

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH NEWSPAPER JOURNALISTS
FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF MINISTERIAL CHANGES

Prime Minister

Over the last two or three years the work load of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations has expanded very greatly. I think we can see the results in that in a greatly improved industrial climate which comes partly from the relationship which has developed between Tony Street and the trade union movement. Partly also I believe from the changes to industrial law; the introduction of the Industrial Relations Bureau which has been workly but in a number of areas effectively. At the same time, through the expansion of various training programmes, the work load on that side of the Department has also expanded enormously compared to earlier times. If you wanted to go back before 1972 and before employment became a significant problem, the Department then was really an Industrial Relations Department. In recent times the totality of effort required by the Permanent Head and Minister has grown very greatly. In addition to that, over a time, the needs of the community, the needs of Government, in its own facilities for the community vary in different concerns. Vary and change over time. That's the reason for establishing two departments where there will be two permanent heads, obviously, and two Ministers involved: Tony Street with Industrial Relations, building on the foundations that have been set and Ian Viner in Employment and Youth Affairs. The resources of the Industrial Relations Department will be expanded because there are some areas where on a national industry and factory basis Tony Street would have wanted to be able to spend more time but over the past he has not been able to. A large part of the work of the Department has been reactive. You react to a dispute situation when it arises, or to a potential dispute when you come to hear of it. From the outset it has been our industrial relations policy the requirement to develop, as much as possible, consultative processes and relationships between management and labour that as far as possible will help to prevent disputes arising. The Minister and the Department will, under the new arrangements, be able to devote much greater attention and time to that aspect of industrial relations. I think this is in a sense a new development in approach to the industrial arena and one which no previous government or minister has embarked upon. That is an area where Tony Street has wanted to be more active than he has been and wanted the Department to be more active than it has been, but under the pressures of the total responsibility has not been possible.

Additionally, of course, in the new Department of Employment and Youth Affairs, they are a very real concern to the community and very concerns on the part of the Government and certainly on the part of myself to make sure that the training programmes and services that are available run as well as possible. Modified and changed as needs permit and as circumstances show it to be desirable. That also

Prime Minister: (continued)

is an area which in present circumstances requires the attention of a senior Minister on a full-time basis.

The other changes, in a sense, flow from these two. They are set out in the statement. Fred Chaney to Aboriginal Affairs. The changes that have been made in Environment, Housing and Community Development I think are natural and sensible. Housing goes to Construction; Environment goes to Science where those responsible for the environment will be able to work even more closer with the CSIRO and the resources in that area which will help to strengthen the overall arm of the Government in environmental matters.

Question

When (inaudible).

Prime Minister

Probably on the 5th. The details of the administrative arrangements order have to be worked out.

Question

(Inaudible)

Question

(inaudible)

Prime Minister

A number of portfolios depend for their position on the Minister that has them. Some portfolios obviously have to be in Cabinet. The Treasury is the obvious example. But other portfolios depend very much on the Minister. Aboriginal Affairs wasn't in Cabinet, it came into the Cabinet because Ian Viner came into Cabinet. I think he has been remarkable successful in that portfolio but I have every confidence that Fred Chaney will be a very good Minister for Aboriginal Affairs with the concerns and sensitivities that are certainly very necessary in that area. The list, there is much more of an indication to the extent that this does mean something, it's an indication of people rather than a rank in the importance of an actual portfolio.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

I think that when -- Fred Chaney has shown a great interest in that area already as you know and I think that interest is known. I'm quite sure that he'll win the confidence of the Aboriginal people as Ian Viner did.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

There are official processes for the appointment of Permanent Heads to Departments and those processes will be -- that's under the Act as it is for the appointment of Permanent Heads.

Question (Laurie Oakes)

...need not guarantee (inaudible)

Prime Minister

That's correct, yes. There's a committee of senior public servants who will make recommendations to the Government.

Question

How long will that take?

Prime Minister

I would have thought those processes -- well they will be set in train forthwith of course, through the course of this coming week.

Question

What's the status at the moment... (inaudible)

Prime Minister

Acting arrangements have to be made and I will be seeking advice also in relation to that.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

For the additional functions in industrial relations, I would envisage additional resources being needed.

Question

To what extent?

