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PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE - KINGSTON

Following is the transcript of the Prime Minister's press conference held in Kingston on 4 May 1975.

Prime Minister's Press Conference, Jamaica, Sunday 4 May 1975.

Question: Is it true that you have proposed a Commonwealth Aid scheme for Vietnam, as was reported in the local press here?

Prime Minister: No. I haven't been able to read the local press over the weekend. I suppose the story would flow from the fact that on Friday - just before we broke up for the weekend - I suggested that there should be a reference in the communique at the end of the conference, to international assistance for reconciliation and reconstruction in Vietnam. It was about as brief as that, I suggested that there should be some reference.

Question: What is your reaction to the position of Prime Minister Burnham of Guyana, which is that if action isn't taken to get a redistribution of wealth towards the developing country and the developing countries will be justified in setting up producer-only organisations to secure that change in the distribution of the world's wealth?

Prime Minister: Well some of you know me and some of you don't. Therefore for the former I will repeat, for the others I will state, that I do not answer questions which are predicated on somebody else's summary of what some colleague might have said. When we were discussing the general economic trade matters, the discussion was started by Prime Minister Wilson and the second speaker was Prime Minister Burnham. Prime Minister Burnham suggested that there should be an expert group set up to examine all features of trade with the objective of sharing the world's wealth more

equitably. Over the weekend the officials advising the various Heads of Government have got together and they have produced the terms of reference for the group of wise men. And I suppose that those terms of reference and maybe, the personnel in the group, will be announced before we disperse from Kingston. But Prime Minister Burnham's basic suggestion was that there should be an expert committee appointed by the Conference to advise the Commonwealth Finance Ministers and also delegates from the Commonwealth to the United Nations General Assembly later in the year. And that suggestion has been acted on.

Question: Can you give me your version of the reported friction between Australia and New Zealand over the question of nuclear free zones for the South Pacific?

Prime Minister: The question of nuclear free zones has not been mentioned in the Conference or, as far as I know, outside it. I was told there was some reference to friction: there is no basis for any such report.

Question: Can I ask your reaction to producer associations per se, as against producer-consumer associations?

Prime Minister: Well the best thing would be to have producer-consumer associations. Australia has been a member of such associations for many years in the past in respect to primary products. There have in recent years been several producer associations in mineral resources. Australia is a member of one, she is an observer at another and she is helping to found a third. The best thing is to have both producers and consumers in such associations. If, however, consumers will not join such associations, producers should go ahead and form their own. It is certainly one of the trends at the moment that there should be such associations. One arose from the discussion at the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Ottawa - the International Bauxite Association.

Question: Prime Minister what would your reaction be to a request by white Rhodesians to come to Australia, when they finally realise that they had to leave their own country or the country that they are in now?

Prime Minister: This is entirely speculative. Australia like all other members of the United Nations are bound by certain resolutions of the United Nations. Australia has followed those, and particularly since my Government came to office, it has followed them very strictly.

Question: Would you tell us whether your view of world trade is closer to that of Mr Burnham or Mr Wilson?

Prime Minister: This is far too simplistic a question. Mr Wilson supported at the end of the debate on this subject Mr Burnham's proposal that there should be an expert group. And from what I'm told the British officials, as well as the other officials, have co-operated in the terms of reference which have been drawn up over this weekend. I know it's a fascinating thing to have a confrontation between Britain and Guyana, it enthralled me, I haven't been able to sleep over the whole of the weekend as to the outcome of such a confrontation. But these things never seem to be quite as dramatic in the outcome.

Question: While here in Kingston Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, commenting on Australia accepting refugees from Vietnam, said: "Maybe it was a fit of emotional spasm, a sense of guilt, maybe some Aussie in a drunken moment may have left something behind and therefore you feel you have atoned for it, but have you"? Can I ask you whether that's a rational assessment of Australia's humanitarian efforts. Or alternatively do you regard the remarks as highly offensive and insulting?

