

PRESS CONFERENCE ON MINISTERIAL CHANGES

30 November 1978

Prime Minister:

The Ministerial changes that I have announced this afternoon are designed to achieve a better and a fairer workload between Ministers, but in particular they are designed to enable work in certain areas to expand and to respond to the changing needs of Government and of government service to the people of Australia.

Tony Street has had probably the hardest and the toughest workload of any Minister over recent times, and there have been very significant changes and improvements in Industrial Relations. In addition to that, over the last two to three years the training programmes have largely been introduced or very significantly expanded.

So overall the responsibilities and the workload in that area have grown very greatly. There have been one or two areas, which you will see from the statement, where greater activity is needed in the industrial relations area. It is a part of the activity that I know Tony Street has wanted to be more involved in, but under the arrangements as they have existed up to the present that has not been possible.

So much of the work of the industrial relations section of the old department was involved in a sense in putting out brush fires - dealing with a dispute after it has arisen. What we want to do now is to build on the progress that has been made in reducing the number of disputes by getting out into industry where it is needed, working with labour and working with management at the national, the industry and at the factory level also, to do more to create the circumstances which will avoid disputes. There is room for much greater activity in that area, and the resources of the new Department of Industrial Relations will be expanded to enable it to undertake that task.

The concerns that we all have, that I know you have and that I certainly have, with unemployment also dictates the need to have a separate Department of Employment and Youth Affairs. For some time there has been an Office of Youth Affairs attached to another Department, but the work of that office will again be expanded and will be more vigorous in pursuing its particular responsibilities.

Ian Viner's task in this Department will be to monitor the programmes to see what changes might be required from time to time, to examine the many suggestions - the new initiatives - that come to us, and to enable the Government to respond to the needs of Australian society and to the needs especially of young people within our community. To make sure that a senior

Minister is devoting his full time to these particular matters, which are of great importance to all of us.

The other changes are not completely consequential upon these, but largely consequential. Senator Chaney will be moving to Aboriginal Affairs and the opportunity is being taken to place the particular parts of Environment, Housing and Community Development with other Departments where, in a sense, they have their natural home. Housing will be with construction, and the environment, for instance, and national parks services, will be established with the Department of Science, where it will be easier for the resources of CSIRO to work even more closely with those who have got direct responsibility for the protection of the environment.

So I think those changes are natural and sensible ones. The number of Ministers stays the same, the number of Departments, as a result of the changes in the area I have just spoken about, the environmental area, will also remain the same.

Question: (Laurie Power)

Mr Fraser, did you think that Mr Street wasn't doing enough in the area of employment?

Prime Minister:

I think Tony Street was doing as much, or more, as could be expected of any one Minister. The workload in industrial relations and the workload in the employment area, with the growth of the training programmes, has expanded enormously, and I believe it was asking more than enough of any one Minister, and for that matter more than enough of any one Permanent Head. There will be two Permanent Heads and there will be two Ministers in relation to the two new Departments.

Question: (Laurie Power)

It wasn't enough, as much as what you wanted, and you have created.....

Prime Minister:

I think you are putting an implication into the question which I think is quite unfair.

Question: (Duncan Fairweather)

Did Mr Street tell you that his workload was too great, Prime Minister, or was that your belief?

Prime Minister:

Tony Street is the sort of person who will undertake any task that is asked of him and will do it to the very best of his ability and put an enormous amount of time and effort into it. In discussing this concept he had indicated to me, in the preventive area, that that was a part of the industrial relations arena, for example, that he would like to be more

active in, that the industrial relations part of the old Department would want to be more active in, but there just hadn't been an opportunity for that. The changes will enable that to occur, and enable the improvements in industrial relations over the last two or three years to be developed further.

There is a very significant change here. The Department of Industrial Relations, in a significant sense, not totally, has been a reactive Department. That's not a criticism, it's the way it has historically been. A dispute occurs and then you do something about it. To get out and promote even more actively than has been the case in the past, the need for preventive arrangements to advocate practices and procedures between management and labour which avoid the possibility of industrial dispute is obviously a highly desirable and, in some areas I would think highly necessary.

It is intended that the resources of the Department of Industrial Relations will be expanded quite specifically to enable greater attention to be given to that part of its role.

Question:

The appearance has been given that Mr Street's role has been diminished in Government and in the Cabinet.

Prime Minister:

I don't think so at all. I think industrial relations is clearly of enormous importance to all of us. There are the consultative processes, the need for conciliation, for reconciliation, and then there is the question of the law, there has been development of the Industrial Relations Bureau, and in all of this area there is a very constant workload and a very constant effort required.

It would be a very unreal Government that didn't respond to the changing needs of differing times, differing circumstances, and it's also plain over the last period that much greater time is involved in the employment area.

If you like to go back to before the Labor time it was then almost a Department of Industrial Relations. It wasn't called that, but people didn't have the concern with employment, there weren't the training programmes, there wasn't the necessity for them, and the Commonwealth Employment Service didn't have the very great and heavy responsibilities that they now have.

