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“In his humiliation justice was denied him”

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Extracts from the reports of debates in the House of
Representatives, Canberra, 1954.

The two major events discussed in Federal Parliament in 1954 were the Petrov defection and the Geneva Agreement on Indo-China. Menzies announced Petrov's defection in the dying hours of the twentieth parliament. The Geneva Agreement of 20th July 1954, the related SEATO pact, and the Petrov Royal Commission, were discussed during the opening session of the twenty-first parliament. Details are to be found in Hansard.

PETROV:

R.G. Menzies: Announcement of Petrov Royal Commission: 8.00pm 13th April 1954:

“It is my unpleasant duty to convey to the house some information which, I this morning laid before the Cabinet for the first time, and which we decided should be dealt with as soon as possible. Some days ago, one Vladimir Mikhailovich Petrov, who has been Third Secretary and Consul in the Soviet Embassy in Australia since February 1951, voluntarily left his diplomatic employment and made to the Australian Government, through the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, a request for political asylum. The Director General of ASIO, acting under the authority of myself, the Attorney General, and the External Affairs Department, received this request. The request has been granted, and following the established diplomatic practice, protection has been provided for M. Petrov. The Soviet Embassy has been notified accordingly. M. Petrov has acted voluntarily throughout. To quote his own words in a statement to the Australian authorities:- “I wish to ask the Australian government for permission to remain in Australia permanently – I wish to become an Australian citizen as soon as possible – I ask for protection for myself and assistance to establish myself comfortably in this country. I no longer believe in the Communism of the Soviet leadership – I no longer believe in Communism, since I have seen the Australian way of living.”

“M. Petrov, who has been carrying out in Australia the function of Russian Ministry of State Security – the MVD – has disclosed a complete willingness and capacity to convey to our own security people a great number of documents and what may turn out to be much oral information and explanation. In the examination of all this material, involving as it does a great deal of translation and comparative research to establish the meaning of particular expressions and code names, much time will necessarily be spent. I am therefore not in a position to make a full statement. But, in the comparatively few days that have elapsed since Petrov came to our security people, enough material has been examined – though only a small

fraction of the whole – to show that there are matters affecting Australia’s security which call for judicial investigation. These matters concern not only the activities of the MVD agents in Australia, but also the position of some Australian citizens named in the documents, under ‘cover’ or ‘code’ names or otherwise, as contacts or co-operators. As would be expected, I do not propose to mention the names of people until the investigations have so far proceeded that a coherent case, of proper probative value, can be prepared. There will, of course, be continued surveillance of persons named, most of whom, incidentally, had already come under the notice of the security service.

“The Government therefore proposes to set up a Royal Commission of investigation into what I may call espionage activities in Australia. This will be done as soon as possible. Naturally it may take some little time to secure the services of a suitable Royal Commissioner and prepare the precise terms of reference. Moreover, as I am informed, much detailed work will have to be done on the material provided to us, before the commissioner could proceed with his investigation. But the Government thought that an announcement of the central fact and our intentions should be made at the earliest possible moment. I think that I should, on the foundation of the material already before us, make two things clear to honourable members.

“The first is that the growing efficiency of our own Australian security organization during recent years has made it much more difficult than in the past for espionage to succeed – a point upon which I would congratulate the officers concerned. The second is that, while it would have been agreeable for all of us to defer an appointment of such importance until after the new Parliament has been established, there can, as I am sure that all parties here will agree, be no avoidable delay of investigation into what are already beginning to emerge as the outlines of systematic espionage and at least attempted subversion. Legal investigation shows that the Royal Commission Act needs amendment in order to authorise a royal commission to compel the attendance of witnesses and the giving of evidence. I give notice of an amending Bill and will invite the House to pass it tomorrow.”

(pages 325.326).

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### **THE GENEVA AGREEMENT:**

At Geneva, in July 1954, a truce was entered into between the French forces in Vietnam and the Viet Minh.

The interpretation placed upon the terms of the Geneva settlement by the 1954 Australian government is evident in the following extracts. Observe how the essential terms of the settlement have since been subverted by the USA aided by Australia.