Prime Minister: Assuming you are correctly quoting what Mr Lee Kuan Yew said, I presume he was inferring that Australian soldiers, during their service in Vietnam, had left children behind. If Australian soldiers have children in Vietnam, certainly the Australian Government would help to bring those children to Australia. I have not come across any application to bring any Australian soldier's child to Australia. Perhaps I should add that there have been quite a number of children brought from Vietnam to Australia by the Australian Government - about 300 of them - and they were brought in these circumstances: where the former South Vietnamese Government had certified that these children were eligible for adoption and where the Australian State Governments - who have the constitutional responsibility

in such matters in Australia - certified that there were suitable parents waiting to adopt. So in those circumstances there has been a reunion between about 300 eligible children and suitable parents. My Government arranged some time last year that the Australian Government would pay the passages of any children from Vietnam who were coming for adoption in Australia. In this case, of course, the children were brought in aircraft which belonged to the Royal Australian Air Force or were chartered by the Australian Government. I conclude, I know of no case where an Australian soldier's child has been nominated to come to Australia. Unquestionably the Australian Government would have assisted in bringing any such children to Australia.

Question: But was it done out of a sense of guilt, Prime Minister? An emotional spasm as Mr Lee Kuan Yew has put it?

Prime Minister: I hesitate to comment on other people's news conferences, because so often I find that a great deal is lost or gained in transmission. I've stated the circumstances in which children from Vietnam have been brought to Australia, and I believe they are very proper circumstances. There was quite a deal of agitation to bring many more children, but no greater number of children could be found for whom the Vietnamese Government was prepared to give a certificate that they were available for adoption, or State Governments were prepared to give certificates that there were suitable parents.

Question: What about adult Vietnamese?

Prime Minister: The Australian Government said that adult Vietnamese could come to Australia if they were the spouses of Australian citizens or if they were the spouses of Vietnamese students who were being given temporary permits to remain in Australia to complete their courses of study. In addition, decisions were made in individual cases where there were Vietnamese adults, whose conduct - in association with Australians over the years - would have placed their lives in jeopardy.

Question: In other words they had to have a connection?

Prime Minister: Of course, yes.

Question: Last week at the conference you were reported as saying that multinational companies had too much influence and control. I was wondering why you raised it at this conference and whether you were seeking some Commonwealth initiative?

Prime Minister: I raised the same matter at the conference in Ottawa where I was asked to initiate the discussion on trade and economic matters. I made a reference to this subject in the same item this time. I wanted to make the point that international trade was concerned with commodities certainly, but it also depended on a very great number of other matters which militated against the developing countries and in fact, against what are regarded as developed countries such as Australia, because international trade depends for its infrastructure on credit facilities, insurance facilities, transport facilities, and these are in the hands, very largely, of international, multinational companies. Most of the countries in the Commonwealth, certainly the developed countries in the Commonwealth, have mixed economies, the private sector is predominant and its companies very often - usually in fact - multinational companies - that provide the banking, the insurance and the transport facilities for international trade. Accordingly, to deal with international trade in terms of commodities alone is to deal with only part of international trade. It maybe that commodities are the principle preoccupation of Britain among the developed countries in the Commonwealth. But it would be quite absurd for a Head of Government from Canada or Australia or New Zealand or Singapore, the other developed countries in the Commonwealth to overlook the aspects of international trade which turn not on commodities, but on banking, insurance and transport. I should add that I was concerned also, to see that the discussion turned on increased processing of commodities in the country of origin, because unquestionably a country's wealth depends very largely on the extent to which it is processing commodities. The countries which produce commodities would be very much wealthier, the gap between them and the developed countries would be very much reduced, if they were able to process their commodities to a greater extent. There again, international companies provide so much of the wherewithal for processing. They control, in mixed economies, such matters as technology and capital.

Question: Could I ask you about the British membership of the European Common Market, bearing in mind that the British people will be voting on the referendum in a month's time. Would you like to see Britain remain a member of the Market?