That demonstrates how some aspects of the role and the responsibilities have grown over past years compared to what used to happen, for example, before 1972.

Question: (Peterson)

Did you invite Mr Peacock to be part of these moves, and did he decline?

Prime Minister:

I'm not going to make any comment on particular Ministers.

Question: (Peterson)

On one who is not a Minister. Did you invite Senator Withers?

Prime Minister:

I'm not going to make any comment on members of the Senate or the House of Representatives. It's a good try, but I'm sure you wouldn't have expected any other answer.

Question:

Are you lessening the influence of Aboriginal Affairs within the Ministry or is Senator Chaney to be a Cabinet Minister?

Prime Minister:

No, the numbers in the Cabinet and the members of the Cabinet will not be altered. But again, I think, it's a question of people very often who you have in Cabinet, and they sometimes take their portfolio with them into the Cabinet and they are often in Cabinet, in some cases obviously -- the Treasurer has to be in Cabinet and some other portfolios have to be in Cabinet -- but with a number of portfolios it depends upon the Minister and, as in Ian Viner's case, he wasn't in Cabinet, he carried Aboriginal Affairs with him into Cabinet, and I believe and I think the Department might believe and the Aboriginal people might believe that he has been one of the best Ministers if not the best Minister ever in that area.

Let me only say that the fact that Senator Chaney is going to become Minister for Aboriginal Affairs indicates the extent of confidence that I have in him to undertake a very important and very sensitive task.

Question: (Peterson)

Do you see him being able to better take on Joh Bjelke-Petersen?

Prime Minister:

That's a question of the Media looking for confrontation to make a better story.

Question: (Laurie Power)

Mr Fraser, with your increased emphasis on employment generations, splitting a portfolio, what are you going to do to match NSW?

Prime Minister:

I don't know if a "generation", in one sense concern for employment and for those who want jobs and find it difficult to get work

is the way I would like to have it put and understood. I was interested to see Mr Wran's initiatives last night, and looking at his words closely it seemed to me that he was taking advantage of the Special Youth Employment Training Scheme and I think, as you know, this does apply to people who do find work. That scheme applies to people who have been out of work for four months and then go into work in private employment or in Government departments. In reading the statement and listening to Mr Wran it seemed to me that he was taking advantage of the Special Youth Employment Training Scheme to make more places available within the public service of NSW for young people to fit the Special Youth Employment Training Programme. I'm very glad that he is finding it possible to give greater weight to that particular Commonwealth initiative. I think all the States do provide places in their own public services. Mr Wran has chosen a good time to expand the number of places available in the NSW public service under the Special Youth Employment Training Scheme previously initiated by Tony Street.

Question: (Peterson)

Are you an admirer of Mr Wran?

Prime Minister:

Mr Wran is a very capable politician.

Question:

Will Mr Street and Mr Viner maintain their respective ranking in Cabinet?

Prime Minister:

There will be no changes in Ministerial ranking orders.

Question:

Prime Minister, has your decision to boost the role of Employment been prompted by the gloomy predictions of unemployment for next year and the possible political implications of those on the next Federal election?

Prime Minister:

No, not prompted by that at all, but in examining the workload and the structure of Government and the structure of Departments I had come to the view that there was a need to achieve a more even workload and also to put in this area two Ministers into the field who can both very capably and forcefully argue the Government's policies and approach in relation to it and at the same time give full-time Ministerial attention, one in the industrial relations arena and the other in employment and in

relation to the Office of Youth Affairs, whose role will also be significantly expanded. Again, I think this is a response to the changing needs of the community and the changing perceptions of the importance of different aspects of Government.

Question: (Duncan Fairweather)

The split between industrial relations and employment, will that be a straight split down the middle of the Department or do you envisage that either side will be bigger than the whole that it is at the moment.

Prime Minister:

The Industrial Relations Department is going to have expanded responsibilities, I've already mentioned that.

Question: (Tony Walker)

Expanded staff?

Prime Minister:

It will need some additional human resources to undertake the additional tasks that are required. Yes it will.

Question: (Malcolm Colless)

Maybe they could take some people from the IRB.

Prime Minister:

Well the rest of that Act has just been proclaimed, or a major part of it. The regulations in relation to union accounts haven't yet been proclaimed, but they are under examination in the National Labour Consultative Committee, and I hope it won't be too long before they also are proclaimed. I think it has been necessary for the work of the Industrial Relations Bureau to begin slowly. It was necessary to build up a staff of appropriate quality and calibre to meet again the very sensitive requirements of the Bureau. I think it is worth noting that the Industrial Relations Bureau and its work is being followed very very closely in a number of countries. It is an Australian initiative and the importance of it, and its possibilities I think, can in part be judged from the fact that the Director of the Industrial Relations Bureau, Des Linehan, was pleased to take that job, and having a mind to his own industrial background, I think, says something for the initiative. But it has been doing its work, doesn't seek to be obtrusive. I believe it will be a very effective Bureau and something that is worth watching.