Prime Minister

Again, we need advice on that. I do envisage the human resources of the Department being expanded to enable it to fill what Tony Street regards, and I regard, as a very important role.

Question

It doesn't seem all that important now. In 1974 it was very important with 6.3 million days lost, etc. (inaudible)...it's only a quarter of that now and yet you have to have a new Department to deal with the problem which is virtually no longer a problem.

Prime Minister

I think industrial relations is a continuing matter for concern because any dispute that occurs when it might not have occurred because of greater attention or greater effort then it is a dispute that is unnecessary and damaging and wasteful.

Question

...one of the reasons for lack of investment and overseas ...confidence. But given this record ... surely we can't use that anymore as a reason for lack of economic recovery.

Prime Minister

I think you will find that quite a number of the disputes that do occur in the export trade or on the waterfront and therefore they do come to the notice of people overseas to quite a considerable extent. The disputes that have involved Utah, the container disputes, and it clearly doesn't enhance a country's reputation when trade is held up as a result of industrial dispute.

Question (Michelle Grattan)

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

No. Environment, Housing and Community Development. It's functions go to, in a sense, as I believe, their natural home. Environment into Science, Housing to Construction, Sport will go to...

Question

To what extent will Mr. Viner... (inaudible).

Prime Minister

Well it depends what you mean by that. If you regard NEAT as specially an employment training programme. These are obviously programmes designed to try and get people into work, in productive and useful work. The examination, monitoring, expansion of these programmes has been undertaken over the last couple of years in particular. I've got no doubt there will be modifications. I've said publicly, and Tony Street has, that there is a review of these particular programmes underway at the moment. A number of suggestions have been made to us. There are one or two interesting experiments being undertaken in different areas.

Prime Minister (continued)

Because of our concern, quite obviously these matters are reviewed continually and I believe the Government will be better served and I think people who want assistance, help, in this area, will also be better served by having a Minister who can devote 100 percent of his time to these particular problems. I've got no doubt that there will be recommendations put to us from time to time but if there is an implication in your question that that means a change of the broad thrust of economic policy, the answer to that part of it would be no.

Question

Is there likely to be a review of the Government's overall policy on employment, following on from this creation of a new department?

Prime Minister

Not a review of the broad thrust of strategy.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

That's the intention, but I will taking advice on that point also. If you are writing that you can say it is likely that.

Question

...the whole lot up.

Prime Minister

Not the whole lot up, no, because both Departments would clearly need, as many Departments do, bases out in other parts of Australia.

Question

It will be headquartered in...

Prime Minister

If you are talking about the headquarters put it in terms "it's likely that..."

Question

What happens to the special ... established ..months ago with Industrial Relations.

Prime Minister

That committee would be continuing.

Question:

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister:

It had work put in front of it and I'm not sure how often it has met actually because I don't know when all Cabinet Committees meet. It had matters put in front of it and a good deal of work was commissioned as a result of that. I've got no doubt that the Committee will meet as it feels necessary.

Question

Could I just ask one question about the workings of that Committee. There has been some confusion about it. Will that Committee -- will particular disputes -- be referred to that Committee?

Prime Minister

No, it was never intended to (inaudible). If you've got a major dispute, which the Minister feels needs referring to other Ministers or to Cabinet, it could go to that Committee or it could go to Cabinet. The major disputes go the Cabinet anyway, or have done in the past. So there is nothing new in that. I think some of the writing at the time was that all disputes will...but that just hasn't happened. It's not intended to happen.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

Tony Street. That stays in his area.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

The Ministers didn't know this announcement was being made today but Tony Street will be handling that tomorrow. There will times in the future. NLCC will stay in his area of responsibility. There will times, clearly, when Ian Viner will need to be present.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

I don't know what his movements are tomorrow. If he can be, it would be helpful, but it's not mandatory and Tony Street's quite capable of handling it.

Question

Did you ask Mr. Peacock if he wanted to change his portfolio...(inaudible).

Prime Minister

I'm not going to start commenting on conversations I might or might not have had with any other Ministers. I don't blame you for trying it on, but I don't think you would have expected any other answer.

Question

You say that the split of the EHCD will fit logically, naturally, in other departments. How logical and how natural is Mr. Newman with these likes atomic energy commission...(inaudible) and general energy development. It's a sort of twin department to Trade and Resources ...(inaudible). How does urban planning and local government fit naturally and logically into that?