Prime Minister: Yes. I said that a few months ago when I was in Britain and when I was in most of the countries of the European Economic Community. I said then that there was no advantage to Australia in Britain withdrawing from the Market. I believe the same has been said by the Prime Minister of Canada and the Prime Minister of New Zealand, in the Common Market countries including Britain. During the discussion - the four days discussions so far of the Heads of Government Meeting here - there hasn't been a single suggestion that it would be to the advantage of any of the members for Britain to withdraw from EEC. There have been several statements that it would be to the advantage of the members if Britain were to remain in the EEC. Tribute was paid by several countries to the skill with which the Wilson Government has renegotiated terms to the advantage of developing Commonwealth countries. I hesitate to comment on a matter which is primarily Britain's concern but since this matter has arisen in the Heads of Government Meeting, since the matter has been put to me when I have been in Britain, I suppose there is no particular harm in me giving the same answer as I always have given. There are many matters of political controversy in my country and such is the neurosis of some people who were dragged from the tart shop after 23 years in Government, that there is any basis whatever for criticising my Government, that basis will be exploited ad nauseam. It is sufficient to say that my views on Britain remaining in the Common Market haven't produced a ripple of criticism in Australia. I wouldn't lose a single vote in Australia by saying that Britain should remain in the EEC. None of my opponents, none of my rivals, have seen any advantage for them in saying that I should discourage Britain from staying in, I should encourage Britain to get out. This may come as some surprise to you because it is true that throughout the sixties and indeed there was an attempt in the seventies, by our opponents - the previous government to make it difficult for Britain to join the Common Market. Britain is now in. Everybody accepts that this is the proper thing and nobody thinks it would be to our advantage - and I suppose I am at least entitled to express that, views on that question - nobody believes that it would be to Australia's advantage for Britain to get out of the Common Market. I believe there are some people in the British Labor Party who feel that somehow the social democrat governments who are in

power in Australia, and New Zealand, and Singapore and virtually in Canada, should somehow rally to the cause of getting Britain out. The suggestion has been made to all of them. It has been made for some months. None of them have responded to the suggestion. Perhaps I could warm to the subject by saying, that as a person whose ancestors all came from Britain - three-quarters from England and one-quarter from Scotland - I don't relish the thought that England might lapse into the position of Spain - looking to a mighty empire in the past and a peripheral influence for the future.

Question: Prime Minister can I revert to your previous question on the Common Market. In view of what you have said Ministers have in the past, without perhaps a lot of evidence been saying in Britain that the entire Commonwealth supports Britain's continued membership of the European Community. On the strength of what you have heard here, from your colleagues and in the Conference and outside it, would you say that they would be justified in future in continuing to make that claim?

Prime Minister: That the Commonwealth supports Britain's membership of the European Economic Community?

Question: Yes.

Prime Minister: I believe that would be a correct statement. Certainly there has been no statement in the Conference which would in any way cast doubt on that proposition. On the other hand it would be quite wrong to say that most people have expressed a view in favour of Britain remaining in. Most people haven't spoken on this on the relevant items where this matter would arise. But everybody who has mentioned it has mentioned it in two contexts : that they believe that Britain should remain in the Market : secondly, that the Wilson Government has been able to make very beneficial changes as regards each country itself.

Question: But do you think on that second point that there is likely to be anything in the communique to make that point?

Prime Minister: I don't know. I would certainly support any such statement in the communique. I think it would be a relevant feature in the communique and it would be an accurate statement.

Question: The fact that Britain has used her membership usefully on behalf of members of the Commonwealth and their relationship with the community?

Prime Minister: Yes, I believe that that would be an accurate statement and I believe that it would be a relevant contribution to the communique. I don't think there can be any doubt that of all the members of the European Economic Community, none is in a better place than Britain to speak on behalf of the developing countries. Britain certainly has a very great deal of experience in these respects and I think Britain's heart is in the right place in these matters.

Question: Mr Prime Minister could you explain why your Government is not able to support New Zealand in its efforts to get a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific?

Prime Minister: The matter hasn't arisen.

Question: But I thought it has arisen before, if not at this Conference?

Prime Minister: It hasn't arisen at this Conference and I'm only concerning myself with matters at this Conference. I'm sorry I can't help you to fabricate any confrontation across the Tasman on this matter. You must be under terrific pressure from home to substantiate these stories.

Question: My question was to explain why Australia does not support New Zealand?

Prime Minister: The matter has not arisen.

Question: What are the implications for Australia's security of the fall of Indo-China to the Communists? Do you feel that that has been discussed enough at this meeting? And do you still feel faith in America as an ally for Australia's defence in that area?

