



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, PORT OF FREMANTLE,
14 MARCH 1990

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JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Andrew Peacock and John Hewson are saying that you and Treasurer Keating panicked over interest rates yesterday.

PM: If there's any sign of panic in this election, it's not on our side of politics. The panic is confined to the conservatives as well it might be. What has happened is simply that the Treasurer, Paul Keating and Prime Minister Hawke have stated the obvious and that is that their Government has put in place the economic structure and policies which can enable interest rates to come down. We've stated the obvious, an obvious which has been confirmed since I spoke yesterday within the banking industry.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, despite your generous endorsement of Mr Keating this morning, apparently he hasn't made it into Mr Howard's war Cabinet.

PM: Well, what is significant of course is first the assumption by Mr Howard that he would be Prime Minister. The people in Australia have shown that they don't trust the conservatives in time of war. They were in office at the start of the last war and they got thrown out because they weren't competent and John Curtin, which is appropriate to say here in Fremantle, John Curtin, the Member for Fremantle, became the Prime Minister of Australia in time of war because the conservatives weren't up to the job. So that's the first thing to say about the assumption of John Howard. The second thing of course to say about it is the very interesting omission from his own side of politics. Where is Andrew? I mean, he's certainly giving very considerable emphasis now to what he said last year. There is no trust between Mr Howard and Mr Peacock and he thinks that much of the man who is offering to be Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Howard wouldn't put him in his hypothetical Cabinet. If you ever wanted an indication of the depth of distrust, bitterness and hatred within the coalition and within the Liberal Party itself, John Howard's underlined it again.

JOURNALIST: Would you have either of them in your war Cabinet?

PM: In war the situation would be, and of course that is entirely hypothetical because we are living, as I've said before, in a more optimistic time than ever before, there's not going to be war. But if I could have a hypothetical answer to your question, it would be that the people of Australia would want, as they've had before, that is Labor in power in war as in peace. The only Government which has ever been called upon with trust by the Australian people in the time of conflict and we've never let them down.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, you said earlier that you had no intention of stepping aside if Labor's re-elected, but isn't it the reality is you could be pushed out?

PM: Dear oh dear, where did this fellow come from? Where did you come from?

JOURNALIST: Well, Canberra, the same place as you did.

PM: Did you? Well, you must have been, you must have been holed up somewhere in Canberra. Where's this push going to come from? There's never been such unity behind a leader and a Prime Minister as there is behind Bob Hawke. I mean, you^{must} have had a good drink last night, old boy. What did you give him, what did you give^{up} fellows?

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke.

PM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: The question of polls, Labor is, you know, in front in most of the polls that we've seen. Are you worried that this might lead to complacency on the part of some voters that there'll be a stronger protest vote than otherwise there would?

PM: No, I want to make the obvious comment. It's almost banal to make it, but I do make it. It's the one on the 24th that does count. I would be dishonest if I didn't say that, you know, I'd rather be in front in the polls than behind. Obviously I would. I think people will make their judgements on the issues and on the way the campaign's gone and on that basis I feel, feel confident of the right decision without being cocky or complacent about it.

JOURNALIST: What's your reaction to the West Australian Democrats' backflip?

PM: Well you might notice if you read the transcript of yesterday I indicated that this might happen. It just seemed to me if you did an intellectual analysis of it, it was an unsustainable decision and I think that that analysis that I did for you in the Press conference yesterday has been proven correct.

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