



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS CONFERENCE - 31 MAY 1985 - PARLIAMENT HOUSE

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

P.M.: The Government has been pleased to receive report within due time from Professor Slatyer. You'll recall that this is part of the decision the Government made in regard to uranium and I believe that it will provide, and as I said in the Parliament, for a useful basis not only for discussion within the Labor Party as they come up to the Conference when they have to make decisions on these matters, but I think the whole of the Australian community in its considerations of this important issue by the report, which in my judgement will become a standard for analysis of these matters. I think it's excellent in terms of its technical competence and the way it addresses itself to the major issues of concern.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke would you expect the Cabinet to be looking at the question of new contracts before the Conference?

P.M.: It could only, I think, be doing that in the light of any reports that we may receive from relevant Ministers and I think there particularly Mr Hayden who wish to make some report on any discussions he's had with the French on this matter. But no, I would see no decisions being made by the Cabinet or the Government prior to the Conference in that respect.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what do you foresee in terms of the report saying that Australia should perhaps enrich uranium and also go into joint ventures with countries in the Asian-Pacific region.

P.M.: Certainly that extension hasn't been considered by the Government. It's formed no part of our considerations. I just see it there as the work of the Committee putting out as a logical extension of its consideration of the issues but it's not a matter to which the Government has directed it's attention nor would it be appropriate to expect any decision on that.

JOURNALIST: So it wouldn't be rejected out of hand?

P.M.: I was putting it the other way. It hasn't to this point been any part of our thinking or our proposals and I can't see that it would be.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke another committee ... academics, Dr Souter and Professor Kerr have put out a report today which takes exactly the opposite stance. Why should more credence be given

JOURNALIST: cont. to the report of the Government committee than the Souter and Kerr report?

P.M.: I would hope that people who are interested in these issues would read both. I haven't had a copy of the Souter report sent to me. I hope that one is sent to me. I will certainly read it. I can only say that I would be more than a little surprised if the Souter report turned out to be a superior one to the report that I tabled in the Parliament today. But I urge everyone who's interested in the issues to read both.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister how does this politically help you, or if it does at all, at the July National Conference in terms of getting this argument through ... policy on uranium.

P.M.: Well I think the report sustains the analysis and argument that I and others have put and it does it with an authority in some respects that I am not able to bring to bear to it, or some of my other colleagues. And I would feel sure that those of our colleagues who will be delegates to the Conference, who to this point may not have come to some final conclusion, will read this report with an open mind and will be persuaded with the virtue of the conclusions that are contained in the report.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke the report goes much farther than the Government's existing policy. Does this lead you to believe that perhaps the changes at the Conference should go further than simply backing the Government's decisions over the last few months.

P.M.: Well, I think you'll appreciate that the draft report of Senator Walsh goes further than the actual decisions of the Government. Now I would not expect that there'll be proposals before the Conference going substantially further than the Roxby issue.

JOURNALIST: Would you support the Walsh position?

P.M.: I've asked my colleagues to contain their debate within the Party and I think I'll do the same thing.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke you said that there was no immediate short-term consideration enrichment. Do you see the enrichment industry ...

P.M.: Well, could I just interrupt you Michelle. I'm not really wanting to put adjectival qualifications on it. I mean there is no consideration of it.

JOURNALIST: Do you see the possibility of an enrichment industry in Australia in the long-term?

P.M.: No, I haven't directed my attention to it. We've given no consideration to it and it not being an issue I therefore firmly believe that the state of the issues that will be before the Conference are not assisted by hypothesising about something which is not in the Government's mind.

JOURNALIST: If you accept the proposition in the Report that if the Government is to maximise input into non-proliferation it would be best for Australia to be involved not only in mining but in the acceptance of the enrichment ... debate.

PM: I can see from the point of view of the Committee, the logic of the position that they put that the Government has to address itself to the issues which are of relevance in the existing political and economic scene and in terms of the answer that I gave to Michelle, there is no point in muddying that relevant debate by talking about something which, as far as the Government is concerned, is not on the agenda.

JOURNALIST: Well since the Report has raised this subject, do you think there will be a requirement or a need for the Government to consider it at some stage?

PM: I can't see it.

JOURNALIST: That would go too with the recommendation to get countries like Japan and Australia together in terms of the nuclear fuel cycle to create stability in the region.

PM: I think there are areas for co-operation between Australia and Japan in some respects. For instance when I was in Japan you will recall that Mr. Nakasone raised with me the question of their disposal of nuclear waste products and I made it clear that Australia had a very strong view that it was against Asian dumping at this stage and arguing that they should dispose of it on land - on their land. So there is an opportunity for co-operation between us in us putting positions as to what we think is the appropriate thing to be done. I think that with those countries with whom we have excellent relations we ought to be able to co-operate in the relevant international fora like the International Atomic Energy Agency to co-operate in trying to increase safe-guards. That is the sort of co-operation that I see as possible.