Prime Minister

I think you've forgotten that he's also got decentralisation responsibilities and the decentralisation...

Question

All I'm suggesting is ...

Prime Minister

Not at all. Local government matters very clearly go with decentralisation.

Question

How do they go with the Atomic Energy Commission or...

Prime Minister

I think you're suggesting that a Department sometimes only has one function. I hope you are not suggesting there just be one department for the Atomic Energy Authority.

Question

But I can't see the logical ...

Prime Minister

It logically and naturally fits with some aspects of the Department of National Development.

Question

Did you say a moment ago that none of the Ministers knew that these changes were taking place?

Prime Minister

Of course the Ministers knew these changes were taking place. Quite a significant number did but the question of timing was one that they might not have been aware of.

Question

Can I ask you if the reference to the new arrangements was "... (inaudible) industrial disputes". (Inaudible).

Prime Minister

No. I think it is a question of -- you can only do these things with co-operation. Our industrial relations policy has had, from the outset, in it the proposal that there should be consultative procedures established in particular work places which would enable management and labour to consult on a continuing basis and not just in a crisis atmosphere when there is a real problem and a real difficulty. Now such processes work in some industries and some work places very well and very effectively. In others they work very well or very effectively. In others just not enough attention is given to it. In some, management might not be interested. In others unions aren't interested. There is a role to promote the concept of consultation in the industrial environment much more vigorously and I think it will take a good deal of time and effort. There are three levels at which this can occur because in a sense disputes come at different levels. It can be local. It can be industry-based and sometimes national. I know Tony Street wants to work in this -- if you like -- preventative arena on the national level, the industry level and on an individual factory basis. I think it, in a sense, heralds an important additional element in our attitude to industrial relations and in the way we seek to go about promoting a better industrial climate.

Question

Did he say he was more interested in this prevention...rather than the employment side ...

Prime Minister

Again, I don't want to talk about the particular information to Ministers. Tony Street I believe has been remarkably successful in the industrial relations environment and in the other area also, but the plain facts are that the

Prime Minister (continued)

responsibilities in both areas have grown very greatly and the time involved has grown very greatly. I certainly believe he's got a continuing contribution to make in the industrial relations environment which may be uniquely his. He's got a very great capacity to get on with members of the trade union movement that I think surprised some people when he was originally appointed to the job.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

He's been staying out at the Lodge this week and we discussed these things at length and it is my very strong impression that he is where he wants to be.

Question

(Inaudible)...extent of your ministerial changes?

Prime Minister

I have nothing else in mind at all.

Question

You said last week that no changes were in contemplation...

Prime Minister

Yes I did. -- I've been thinking of how, for some time, how to give more attention to the very real needs in our community in certain areas and to the changing basis of those needs. You can be thinking about it and not quite know how to respond to it.

Question

But you said not in contemplation.

Prime Minister

I didn't have ministerial changes in contemplation.

Question

You didn't?

Prime Minister

No.

Question

(Inaudible)

Prime Minister

No, I didn't.

Question

You just wanted to think of ways to give more attention to ... (inaudible).

Question

What is the employment prospect that faces the news of ... (inaudible).

Prime Minister

You've got Tony Street's statement and other statements in relation to that. The prospects are all there. There are a number of factors that have an impact on what is going to occur in the employment arena. Some of these are under our own control in relation to inflation and changes in wage levels where the attitude I have is virtually identical with that of Dennis Healey or the British Prime Minister. Others can also be affected by what happens overseas. Because inflation has tended to increase rather than to continue to diminish in North America and a number of countries in Europe I don't think you can expect to find an expansion in world trade, in world markets, which a year ago many of us were hoping for. That means that we will have to be more reliant on our own efforts to overcome our problems and even more vigorous in making Australian industries more competitive: to get a bigger share of our domestic market and at the same time to enable more people to get into the export arena. There's beginning to be some encouraging news in relation to the exports of manufacturers.

Question

...talks with Ministers over the last couple of days. (Inaudible)...

Prime Minister

Some Ministers, because of the nature of their job, you see very often and you are talking with them but other Ministers, because their task might be out of the mainstream of public concern, you don't talk to in a relaxed way about their concerns and problems and how they feel matters are going in their portfolio and I wanted to do just that.