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PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - Proof Only

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QUESTION: Mr Hawke, Graham Lever, North Queensland Television. Sir, a couple of national questions.

P.M.: Yes

QUESTION: First and foremost harking back to the Chinese steel talks, just how are they in fact progressing?

P.M.: Yes, they are going even better than we expected when I was there in February. I would like to say that some indication of the accuracy of the judgement being made by the Australian people about the pathetic nature of the Opposition in this country and its leader - it is to be taken from their performance on this issue. One would have thought that any politician in this country concerned with the future of Australia would welcome positive achievements by Government which are necessarily going to mean an improvement in the economic status of Australia. What we arrived at in China, between Premier Zhao and myself were that there should be the investigation of developments in five areas - that is the supply of further raw materials to China, mutual interchange of technology, possible investment by China in Australian iron-ore mining, Australian investment in the Chinese steel industry and the supply of Australian pig-iron or processed raw steel to China. Now in respect of those five things there has been a remarkable degree of progress. Within a very short time of my return to Australia officials went from Australia to China, and it worked very closely there already - the joint working party in China. The Minister, the Chinese Minister for Metallurgy, Mr Lee will be coming here within a matter of two or three weeks now, for a couple of weeks work here in Australia. Now, it is quite clear that the developments that I have talked about will be shaped up and according to the sort of timetable I talked about. This nonsense that Mr Peacock has alluded to, of trying to say that I talked about some doubling of Australian steel production - another 6 million tonnes. To say that this was some short-term thing is a deliberate grotesque misrepresentation and distortion of what was clearly said by myself. And if you look at the record I talked about the possible doubling by the end of this century, and that's in the written record.

Now, this Government has done more by this initiative than was done in seven years by the conservative Government to get hold of the possibility of a distinct improvement in the economic performance of our steel industry. And it sticks in my gullet that these people, our predecessors had run down the Australian steel industry to the point - when we took office that we were

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looking at the disappearance of the Australian steel industry - that was the reality. Now, I promised that I would save it, and we did. We now have not a disappearing steel industry, but a viable, efficient cost-competitive, very profitable industry. Now, we've brought that about by bringing the industry, the unions and the Government together, and as part of this commitment that we have to the development of the Australian steel industry - we have taken this initiative with China, which is recognised by everyone in the industry here as proceeding now beyond the expectations that we could have had in February. Now, I find it difficult to think that Mr Peacock and the Opposition could be going down the political gurgler any faster than they were two or three weeks ago. But, if he goes on like this there disappearance is going to be even more rapid than even their few remaining supporters could have conceived.

QUESTION: Sir, are you disappointed in some of the comments that have been attributed to BHP senior management about the issue?

P.M.: Well, let me read what Mr Loton has said. I am told that his statement which has excited the poor Mr Peacock so much, was not in a prepared statement that he made, but in an answer to a question - he made some off-the-cuff observations, which this as I say - poor Opposition has sought to grab hold of and distort. Now, what Mr Loton has said in a prepared statement is this - the understandings reached by the Prime Minister have been very helpful in that they have meant a significantly increased interest by the Chinese in co-operating with the Australian industry. Now that's clear, he goes on to point out - that obviously as we've said right from the beginning - finally there will have to be commercial decisions made. We facilitated those commercial discussions. CRA has gone to China, BHP has gone there. And as a result of what we've done, as Mr Loton indicates, it's been very helpful in improving the context within which they are operating. Now, the commercial enterprises will have to-in co-operation with the Governments make those decisions which are going to lead to an improvement in the industry. Those will happen - and that's what Mr Loton has said about the contribution of the Australian Government.

QUESTION: So, you are saying that Opposition are really distorting the issue.

P.M.: Well, not only am I saying it, but everyone who knows anything else about is. I am looking forward to Parliament so that we can deal with these things in the way that they ought to be dealt with.

QUESTION: Mr Hawke, Wayne Wallace 4CN News, just harking back to Premier Joh's comments about foiling any proposed early federal election .

P.M.: When is he going to stop attacking the Liberals. I mean really what he is doing to them is terrible.

QUESTION: Do you think his comments are a mere savor-rattling or is there any basis of truth behind them?

P.M.: Oh I would say savor-rattling, but again as I point out the savor, I think it is pointed at the throat of the Liberals - his dear friends!

QUESTION: So, you think out of any confrontation with the Liberals.

P.M.: Well, they have been lean so far. Do they still exist in Queensland, the Liberals. I mean if they do, I mean I think what he is doing is trying to boot them out entirely - very naughty of him.

QUESTION: Sir, harking back to the April the first comments in relationship to Waltzing Matilda. What is the state of play with Waltzing Matilda now?

P.M.: Well, when I had this brought to my attention a short while ago, I instructed the Attorney-General's Department to examine the issue very closely. They were doing that at the time when I left for the Easter break. I will have a report when I get back, and if it does seem that the unthinkable - is the case - that the Americans do have some copyright on this most sacred of our possessions, then I will be making an approach to the United States authorities to see that this great wrong is remedied.

QUESTION: Well, quoting you on 60 Minutes, will you in fact be picking up the phone and talking to Ron?

P.M.: I will certainly ^{be} talking to Ron if it is the case that we don't have the copyright, as I say of this, one of the most sacred of our possessions. And I would think I would receive a very sympathetic hearing from Ron.

QUESTION: Sir, again a fairly local issue, the Democrats are making great play over the fact that Senator Margaret Reynolds may find herself facing a more difficult task on the Senate Committee. They claim that your Government could face a political backlash in the North if that was to be the case.

P.M.: When I get to the stage when I need the Democrats of Australia to look after the fortune of my Party, the Australian Labor Party then I'll let them know. I would think that they would be well served, like the Liberals in Queensland in looking after their own meagre chances. And I would have thought that given their demonstrated limitations of capacity by their performance in the Senate where the Democrats and the Liberals, together with the National Party have shown themselves as the friends of the tax avoiders of this country, and I know that they are going to have to face up to the judgement of the Australian people - and it is going to be a very harsh judgement. And you know I am a charitable person, I would just kindly say to them in a kindly fashion, look don't dissipate your very limited and not too adequate resources by trying to tell us how to look after our affairs. We will go into the half Senate election - whenever it is held - and I haven't been told yet when it's going to be, but when we go into the half Senate election, and whatever form of election it is - we'll be in the very best of shape, and I believe that that shape will include the representation of Senator Margaret Reynolds in a prominent and winnable position on the Senate ticket.

P.M.: But we will sought that out, and as I say they've got loads of problems themselves. They really should concentrate on their own problems.

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