



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE AT 377 SUSSEX STREET,
SYDNEY

21 MARCH 1986

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JOURNALIST: ... inaudible ...

PM: Well, I don't know there is such dissension in their ranks that it is very likely to appear I would think.

JOURNALIST: You are obviously very happy about the way things have been going?

PM: Well, it is nothing much more than you would expect really. This is the worst Opposition in, I think, the history of federal politics. The most inept leadership I have been saying from the time that this Parliament resumed that the media should be watching the Opposition parties because they were going to be fractured by different factions, philosophies and opportunisms. And that is the way it is working out. They have no principles, they have no policies. And it is inevitable in that situation that you are going to have this degeneration in the rabble that you have got.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke any comments on what you will be discussing today at the meeting.

PM: NO, I always maintain my comments for in the meeting not outside.

JOURNALIST: Will interest rates be a topic of discussion?

PM: No, of course not.

JOURNALIST: Any idea of what is on page four?

PM: NO. It is fascinating. If they had to keep that quiet, may be it is the liquidation list. I just don't know.

JOURNALIST: Would you expect some sort of challenge to Mr Howard, given the number of leaks from the Party in recent times?

PM: I don't think it is just because of the leaks. As I said before, they have no principles. They have never really worked out what they stood for. They have had government for a fair while by default. They have never had to address themselves to what they really believe. And of course, it emerges that they believe in nothing except power. So they have no capacity to develop policies because they have no principles from which to develop policies. And in that sort of vacuum of principle and policy, what comes to the surface inevitably is personal lusts for power. What comes to the top is the pursuit of particular personal possessions. In that situation you will have leaks, you will have backbiting. And you will have very tenuous holds of positions of power.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, all I want is a tip for the Slipper?

PM: Well, I have to confess that I haven't had a chance yet to study the form as closely as I would like to, but my preliminary position is Bounding Away and Imperial Baron, but I would like to have a look at the form of this New Zealander Scotch and Dry, it seems to be fairly good.

JOURNALIST: What about for a bit of value?

PM: For a bit of value? Perhaps Bataan.

JOURNALIST: ... drought along the East Coast, is that a concern to the Government re the balance of payments problem?

PM: Well, you never want a drought. But at this stage it hasn't been put to me as something that is likely to occur. Our problem, of course, is the prices we get for our products. We are amongst the world's most efficient producers of rural products. The great tragedy is that our farming community, the best in the world, is being mutilated by a corrupted international market. And that is why I am going to see President Reagan. Why I am going to press the case of Australian farmers. It is a tragedy that these men and women, who work so hard, more efficiently than anyone else in the world, are not getting a proper reward for their efforts because of this corruption of the international market initiated by the Europeans and now compounded by the understandable concern of the Americans who are trying to retaliate against the Europeans, but in that retaliation Australia could be hurt. So that is why I am going to the United States to try and ensure that the proper interests of Australians are protected.

JOURNALIST: Will it immediately affect the more pressing economic problems facing Australia ... will these things affect government policy over the short term?

PM: Well, let me say that the matters to which I have been referring, the corruption of international markets, has been a major factor in the massive turnaround in the terms of trade. If, in fact, the terms of trade hadn't turned in the way they have, that is a drop, a substantial drop in prices for our commodities in international markets, we had had the same terms of trade position which operated at the end of 1984, our current account situation would be three and a half billion dollars better than it is. Now, that is an enormous load for any economy to be carrying. And it is a tribute to the strength of the Australian economy that with than enormously adverse turn against us in the terms of trade, the prices we receive for our products, that we are doing so outstandingly well.

JOURNALIST: *What is on the agenda, Sir, can you tell us what you will be talking about today?*

PM: No, it is just an internal matter. It is only the Liberal Party which spills its guts, if I can put it gently that way to the public. We conduct our affairs within the Party.

JOURNALIST: Sir, will you be discussing at all Mr Hartley's

PM: Oh, I think there is some reference to it, but I think that should take up a small amount of our time.

JOURNALIST: Just one question, Sir, on that matter, the infamous list from the Liberal Party. Could it be not be seen as something quite normal, given that all parties might discuss who might oppose who support their policies.

PM: No, it can't be seen normal in any sense because here you have a party which traditionally has relied upon the support of the business community and this document starkly reveals that their own base has repudiated them. Quite understandably, because the sort of nonsense they are talking in regard to industrial relations would be disastrous for business as indeed it would be for the trade unions and the community generally. So, I mean it is a terrible commentary upon their ineptitude, their hopelessness, that in a central issue like this they are revealing that they understand that they have no basic support any where in the community.

JOURNALIST: Does the Labor Party have any similar type lists?

PM: No, of course not. We have broad support from the business community, the trade unions and community generally. We just couldn't possibly fill up five pages of people like that who would be doubtful about our policies.

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