's Courier Mail. It just underlined all those obvious ambitions of the underrepresented Liberals in the outgoing State Government. And yet, as I said, given a choice between the two coalition partners I would go for the Liberal potential for co-operation, rather than the demonstrated Country Party obstruction. You'll notice that I keep calling it the Country Party, I can't quite get into the habit of calling it the National Party. And just when I was getting into the habit over the weekend, I find that the National Conference of this Party held in all places in Canberra, the centre itself, decided that it

was going to be the National Country Party.

And then, of course, they also said some kind things about their Liberal partners in the various State Parliaments. Perhaps I might draw your attention to the things which Sir Gordon Chalk said in the Courier Mail this morning. Sir Gordon, if he were Premier, would not be so rock-hard about Canberra. He says: "We've got to get round the table with these fellows and see how many arguments we can win. We've got a Labor Government in Canberra, we've got to get rid of it, but we're stuck with it for the time being. We must have a softer line with Canberra. We have to live with them." And again: "I've never been guilty of criticising my Premier, but what worries me is that, to him, Canberra can do nothing right. There has got to be something good in Canberra, it just can't be all that bad. I'm very opposed to Canberra's political philosophy, but if Queensland and the Commonwealth are to go ahead there has to be some basis for harmony. How to achieve Queensland harmony with Canberra, I admit I'm not quite sure, but given the opportunity I feel I might be able to bring about a better understanding."

Now, I might say a couple of local matters here. You will have noticed that the Regional Employment Development Scheme is examining proposals which come from local government bodies to promote employment locally and to do jobs which will have enduring value. Last Wednesday, at the weekly meeting of the Ministers concerned, they finalised the proposals which came from the Gold Coast City Council. The Gold Coast City Council had put in a very great number of proposals and of course they all had to be examined, but nevertheless, we are now able to go ahead with nine projects amounting in all to about \$46,000, and I won't read them out to you, I think it would suit you best if I handed them out to you. Now the projects which are preferred are those which will give a great deal of employment. The emphasis is on employment, rather than just on materials. The Scheme will be administered by the Southport office of the Commonwealth Employment Service. Excluding supervisory and specialist personnel all labour requirements will be drawn from persons eligible for unemployment benefits. In selecting the labour required, preference will be given to persons with dependents who have been unemployed

for the longest time. Married persons working part-time, or on short-time will not necessarily be disqualified, however, from employment on projects. All persons employed under the scheme will be work tested for suitable employment at not less than monthly intervals and their continued employment on a project at Australian Government expense will be conditional on there being no such alternative employment. This will ensure that projects don't compete for labour with regular employers. Proposals for projects that may receive assistance may emanate from such bodies as Local Government Authorities, Community Groups, Special Purpose Groups, Business Enterprises, or State Departments.

There's another couple of matters that I might mention to you. It is unfortunately true that the Gold Coast area is the least satisfactorily sewered part in Australia. There's only 20% of the premises which are sewered, yet it is the most rapidly growing urban area in Australia. And accordingly it is one of those areas where a State Government should move quickly with proposals, because the Australian Government has extended the whole scheme, the urban sewerage proposals, from the State capitals to places of the population of the Gold Coast or less. So that the sooner proposals can be made, by the State Government and local authorities, the sooner the money can flow. There is still dispute, of course, as to how to dispose of the effluent. Now, there can be no question that it is now possible to dispose of it in the most healthy and satisfactory way, because the Australian Government is making that possible.

The concluding thing I want to raise of local interest is the question of public transport between the Gold Coast and Brisbane. It is, of course, now seen to be the folly which we said it was all along, to discontinue the railway between Coolangatta and later Southport and Beenlea. I think Sir Gordon Chalk was the Minister for Transport in 1961 when the line to Coolangatta was discontinued and in 1964 when the line from Southport to Beenlea in turn was discontinued. And folly on folly, of course, they have now sold much of the track. Now the Gold Coast is easily the largest city in Australia which does not have

public transport by rail with other places. And as I said earlier, it is the most rapidly growing area in Australia. So we would be happy as a Government, Federally, to consult with the State Government on this proposal. There again, it is something which the Federal Government cannot do on its own. The Constitution prevents the Federal Parliament building any railway without the consent of the State Government. And accordingly, it does require co-operation with a State Government before this can be done. But it is very clear, that this distance, this population is ideal for having public transport. It can be quicker, safer, and cheaper than public transport by buses and it also provides an alternative for individuals if they prefer to go by public transport instead of driving their own cars.

PRIME MINISTER: Are there any questions you would like to ask me.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, after you finished reading the Courier Mail this morning, did you notice in the National Press reports that Sir Charles Court in Western Australian has written to mining companies telling them that if they accept financial help from the Government they could not expect to get mining leases on or off-shore in Western Australia. Do you have any comment on that?