JOURNALIST: But not joint ventures or anything like that?

PM: Not down the sort of track that has been raised in the previous question.

JOURNALIST: Mr. Hawke, if you were holding discussions with other countries about the storage of high level nuclear waste, would you see it as a possibility that Australia might store nuclear waste in this country ...

PM: I can't see that as a possibility.

JOURNALIST: Sir, would you prefer that we use the term long term in your statement to Parliament today - forecasts as well - does this imply that you see a need for Australia to play a role in the nuclear fuel cycle which goes beyond the resources of the existing mines at Roxby Downs.

PM: You know the Walsh Draft goes further and I have already addressed myself to that question.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, can I ask you a question on another subject.

PM: You can have a go, we'll see.

JOURNALIST: Has the Cabinet reached a decision on an assets test and if so, do you believe the decision will reduce some of the fear or confusion, if you like, amongst pensioners.

PM: Yes and yes.

JOURNALIST: Can you confirm to us that you gave a dressing down to your Ministry today about the leaks?

PM: I cannot confirm.

JOURNALIST: About the decision?

PM: I like that one actually.

JOURNALIST: Do you plan to tell us the decision now?

PM: Which one?

JOURNALIST: The Cabinet decision. Or are you going to do that tomorrow?

PM: Oh I think I will leave it till tomorrow, Ken, if you don't mind. I'm quite prepared to have another press conference with you tomorrow.

JOURNALIST: Will you announce it tomorrow?

PM: Yes, I'll be making a statement in the Parliament tomorrow.

JOURNALIST: In the events of this week, particularly yesterday, do you think that immigration will now run as an issue in the election?

PM: I trust it will not. I don't want to do anything here or subsequently to revive it as an issue or partisanship. I think you can appreciate that it would be fairly easy for me to do that, but I'm not going to. I think you are all aware of the attitude that I adopted in the Parliament. I'm not going to divert from that. I simply want to say that I think there is the basis now for a resumption by the Opposition of a bipartisan position and I think that position has been reached and I trust it will be and I'm not going to say anything which is going to prejudice that.

JOURNALIST: Does that mean, Mr. Hawke, that the Government sees its way clear now to establish a race relations committee in the Caucus.

PM: Well I believe that anything that the Parliament can do to secure within the community a rational and humane approach on these issues makes sense and I say at this stage no more than that.

JOURNALIST: Given the number of new revelations about the Maralinga test area is there a case for a full judicial enquiry into that ...

PM: I wouldn't say that at this stage. Let me make a couple of general comments and then a specific one. I think you will appreciate that this Government has got nothing to hide or any interest in seeking to hide the truth as to what happened in that period and that is, if you like, quite objective reason and if you want to look at it in partisan terms we were not the Government. So however you look at it, this Government doesn't seek to hide anything and certainly that is the attitude of the Government in general. It is the attitude of the Minister, Senator Walsh. He, I understand, will receive tomorrow the Report which he commissioned to examine from whatever sources are available what the evidence is as to fall-out. I think he has got the Report as to chronology of events and he and the Government will be examining the situation in the light of those Reports. It is premature until we have looked at those reports to say what further steps may be necessary but I assert to you quite unequivocally that we will do all that we can to see that the truth of what happened emerges.

JOURNALIST: If you have made a decision on the assets test, why can't you bring the uncertainty that is surrounding it, particularly amongst the elderly community to a rest here and now by making ...

PM: I understand the importance that you attach to yourselves and the jobs that you hold and the responsibilities that you feel that you have to discharge, but my view is that it is appropriate to bring to this to the Parliament.

JOURNALIST: Mr. Hawke, just on that immigration point on the committee on race relations, do you think the suspension of Mr. Hodgman today might impair the Government's ability to have that committee?

PM: I wouldn't think so. I mean, you know I'm charitable by nature. I don't want to cast dispersions on the person to whom you refer. I didn't detect a noticeable degree of support for the gentleman on the other side of the House. I think the Parliament is capable of dealing with these matters with or without the presence of the person to whom you refer.

JOURNALIST: Mr. Hawke, will you intervene in this dispute which is keeping the non-members bar closed?

PM: MY heart goes out to you. No-one is on strike at the Lodge.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, if I may, one more on the assets test. You have made a decision. Would that decision be as that suggested by Mr. Peacock today, namely, that you could drop all plans for an assets test.

PM: I would have thought that the evidence available to you people who watch the proceedings of this Parliament is such that you would have come to the conclusion that I certainly have come to a long time ago - and it is perhaps more starkly evident now - that it would be an exercise in futility to rely upon any form of guidance - and particularly consistent guidance - from the Leader of the Opposition on any matter of importance.