Prime Minister: The matter has scarcely been mentioned in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The matters which are given most attention at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting are the matters which concern several members and Vietnam has only directly involved Australia and New Zealand. We were the only nations which participated in the civil war.

We did so for several years, but our participation was ended in each case in December 1972. So you can't really expect that the question would bulk largely at a Commonwealth Meeting. I would hope that there would be some reference to reconciliation and reconstruction in Vietnam because that is something in which most of us could participate, and I believe, should participate. You asked me about America's situation. America has been, is, and will for many years, as far ahead as any of us can see, continue to be the greatest military country in the world. What I think we have to realise is that from now on, America's commitments will require the support of the Administration and the Congress. People in the past, particularly those adopting the Westminster system, have found it very puzzling, that if a Government commits itself to something, the Parliament doesn't support it. But of course, in the American system the President and the Congress are elected separately and it's not for the first time you have the situation where they have different points of view. Quite obviously Wilson and the League of Nations is one that we all remember from our history. But if the President and the Congress support a commitment then I have no reason whatever to believe that that commitment would not be effective in the circumstances which it contemplated. And as regards the arrangements between Australia, New Zealand and the United States - the ANZUS arrangements - I have never heard any President or any Congressional leader express any doubts as to the validity and the relevance of the arrangements. And I say in that positive way because from 1967 onwards I have on visits to Washington made a point of ascertaining the views of Congress as far as I could, as well as the Administration. And therefore I can say that from the last visit I made to Washington which was last September, Republicans and Democrats, in each house of the Congress, supported the ANZUS arrangements. I will be seeing these people as well as the President and the Vice-President next Wednesday and Thursday, and I would expect the same situation to apply. I think we should avoid equating the situation in South Vietnam with that in any other country in the region. The reason why South Vietnam's Government failed was principally two-fold. The first was that they never were prepared to test public opinion. After the General Agreements in 1954 and after the Paris Accords in 1973, in each case the South Vietnamese Government refused to carry out the undertakings to have elections, or to have a broader-based government. That is, they just wouldn't budge on that aspect. And of course, they fell.

And the other reason is their situation was seen by their own citizens to depend on outside support. And no government can have the respect or support of its population if it is regarded as depending on outsiders. However noble the motives or however mighty the resources of those outsiders, no government has respect or retains support if it is seen to depend on outsiders. That situation doesn't apply with any other country in the region.

Question: Could you tell us what your attitude would be to an invasion by North Korea of South Korea?

Prime Minister: That is a hypothetical question.

Question: This Conference has spent almost two days discussing Rhodesia. On Friday you had every bit of 15 minutes to deal with a whole range of subjects namely, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, the future of Portuguese Timor, the power play in the Indian Ocean. All matters of considerable importance to the peoples of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. My question is this: do you think that this Conference has spent so much time on Rhodesia that other matters of vital importance to the Commonwealth, particularly in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean have been virtually shut out? And while we are on the subject, do you approve of long set speeches being given at this Conference?

Prime Minister: It is inevitable that this Conference should have spent a very great deal of time on Rhodesia. It was dealt with early because some of those who wanted to take part in it, had to leave this weekend. But it was inevitable that a very great deal of time should be spent on Rhodesia because at every Conference throughout the 1960s and I think back in the '50s, a very great deal of time was spent on Rhodesia. It is a matter which concerns a very great number of Commonwealth countries. Obviously it concerns the African ones, but it is a matter upon which most of the others feel very intensely indeed. Furthermore this time there was a very great breakthrough in that since our last Conference, Portugal had decided to give up her empire. In those circumstances I don't think we could have expected that less time would be spent on Rhodesia - Zimbabwe - than was spent.