PRIME MINISTER: I only know what I saw in the paper and it is very short. I don't want to, I haven't seen any of the letters that Sir Charles Court wrote, so I'm rather reluctant to comment about them. It is quite clear however that any mining company with interests in Australia has to consider the attitude of the National Government, because men, materials, money, coming into Australia, any materials going out of Australia do so under arrangements made with the Australian Government. State Governments do not have any authority in those matters. My Government has, right from the outset, set out to see, two things: that there was an increasing Australian control over natural resources, including mining resources, and secondly that there was a proper return on exports of mineral products from Australia. No State has benefited more from this policy than Queensland. Already one hundred million dollars more has been got for export of minerals

from Queensland than would have been got under the arrangements which were in operation before my Government was elected. But there's been a review of a very great number of these contracts and that review will mean that about eighteen hundred million more available for Queensland exports than would have been got under the arrangements which were there before we came in.

You mention also off-shore matters, This is a matter before the High Court . In our view the attitude which Mr. Gorton's Government took and which my Government has taken will be upheld by the Court and this means that matters off-shore will in fact be determined by the Australian Government. Up till now, the rivalry between State Governments in mineral matters has been very much to the disadvantage of the people in the industry, because State Governments were competing with each other to provide exports at the very best terms for the overseas companies. They were cutting each others throats. Now the whole of Australia, including the States concerned, are benefiting very much more from the co-ordinated National approach which my Government has been able to bring in.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, Sir, I announce myself (unclear), from Gold Coast Mirror. Now, what the Gold Coast has many records, and one is that it now has the highest proportion of pensioners living in its population, of any part of Australia, in fact I think the figure is 23%. Now in view of the fact that many pensioners are living on savings that they've accumulated throughout their lifetime may you tell us, Sir, what exactly is the position concerning the unearned income tax, that was proposed in your September budget. Is in fact this tax on thrift to be proceeded with and become Federal Law, because I feel it would be a very bad move and hitting the people who are defenceless and least able to help themselves in these times of rapidly rising inflation?

PRIME MINISTER: If the new law was taken in isolation then there might be that consequence for some retired people. But, of course, this is not the only piece of legislation. Most of these people would have had no hope of pensions under the arrangement

which applied before my Government was elected. My Government has now made it possible for people who are seventy-five or more to receive pensions whatever their other income or property may be. To take an extreme case, a millionaire of seventy-five, can now get a full-age pension. As from next April the same will apply to everybody who is seventy or more, and then, of course, later on it will be for everybody who is sixty-five or more. The net result is therefore, that people of those age groups will get a full pension irrespective of their incomes or their property. This will be a very great benefit to everybody who is retired. Furthermore, the age pension is being increased in its value. When we came in, the age pension was worth 20% of average weekly earnings; it's now worth about 24% and it's going to be brought up to 25%, so there can be no question that there will be indexation of pensions. We are determined that people who are least able to bear the consequences of inflation will be given every assistance to maintain their standard of living. That obviously includes pensions.

QUESTION: Yes Sir, with due respect, Sir, I fully appreciate that situation, but I did ask what is the position of the proposal to tax, to put an unearned income tax on unearned income that many pensioners are now living on and will continue to live on, because life savings have arrived at out of taxed income. Now, you did say there would be a 10% surcharge, in effect, on unearned income, which must come from bank deposits and...

PRIME MINISTER: Over certain income, yes. People don't keep bank deposits on incomes effected because they don't get anything for bank deposits, savings bank deposits of those amounts. No, our attitude is it's a perfectly reasonable attitude that people shouldn't have to pay so much tax on what they earn, as they should pay on what they don't earn. But, the proposal is, of course, going ahead.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, in the press this morning there was a report to the effect that you said that you were having just as much trouble as John Gorton in getting the Queensland Government to update its aboriginal policies. Could you tell us, Sir, why you don't put into effect the powers you had under the 1967 referendum to legislate?

PRIME MINSISTER: Well, we are going to do so. We have, of course, being trying to do these things by negotiation with the States. It's clear that negotiations are useless with the type of Government Queensland's had up to this stage. We haven't had to bring in such legislation with respect to any of the other States. New South Wales, Victoria, and now Western Australia, no the other order, but all those three Liberal States have made agreements with the Australian Government with respect to Aboriginal rights. There has been no difficulty at all, no legislation was needed therefore, but negotiations have not succeeded with the Queensland Government. So, I think we might have to resort to legislation there.

QUESTION: Frank Holmes, (unclear), Mr. Prime Minister. The State Government provides the Gold Coast City Council with a 20% subsidy towards beach restoration as an aid to tourism. Your Government hasn't (unclear) this, is it likely to introduce similiar aid in future?

