

QUESTION: Are you going to make any major announcements here in Mt Isa?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't have it in mind to make any particular announcement, any one announcement. The approach that my Government has to Mt Isa can be seen from the fact that we have set up a Department of Northern Development. We particularly want to concentrate on developing this most distant part of Australia and the first Minister for Northern Development, Dr Rex Patterson, is a public man who knows the North from east to west more than any one has ever known it.

There have been quite a number of specific things that we have been able to do for Mt Isa, for instance, we have now put through the Parliament - it went through the Senate on Thursday night - the Local Government Grants Bill constituting the first recommendations made by the reconstituted Grants Commission and Mt Isa City Council will get \$250,000 within a fortnight to spend as it sees fit. Cloncurry will get \$86,000.

My colleague Mr Frank Stewart, the Minister for Tourism and Recreation, has already I believe announced a grant of \$115,000 to a community recreation centre in Mt Isa.

My colleague Mr Bill Hayden, the Minister for Social Security, will be opening a regional office of the Department of Social Security this financial year. There are particular difficulties facing the residents of Mt Isa because of the city's isolation. A social worker will be included among the staff of the Social Security office in Mt Isa. It won't therefore be dealing just with payments and the assessment of payments; it will also have a person trained to give advice. I think there are 340 aged pensioners in Mt Isa, 133 invalid pensioners, 123 widow pensioners and 4,000 families receiving child endowment. I don't think ever in Australia I've been received by so many babes in arms at an airport. I have at Rabaul, in Papua New Guinea, but never in Australia. Mr Hayden's Department is also considering an application for a 34-bed hospital for the care of the aged in Mt Isa.

Now perhaps I can give the Northwest Star details of the afterwards. You aren't going to press until Monday are you.

QUESTION: This \$250,000.....

PRIME MINISTER: It is for the Council to spend as it sees fit.

QUESTION: Has any request been made to you for finance (unclear)

PRIME MINISTER: That's being considered by the body that the Australian and State Governments have all set up. It's being reviewed by that body - the Screening Committee of the National Water Program - and it may be that the Queensland and Australian Government will be able to make some announcement. There has been no proposition made by the State Government than the one which

we accepted in the legislation in 1972 and then again earlier this year. An agreement was signed between our two Governments on 11 April this year embodying the only matters which had been formally put by the State Government to the Australian Government up till that time or at all. I also should tell you that there is going to be a legal aid office opened in Mt Isa. In the overall context Mt Isa will have the great advantage of being a pivotal point on the National Highways Program. The Australian Government has always had the authority under the Constitution to build roads to promote trade between the States or access to the Territories, so we are going to undertake the whole cost of maintaining and constructing the Flinders and Landsborough Highway. That means you will at last be certain there is a decent road available all the time between Mt Isa and Brisbane and all points south and between Mt Isa and of course, the Northern Territory.

Mr Connor, is very keen to upgrade the railway, which is now fully extended and he may tell you more about his proposals for the phosphate deposits for which the railway would have to be upgraded between Duchess and the Coast.

You not only have copper here and so on but in this region you also have the very best deposits that Australia has ever discovered in phosphates, and they're very large items of import to Australia. These places from which we've been importing phosphates are running out - Nauru, Ocean Island, Christmas Island, in the Indian Ocean - and we have these very great deposits within Australia, within this region.

QUESTION: The building industries in town are worried about the lack of housing commission homes which are to be built in the next year within this city. Are there any commission homes planned early in 1975 to keep these men who are frightened of losing work in employment?

PRIME MINISTER: The State Government builds housing commission houses; the Australian Government finds the money for the houses. Last June I gave every State Premier a blank cheque to build housing commission houses. As many houses as the Queensland Government can let a contract for will be financed by my Government. There's no bottleneck as far as the Australian Government is concerned. Every house which the Housing Commission can build in Queensland will be immediately funded by the Australian Government. That has been the position ever since last June 7. You are mentioning building too. There is, I don't know the details for instance schools in Mt Isa, but a year ago the Australian Parliament passed legislation to provide for additional funds for school buildings for 1974/75. Queensland to date has only sought 18% of the money which the Australian Parliament passed twelve months ago for Government school buildings. So that means there is an immense amount of money available for housing commission homes - as many as the State Government can construct - and for school buildings. The Government can have as much money for those buildings as it has so far spent.

QUESTION: Can I ask Mr Connor a question?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes indeed. I would like you to. This is one of the mineral capitals of Australia and he's the Czar of minerals in Australia.

QUESTION: Three countries have taken measures to boost or maintain the copper price? What will Australia be doing about this?

CONNOR: Well the CIPEC countries - that's Peru, Chile, Zambia and Zaire - have decided to curtail production by 10%. It's debatable as to what the net result of it will be. Copper is of course, is a highly volatile metal in price and its history has traditionally been one of production in politically unstable countries. We in Australia have tried to maintain a stable price and I wouldn't like to hazard a guess as to the ultimate effect. I don't think it will have much. The trend in copper has been downwards. Copper at one stage was right up around \$2.260 a ton - so dear, in fact, that it was pricing itself out of the market and substitutes were coming in. The position today is a much more healthy one, providing we can hold the present price structure.

QUESTION: There's no question of you suggesting that Mt Isa Mines should cut their production?

CONNOR: I think we can place all that they can produce - immense amounts.

QUESTION: Are you expecting a censure motion in the House on Monday?

PRIME MINISTER: I just have to read what you have to say in the papers. I don't know.

