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PRIME MINISTER

- PRESS CONFERENCE - ADELAIDE, 18 APRIL 1984 E. & O.E. -Proof
PM: Afternoon everybody. Right, whose first. Only
- PRESS: Does Australia have any intention of recognising Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor?
- PM: Thats not a question that we are rushing/decisions into about. What I've made clear is that the important thing in relations between our countries is that we are able to deal with specific issues that are of importance, like trade, involvement with them through ASEAN and in whatever issues that we need to talk about. Now theres been no problem about our capacity to do that and we will continue to do that. The question of recognition in the sense is not a matter that is on the immediate agenda.
- PRESS: Does it come into the negotiations though over a seabed boundary?
- PM: Well it hasn't so far.
- PRESS: Without pre-empting the July conference Mr. Hawke
- PM: You know I would never attempt to do that.
- PRESS: What assurances can you give Mr. Bannon about the future of Roxby Downs?
- PM: Well the Government has made a clear decision on that. I have no reason to believe that the Government's decision will not be sustained.
- PRESS: Mr. Hawke, is the Government concerned about the fact that there was a 19 hour delay between the times the Canberra Times received a letter from the bomber hoax and the Federal Police were informed and they carried out a check on Parliament House yesterday.
- PM: Well its not a matter which has excited my mind. I have confidence in the general abilities and dedication of our relevant police and security forces. I would say this generally that there must be some matter of concern about the security of Parliament House and as I said on our programme this morning that we have got to balance the desire fundamental to the people of Australia to be able to have access to their Parliament House with concern about security and I think there will be a review of the situation and I hope it can work out in a way which is not going to limit the opportunities for Australians to visit the Parliament House and yet to say watch the security considerations.

PRESS: Are you concerned that your popularity has only risen to 75% this time?

PM: Oh well, in life in all the areas of activity there is always room for improvement.

PRESS: At what stage are the submarine negotiations at the moment.

PM: Well it is not really negotiations at this stage, clearly the Federal Government is looking at the question of building submarines in Australia and a number of States have indicated their interest. None has put their case more vigorously than S.A. through my friend and colleague John Bannon. Obviously it's a submission which will carry considerable weight. It will have to be considered with the others. I understand that what S.A. is saying and saying....., is that you've had a run down in your motor vehicle production industry and that maybe some sort of continuing concern as the industry is restructured in Australia. It is certainly something that any responsible Government would have in its mind. It's been said that you have a skilled and trained workforce which could very easily and appropriately adapt to a submarine construction. Now that's a telling argument and it is one that will be taken into account by us in coming to a decision.

PRESS: One of the main arguments or main concerns why people have prepared the submission is that while we've got the best case N.S.W. has got more voters. Is it likely that it is going to be a political decision.

PM: This Government doesn't operate that way.

PRESS: Mr. Hawke in light of the shooting incident involving the Libyan Embassy in London are any checks being made on bona fides of diplomats in Canberra representing Libya.

PM: Not that I'm aware of but if the responsible authorities were making some checks I wouldn't necessarily know immediately, I mean not all the agencies of Government have to get a prior clearance from me before they can move.

PRESS: I understand that you haven't actually spelt out or detailed what you believe is the pattern of bias in the ABC publicly.

PM: No, and I'm not going to do it here. I have indicated that if the ABC would like to talk to me about it then I'll talk to them and I think I'm going to have some discussions in the near future with the Manager of the ABC at management's request, the matter may arise then. Don't let's get this thing out of perspective. I know the media's finding it difficult to find anything to criticise the Government on and I'm very pleased about that, but I've simply said that independence doesn't mean immunity from criticism, observations and I don't intend to say anything more publicly about that.

PRESS: Mr. Myers says that he doesn't think that Mr. Whitehead will want to talk about that with you but you still insist that you want to talk to Mr. Whitehead.

PM: No, you have a singular incapacity to listen or understand what I say. If Mr. Whitehead wishes to talk to me about it I will talk to him about it. I understand that he is a competent, capable and independent person and I guess he will be making his own mind up and I wouldn't think that Mr. Myer will be determining Mr. Whitehead's mind anymore than I will be determining Mr. Whitehead's mind.

PRESS: Would it be fair though to spell out your concerns in public

PM: I haven't been inundated with questions or letters or representations about it.

PRESS: Getting back to the submarines Prime Minister is the S.A. submission likely to be viewed more favourably in view of the fact that we lost the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway?