PRIME MINISTER: There would have to be a very much more persuasive case than hitherto has been put. The fact is that you can't expect the taxpayers as a whole to come in and compensate Councils for their own follies. The beach along here has been eroded because people have built on sand-dunes. That is not the fault of the Australian Government.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, your opening comments with Sir Gordon Chalk, in dealing with him up to now, how have you found him as Deputy Premier and Treasurer?

PRIME MINISTER: In a personal way, he's a very good companion As you'd all know. Nevertheless, he is saddled with the attitude of the outgoing Premier.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, you hold up Mr. Hamer, Victoria, as one of the co-operative members.. Does it disappoint you that Mr. Hamer has rejected your application to allow the Evert Royal Commission to deal directly with Victorian agencies. As I understand it Mr. Hamer has now written back to you saying, no the Commission will have to deal through the Premier.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I thought he was rather defencive about the matter. As you know heweever, this is not necessarily my

request or my initiative. It was an initiative taken by the Parliament, the private members on both sides. I think the mover was a Liberal private member, and the seconder was one of the Labor private members, and the motion was carried on a non-Party vote, that there should be a Royal Commission composed of, I forget how many it said, but it was to be several Royal Commissioners. It was not to be a sole Royal Commission. This was carried last year, I think it was, and accordingly it's a Parliamentary initiative. Under those circumstances, the Government should try to carry out what the Parliament has resolved so it's, but only a Government, of course can appoint a Royal Commission, only the Government can advise the Governor-General. So this Royal Commission composed of Justice Elizabeth Evert, and Archbishop Felix Arnott, and Mrs. Anne Deveson, has been established by the Government because the House of Representatives passed the resolution that there should be such a Royal Commission. In those circumstances, I would have thought that Premier Hamer could have been a bit more forthcoming. It's not however, a Government matter.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Bjelke-Petersen opened his Government's campaign at Southport. You are here today, Mr. Bjelke-Petersen is back here tomorrow. Therefore the campaign for the seat of Albert appears to have developed into something of a personality leadership matter. Do you think that might be reflected in the ballot boxes. Do you hope it will be?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I don't think the result in Albert will depend on the particular leaders alone, I suppose that has some impact, naturally. But, I think it will turn on the member. Bill Darcy has worked here, his wife has to, for very many years, and he was a very well known sporting figure and public figure before he was elected to the Parliament. He did very well, you'll remember on the old boundaries at a bi-election in 1970, and he got in at the last general election in 1972. And he's worked very well for the electorate. I would have no doubt that we'll retain Albert. His services deserve his return.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, could you tell us why Australia voted to expell South Africa from the United Nations?

PRIME MINISTER: Because, South Africa was incorrigible. South

Africa had defied the United Nations for years and she was not in the least contrite and in those circumstances, like nearly everybody else, we voted in the Security Council as we did. Your not quite correct to say that we voted for expulsion, because that is not the Security Council's job, but we did vote in the Security Council, for a recommendation to the General Assembly which does it.

QUESTION: On that question, Sir, it looks now as though South Africa is going to resign. It appears very likely. If that happens and she's no longer a member of the United Nations would your Government (unclear) continue reciprocal trade at the level at which it's been going on?

PRIME MINISTER: We will carry on trade with South Africa on the condition that the world itself accepts for that trade. We no longer officially promote trade with South Africa, as you know, but a very great number of other countries, significant countries, still do. And of course it would therefore, be quite ineffective for Australia, by herself, to just ban trade. But at any rate, there are no international arrangements for banning trade with South Africa. We are urging companies with headquarters in Australia, which have subsidiaries in South Africa, to improve the condition of their African employees. We're following the practice there of the United States and Britain.

QUESTION: When can we expect pensions to reach 25% of average weekly earnings and how will you then hold them there (unclear)?

PRIME MINISTER: I would expect it to reach that next year, it very nearly did when they were put up, I think it was about 24½% at the time when they were put up in July, wasn't it, and it took effect from August; wasn't it, and they will be maintained there in accordance with the undertaking I gave on behalf of the Party when it was elected to Government, at six monthly intervals. Every Spring and Autumn.

QUESTION: Will this be by Government decision or by (unclear) indexation, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not sure.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, this area has one of the highest registered levels of unemployment. Do you believe that there is still a need for further measures to support those recently announced to reactivate the economy?

PRIME MINISTER: Let me see how these are working. Did you notice the full-page advertisement by General Motors-Holden today. I think that is typical of the attitude which business will now take - Get on with the job. I commend it to you.