QUESTION: Are you going back for the Parliament on Monday?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes I'll be going back.

QUESTION: You made a comment a while ago that the petrol subsidy for country areas would only affect mining companies and such. Do you think this is really true when you consider that the cost of petrol now costs 11¢ more than when the subsidy was in operation, which is now coming out of the working man's pocket?

PRIME MINISTER: The principal beneficiaries were mining companies in this city and in Western Australia. In this context I believe the working man in general would be much more assisted by electricity. As you will appreciate, there are very great numbers of people in this region who don't have cars at all and the petrol subsidy makes no difference to them. There are very few indeed who don't use electricity and provincial cities in Queensland pay more than provincial cities anywhere else in Australia. Last June I wrote to the outgoing Premier suggesting that his Government and my Government might co-operate in a study to ascertain how the cost of electricity in Queensland provincial cities and in the State generally could be brought down closer to the average price of the eastern States. He hasn't yet answered the letter.

QUESTION: Has Mr Hawke contacted you about the airline strike?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes. Yes.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything....

PRIME MINISTER: No I don't publicise conversations I have.

QUESTION: He apparently was anxious....

PRIME MINISTER: Well that may be but I'm not going to. I never have and I'm not going to. A very great number of people speak to me face to face or on the telephone and I do not make a practice of announcing what we discuss.

QUESTION: Have you spoken to Mr Jones?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Well what do you mean - by telephone? No.

QUESTION: Could I ask whether you support the idea of TAA and Ansett together discussing the wage issue? With the....

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that the domestic pilots ought to go to Arbitration. I have no sympathy whatever at their resorting to direct action so promptly as they've become accustomed to do.

QUESTION: Did they not resort to direct action because the Government airline and Ansett would not negotiate with them?

PRIME MINISTER: It's for them to say why they resorted to direct action. The proposition is that they should go to Arbitration.

QUESTION: Yesterday a comment was made by a prominent ALP man that especially in Queensland, the employers were forcing or intimidating the worker into strike action to make it look bad for the ALP. Do you have any comments on that?

PRIME MINISTER: No, quite frankly I haven't seen the papers. Where was this supposed to be said? The other chaps here with us would know that I don't comment on comments like this. You can ask me for my views but I'm long experienced now; I know that there's nothing in commenting on somebody's summary selection of somebody else's comment.

QUESTION: I would like to talk about the National Highway Scheme. The Landsborough Highway is now a national road but the slightest amount of rain closes it. What allocation from the Highway Scheme will the Government make for this stretch of road?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't got at my fingertips the exact amount. There are two national highways in Queensland - the one from the State border near Warwick through Brisbane to Cairns and there will be another one from Cairns up to Mt Isa and the Territory border. We have now accepted the responsibility of maintaining and constructing those roads. Ever since the war successive Australian Governments have given hundreds of millions of dollars to State Governments for roads and the State Government have not succeeded in producing a national highway scheme. You cannot go at every time of the year with certainty between the various State Territory capitals. In those circumstances the Australian Government has decided to accept the responsibility which it has always had under the Constitution.

QUESTION: What plans do you have or does the Government have to improve the statistical information regarding economic changes which Treasury delivers to the Government?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll be in a better position to tell you within a week.

QUESTION: There are plans for this....

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, but it would be premature for me to mention them.

QUESTION: Why do you say within a week, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I might be able to tell you that in a few days. I'll issue a communique in a few days, probably on that.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, will you answer questions today about the transfer of Mr Crean from Treasury portfolio?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

QUESTION: Do you think that the Premier is taking the right line in campaigning on national issues in the State election?

PRIME MINISTER: I welcome the opportunity to expose his lack of co-operation on national issues. We have decided to accept responsibility for a national roads scheme because of the failures for 17½ years now of Country Party/Liberal Government in this State. It's true that in two years we have been unable to overcome the deficiencies of 17½ years of LCP Government, Federal and Queensland. We're doing our best. He doesn't like it but there are other Premiers who don't like it either but they are accepting it where they see it is of benefit to their citizens. Other Premiers realise that there have been shortcomings which have developed and they swallow their pride and accept our assistance in overcoming those shortcomings. But the Queensland Premier alone does not do so. I have pointed to the fact that the Premier has deprived his State of at least \$50 million under schemes which have been accepted by every other State. The legislation has been passed by the Australian Government with the support in most cases of the Liberal and Country Parties in both Houses. Sometimes those parties have divided e.g. the Country Party supported the Schools Program; the Liberals opposed it but it went through both Houses. Any schemes we enact apply to the whole of Australia. They are available on the same conditions in every part of Australia and the other States have accepted these schemes, e.g. the scheme for reducing the price of land for building in regional centres.

is a situation resented by the Queensland Liberal leader, Sir Gordon Chalk, the Treasurer, the Deputy Premier. He would have entered into these schemes, the same as any other Liberal Premier in Australia as well as the Labor leaders in Australia have already done.

QUESTION: This \$50 million that Mr Bjelke-Petersen hasn't spent; how much has this contributed to unemployment? Have you got any figures on the jobs that may have been provided with increased expenditure?

PRIME MINISTER: No I haven't but very obviously there would be a great deal of employment created by the development of growth centres or land development schemes. That has been the case in Monarto in South Australia and Albury-Wodonga and with Bathurst-Orange. But I would say the big contribution to employment is in the building industry, i.e. if they would only in this State use the money which is available for school buildings and welfare housing.
