



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, THE HON PETER STAPLES' MP
ELECTORATE/MINISTERIAL OFFICE, HEIDELBERG, 24 APRIL 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke how do you feel about Mr Fraser's comments over the weekend?

PM: Well I feel much more relaxed about them than John Howard does. I think it was a fairly obvious statement, the fact that the Liberal Party was going to have any chance it has got to be representative of much broader strands than the way it's going. It is as Mr Macphee says, all the machinations within the Liberal Party and within the conservative parties and the National Party as well, are to push it more and more towards the hard right and Mr Macphee and Mr Fraser are not wrong about that.

JOURNALIST: Are you surprised that Mr Fraser would buy into it?

PM: No I haven't really thought about whether I'm surprised about that. He was obviously being pressed by Mr Macphee to do so and he obviously thought that the issues were important enough. I mean no-one's had more vigorous and concentrated disagreements with Mr Fraser than have I. But there are certain fundamental issues on which he has been very sound and those include particularly the issues of race, immigration and colour and that's why I've been supporting him in his attempt to get the secretaryship of the Commonwealth and he obviously believes that those fundamental issues are at risk in this push against Mr Macphee and that Mr Macphee warrants support because of the importance of those issues.

JOURNALIST: On the same level, are you concerned about the challenge to Mr Dawkins in Perth?

PM: No and more importantly neither is Mr Dawkins.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister is there any significance in your teeing up an overseas trip as Prime Minister for twelve months time in regard to an election?

PM: No, no. You'd have to have a convoluted mind to work out any problems in that. I mean I can't and don't wish to change the date of Anzac Day. There's nothing I can do about that and nor did I want to.

JOURNALIST: Maybe it's your confidence that still being Prime Minister in twelve months time whether there's an election before or after, is that it?

PM: Well I think it follows that if there hasn't been an election ... there's no move against me is there Peter?

STAPLES: Not that I ...

PM: No, no there's no move against me within the Party so I'll be Prime Minister before the election and we're confident of winning the next election. So you have to plan these things ahead. I mean obviously it's given me very much pleasure to be able to make available Royal Australian Air Force facilities to enable a contingent of veterans to go over there for the 75th anniversary of Anzac Day. It's been put to me that it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister to be with them and I think my commitment to the veterans of Australia has been very well established. So it would give me particular pleasure to be able to be with them there on that important day, which is a day as I said in opening this new ward at Heidleberg earlier today, Anzac Day was something which is really in a sense defines the spirit and the consciousness of Australia in so many ways. So it would be good to be there.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke will you sending any more assistance to Papua New Guinea, perhaps RAAF assistance?

PM: Let me say this. As far as the agreements that we have with Papua New Guinea are concerned, the operation of those agreements will continue. We've got people there helping in the training of the defence forces of Papua New Guinea. The question of whether there'd be any more particular assistance is a matter which would need a specific request and a considered decision. Now that hasn't occurred at this stage. I mean the main concern that we have as far as Papua New Guinea is concerned is that there be a resolution of what is a potentially very dangerous dispute in Bougainville where it's not simply a question of some disaffection amongst some people - either representing or purporting to represent land owners there as owner is purporting to do - but the dimension of that problem can be greater. I mean it can go to the very question of the viability of the existing constitutional structure of Papua New Guinea and therefore one has to be very careful in considering this issue, that you don't look at it merely in terms of some conflict and quasi military conflict on Bougainville but it's got to be looked at in terms of what does this mean for the polarity of Papua New Guinea. So we're monitoring the situation very, very closely. I've been reading all the cables myself, I've read a lot over the weekend, and in just sending off our new High Commissioner last week - I had him in and I told him that I wanted to be kept consistently informed of developments there because what happens in Papua New Guinea is not only important for the people of Papua New Guinea itself but clearly has significance for Australia in

(PM cont) many terms. I mean there are 4000 Australians on Bougainville and any escalation of the conflict there could be potentially very dangerous for those 4000 Australians. So for whatever reason you want to look at it, Australia has a very significant interest in developments there.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister does it frustrate you that given that you've ruled out an election this year, that you can't make use therefore of the electoral godsend represented by both the disunity within the coalition and within the Liberal Party itself?

PM: Well of course that question assumes that they are going to overcome in the short term their problems. Now they are not. They are not because as I said earlier today in opening Peter's office, their problem arises from a very simple fact, they have no beliefs. I mean they have been in opposition now for 6 years, that's a very significant fact, they've been in opposition for 6 years. They still haven't agreed on their basic policies. Why? Because they don't believe in anything. They have been in government in the past so often because we in the Labor Party couldn't govern ourselves and delivered government to them on a plate, but we have learnt. We have learnt that you have to have policies so in opposition we developed policies and policies that were relevant to the present and the future and were not just rehashes of a faded past. Now they haven't got policies and they have no sign of getting them, of getting relevant policies, and in that circumstance they are going to be characterised by this internal fratricide which mind you isn't new, it's happening at the moment. It just happens to be getting a sort of dramatic surfacing, if you like, because they've got some preselection ballots coming up. But the fundamental hatreds that exist between Mr Macphie and the right wing of his Party, that just hasn't emerged now, it's just come to the surface dramatically because of the preselections. But it's been a consistent undercurrent as has been the hatreds and the bitterness' and the divisions between the Liberal Party and the Country Party. They just happen to be surfacing at the moment because you've got questions of joint Senate tickets and preselections in the Party. They are not going to go away.

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