PM: No it has no relationship to the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway, you don't make decision on that sort of basis because you perhaps upset someone with one decision therefore you make a decision which is going to unupset them and if you start running Government's like that you'll quickly go out of business.

PRESS: So you don't do deals like that in Government?

PM: I don't and on the evidence I don't.

PRESS: In the light of that Alice Springs to Darwin Railway decision, will there be a speeding up of the Stuart Highway?

PM: Yes, we made it clear in our discussions earlier with Mr. Bannon and Mr. Everingham and may I say that in all these discussions that Mr. Bannon has taken a significantly more responsible and reasonable line than Mr. Everingham, I made it clear that we thought the interests of S.A. and the Territory would be better served by the upgrading of the Highway and now that the question of the railways being disposed of, well then of course we will be moving more urgently in that area.

PRESS: Mr. Bannon, are you satisfied with that sort of guarantee from the Prime Minister?

MR. BANNON: Well, I've accepted the reality of the Government's Federal Government's decision. We don't agree with it, but it's their right to make that decision and they've made it. Now I believe we concentrate on the upgrading of the road, the acceleration of that. The Prime Minister has indicated he is happy to talk about that and we can get something done and so I think that is the productive way to approach this

and it will be in South Australia's interest to do so.

PRESS: Mr. Hawke can you name any good aspects you see of Mr. Peacock's industrial policy.

PM: I have enormous reserves with charity as is well known but it even stretches my reserves to be able to find any sensible qualities in it. It is essentially promising, of course this is hypothetical because he is not going to get the opportunity, but what he would be promising would be a return to the chaos of 1981, 82 which saw a wages explosion which brought about a recession in this country. It out of the mouth of the spokesman Mr. Mc Phee who said - he's an honest sort of chap - and he said in response to a question, yes, of course, if this were to come in we would have an increase in industrial strife. Now that is an absurdity, what you have to understand about wages policy and I think I'm probably able to speak with more authority in this area than just about anyone in Australia, that if you are in a recessed economic condition in a sense you don't need a wages policy because the awfulness of a recession does the job, it holds wages down. The time when you need an effective wages policy is in the period of recovery and growth which is what this Government has bought this country to. Now we have got a situation with the trade union movement - and the employers have accepted the concept of responsibility of not making excessive claims and that is going to mean that now in the twelve months following the recent decision this country is looking at wage increases of I would think of no more than 2% and that in a period of recovery when profits will be burgeoning, now that is what this economy needs. Whats happened now is that unit costs in this country are steadily reducing - by the end of this year it is my judgement that real unit labour costs will be down to the same level as they were in the base period 1966-67 to 72 73 which will be a better performance than virtually any other of our competitor countries. Now thats what we're doing, thats what the business community needs, to become more efficient, more competitive, rather than this promise of return to the chaos and explosiveness of 81/82. I want to assure you that there is no truth in the rumour that we've got a mole in the liberal - national party opposition writing their policies for them.

PRESS: What about your promises of good times ahead though, is that fragile?

PM: It's not fragile - the promise has already been delivered and it will continue to be delivered - Just remind you of basic statistics in the 12 months from April to March 210,000 new jobs created - in the previous 12 months nearly 12,000 jobs disappeared. Inflation down significantly, interest rates down, growth up to the position where Australia now has the highest rate of economic growth in 1984 of any of the OECD countries. If you are not satisfied with that you are very hard to satisfied.

PRESS: Why are you in a hurry to have an early election then.

PM: Do you think that is rather a clever question to you. I'm very genuinely relaxed these days, and I refuse to be upset by such a silly question and I will generously respond to it. I would also - I will make the assumption that you have been out of the country and haven't had the opportunity of reading the many explanations that have been given, not that you don't understand what's been said. I'll put to you so that you will have the opportunity of understanding it - now start quietly and slowly - that there must be under the constitution an election for half the Senate before the middle of next year because the new Senators have to take their place by July of next year. So there must be an election and it is much better for Australia that we get back into the situation of having our elections in the kilter rather than a continuation of disruptions caused by the previous conservative government, so we consider that there be an election for the House of Representatives at the same time as the necessary election for the half Senate. That's what's happened 22 times before in the history of this country. The point I'm trying to make is that at the same time as we do that we will have a referendum put to the people of Australia for the position to be changed so that we will have the synchronisation of elections with the Senate and the House of Representatives so that never again will we have the situation where conservative governments can play around with this issue of elections. Now they are all the reasons, they are reasons which have clearly have recommended themselves to the majority of the Australian people. That's what we'll do.