QUESTION: Mr. Whitlam, there was a report in this morning's paper by an opposition spokesman that there will be 350,000 unemployed by next February. What's your comments on that?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't comment on that.

QUESTION: Yesterday you said you used every Constitutional power...

PRIME MINISTER: It takes a few months for anything that you do to have its full effect. We have acted in the ways in which we think will have the quickest effect, but there's no doubt that the general period December, January, February, are those when traditionally unemployment figures, the number of people seeking jobs, is greatest.

QUESTION: Sir, does that mean that you should have acted a few months earlier?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think anybody knew the figures would be so bad as they were revealed on Friday week. Nobody.

QUESTION: Not even Mr. Cameron who says that he was predicting it at the beginning of this year?

PRIME MINISTER: There were no figures to justify what Mr. Cameron was saying at that time.

QUESTION: What's going to happen if there is 350,000 unemployed people...

PRIME MINISTER: Well, look let's see...

QUESTION: Mr. Whitlam, Sir, last week Mr. Hawke said the whole world was heading for tremendous economic recession. Everyone is entitled to their own view. Do you believe that Australia with its unrivalled natural resources, in fact Australia, to coin a phrase, could in fact be the 'white Arabs', but won't adopt the same tactics, as you've made quite clear. Do you believe that this continent and this country could well pull out of any difficulties faster than most countries in the world?

PRIME MINISTER: We're going through a terribly difficult period. All the countries like us. The most difficult period for forty years. For more than forty years. And while it's true, as you say, that Australia has very great natural resources, Australia is still a very great trading country. It's no use having all the cattle and minerals we have if we can't sell them. And you just can't, no trading country can isolate itself, there's very few countries, there's no developed country which is a bigger trading country than Australia. And accordingly, it's impossible for us to isolate ourselves from what's happening with the three great groups with which we have most of our trade, Japan, United States and Western Europe. Three-quarters of our trade is with those three big blocks and they've all got the same troubles as we have.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, This may be an unpolitical question...(unclear)

PRIME MINISTER: In the event which you speculate about, I would be optimistic that the vote in Queensland for the Australian Labor Party will be such as to make even Mr. Bjelke-Petersen realise that there's nothing to be gained by continued obstruction. That he might as well get into step with all the Premiers. I'm not saying that the Liberal Premiers are very fond of the Australian Government, but at least they are prepared to co-operate on the basic things which we've initiated. There's been no trouble, well, there was some delay, but nevertheless, you now have the necessary framework of co-operation with the other Premiers. Take this area where we're meeting now, the Morton district. When we came in, we said to the Queensland Government that we were anxious to co-operate with them in

developing three regional areas: the Moreton region, the Fitzroy region, you know, Capricorn from Rockhampton and so on, and the Townsville region. We've been unable to make arrangements with Queensland on any of those three regions. In every other State we are already far advanced with arrangements, and in many cases, Albury-Wodonga being the outstanding one, the arrangements have been put in legislation by the three Parliaments concerned.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, could you tell me if it's a fact that Commonwealth Police recently had to investigate a note from the boys of the Southport School which contained a threat to your life?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't know about it.

QUESTION: Your secretary does.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, he hadn't told me. There are two things. Anybody in my position must be getting such threats. I don't see them. And the other thing is, nobody publicises those things because it, somebody else will get the bright idea. Nobody in my position publicises these things.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, there was a demonstration on Saturday at your meeting by unemployed people, and there's another one outside today. I understand from reports that you can expect the same tonight. Are these demonstrations helping to (unclear) your mind on questions of unemployment?

PRIME MINISTER: They are very helpful indeed. They came, the ones up in Brisbane had driven up in buses from the South Coast, the same bus is outside now. About unemployment, of course, the amazing thing is that the State Government used to pay unemployment benefits. I think there was provision for two and a half million wasn't there. Now, they've cut them out.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, your laughter doesn't indicate your laughing at unemployment..your laughing at the demonstrators...

PRIME MINISTER: Of course not. I have nothing but contempt for those people that exploit these particularly where supporters of a Premier whose discontinued arrangements for unemployment

benefits which have been made by his State for very many years, as far back as one can remember. At this time, of all times, he goes and discontinues the arrangements, I think that's contemptible.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, this is probably the first time in some months that you've mixed so much with ordinary electors. What's been the main reaction from the people. There's been both sides obviously, organised by the different Parties. Your talks to the public though?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I just can't cope with the hospitality that's been thrust upon me in the places. No, I, as always I get a very cordial reception in Queensland, after all there's no Southern politician who knows it so well. Never has been, and I would think that I would be better received all over Queensland than Mr. Bjelke-Petersen or Sir Gordon Chalk in some places, either might get a more cordial reception than I would. But on average, I'd beat them hands down.