Now on Papua New Guinea and Timor, these were only passing references I made. Obviously I would be expected to refer to Papua New Guinea because the Chief Minister on Thursday sent me a message asking that the Conference should accept Papua New Guinea's membership of the Commonwealth when she gained independence, which will be in a few months time. That was announced to the Conference on Thursday and the first business on Friday was to accept the proposition. Well naturally when I had a few minutes - I think it was about 10 minutes - at the end on Friday to mention a few subjects which I thought ought to be dealt with in the communique I referred to this situation. Every member of the Commonwealth has been a British colony with two exceptions, there was Western Samoa and now there is Papua New Guinea. So inevitably it is a matter which we should acknowledge that a colony and a trust territory of ours should be admitted. Timor was only mentioned in the context of the Portuguese empire. After all there are some bits of it, apart from Angola, Mozambique, and Cabo Verde. I would hope later on that there would be some discussion and that in the communique there would be some reference to the Indian Ocean because about half the Commonwealth countries are island or littoral or hinterland States of the Indian Ocean. And several of them have taken initiatives in international bodies dealing with the Indian Ocean. I think it would be appropriate for us to refer to them. And the other matter which I think ought to be mentioned is some aspects of disarmament such as the comprehensive test ban treaty which is being discussed, or this coming week the review conference on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Question: In the Rhodesia question, as you mentioned you are going on to Washington and this Conference is much concerned with pressure on Ian Smith of a practical kind. I'm sure you will be taking up the chrome problem as part of the sanctions tightening when you're in Washington. But looking at the thing more broadly, I wonder if you could tell us why either Australia or other countries remote from Rhodesia should be concerned with the problem at this summit. I mean in what sense does it drive you to try to get a formula, why bother? It certainly would be easier politically just not to worry.

Prime Minister: I agree with the unanimous Commonwealth view on chrome. I wasn't proposing to raise it in Washington, it's not a matter which is of prime concern to Australia. There will be very much more important matters for me to discuss in Washington. Now you mention about Rhodesia, why should it take up so much time and what are the political matters. Rhodesia has concerned people not only in the Commonwealth, but in the United Nations for quite some time. It's obviously not a prime consideration so far as Australia is concerned. Nevertheless Australia has got obligations under United Nations resolutions. It's faithfully discharged those obligations. As regards internal politics I don't say that one gains any votes in Australia by supporting this question but by the same token any votes that were going to be lost had been lost already. And from what I see of the spokesman for Ian Smith in Australia I would not expect or wish that they vote for us. Externally it is important that Australia should be known to support proper principles in this question. Australia cannot afford to be in the situation in regards to South East Asia or the Indian or Pacific Oceans that South Africa has got into in Africa. There is no basis for Australia being put in that way, and nobody should be under any impression that it is. So accordingly we support the attitude which is universally expressed in the Commonwealth and in the United Nations.

Question: Apart from what's happened about chrome and New Zealand and the Tasman Sea. We recognise that history has been made in Indo-China in the past week and that you know more than we do that history has been made and that you yourself have described the United States as the greatest military power in the world, has been forced to withdraw from that part of the world. You yourself have boasted that Australia has made a tremendous contribution to the humanitarian aftermath of the Vietnam war. Do you not think that there is not a terrific political vacuum there which you in Australia may be uniquely placed to fill. Having talks as you do have with President Ford in the United States in a few days time, do you see yourself as taking an initiative here to bring the nations of that part of the world together to try to make political headway where there is a terrific political vacuum?

Prime Minister: No I wasn't wanting to boast of the huge humanitarian contribution that we have made. All that I was saying is that we have done more than others. I think there is room for Australia to do more than she has and for others to do more than they have. I am not thinking of taking any particular initiative or being cast in any such role. But I do believe that international organisations and various countries, preferably through international organisations, ought to do something about reconciling and rehabilitating this country. It is quite tragic that of all the old colonies in South East Asia and in Southern Asia, Indo-China has had to wait so long for independence. There was no earthly reason why South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos should be in so much worse a position than say, the Philippines, which was emancipated by the United States, I think in '46, India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma which were emancipated in '47, and Indonesia which was emancipated in '49 - had to put up a bit of a struggle to do so, but it was - then Malaya in '57 and then later on Sarawak, Sabah, Bangladesh - with a terrific trauma in the case of Bangladesh - all were able to get independence. But in Indo-China for nearly 30 years the war has continued. And there is no reason whatever why the position of Indo-China should be worse than those of all the other colonies. Now in those circumstances I believe there is a very great international obligation to reconcile the people and reconstruct the country.