**Settlement terms:    R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister:    5<sup>th</sup> August 1954.**

“In Viet Nam, which is the most difficult of the three, the Communist and non-Communist forces are to be regrouped into the north and south respectively within a specified time. Both Hanoi and Haiphong are to be evacuated by the French. The settlement says that everyone in Viet Nam must be allowed to decide freely in which zone he wishes to live. General elections throughout the country are to be held in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission, and consultations on this subject will be held between competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20<sup>th</sup> April 1955 onwards.” (page 64).

**Settlement terms:    R.G. Casey, External Affairs Minister:    10<sup>th</sup> August 1954:**

“The big question mark hanging over the settlement is the partition of Viet Nam. Under the Geneva settlement this partition would be temporary only, and elections are envisaged for 1956 in an effort to unify the country. The settlement has not made the military demarcation line the permanent political boundary, as such a solution could not be agreed upon between the two sides. Among the Vietnamese the urge for unity of their country is very strong. Preparations are to be made by the representatives from the north and from the south of Viet Nam for the elections to be held in 1956. The discussions will begin about a year from now. The elections will be under the supervision of a commission consisting of India, Canada and Poland. Many difficult questions will have to be resolved. It is up to the rest of us to give the people of Southern Viet Nam whatever assistance and encouragement we can in developing democratic institutions and genuinely nationalist aspirations.” (page 100).

**Opposition to free elections:    R.G. Menzies:    5<sup>th</sup> August 1954:**

“Living as we do in a country with the twin inheritances of the common law and parliamentary self-government, we are not necessarily qualified to determine how far such instruments of government are understood or applicable in other countries or how long a period of time should elapse before they become so. It is a simple enough matter to provide in a truce that there should be what we call “free election” within some stipulated time. That is something we understand, but five minutes’ reflection will show us that even we have not yet completely mastered the techniques of democracy. Though it is the noblest system of government yet devised and promotes, as no other system could, the significance and well being of the individual, democracy is, at the same time complex. I say “complex”, because all honourable members know how much the successful working of democracy depends upon an educated intelligence, self-discipline, a community conception and a capacity for selection and judgement. It is idle to suppose that we can take a community with a high percentage of illiteracy, with primitive civic organisation and with little, if any, popular acquaintance with the art and science of government, and convert it into a democracy in a year or two. I make these remarks not because I desire even to appear to resist the development of democracy in other communities; on the contrary, it is one of the great hopes of the world. My reason for saying what I have on this point is to emphasise that the probabilities in Viet Nam, both north and south of the line of division now established, are that the most organised groups will be the Communists themselves. We must, therefore, not overlook the possibility that a free election

may be an election which establishes a Communist administration in the whole of Viet Nam.” (pages 64, 65).

**SEATO pact not relevant: R.G. Casey: 10<sup>th</sup> August 1954:**

“The chances of getting a sympathetic attitude in Asia towards the pact are greatly increased by the fact that settlement has now been reached in Geneva. The prospective South East Asia Treaty Organisation is no longer related, even indirectly, to the fighting that was until recently taking place in Indo-China, and can therefore be seen more clearly as a collective defence of a long term nature and not as a mere alliance reached hastily for possible use in the Indo-China fighting. We urged these views to our friends.” (page 101).

**NOTE:**

The possibility of a Holy War arising out of the Geneva settlement of 1954 is clear from several statements of 10/8/1954.

- S. Keon MHR, a member of the Santamaria group secretly operating within the ALP, complained of the Geneva “surrender”.
- R.G. Casey expressed concern for “Catholic communities” in the Red River delta and foreshadowed their transfer to the south.
- Menzies (5/8/54) summed up the reasons for Australia’s involvement in the subsequent Vietnam War:  
“There can be no easy or enduring compromise between peoples who affirm the existence of a divine authority and the compulsion of a spiritual law, and those others who see nothing beyond an atheistic materialism.”

In the House of Representatives on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1954, (Hansard, p325) Sir Eric Harrison criticised the following statement in a book, “The Alternative” by Dr. John Burton:

“There is no undertaking which the Communists can give, there is no basis for settlement which the United States is at present prepared to accept, because fundamentally it is not “Communist aggression” which is being fought, it is progress.” (from p 38).

“The Roman Catholic Church and many American financial interests have therefore joined together ... to fight not merely communism, but any change which would destroy their common interests.”(from p 40).

Dr. Burton was formerly Secretary of the Department of External Affairs. Since he made these statements, Australia has become involved in America’s Holy War on behalf of Rome in Vietnam.