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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE LODGE - FEBRUARY 9, 1986

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JOURNALIST: Mr Howard is claiming to have given the Labor Government a kick in the shins Mr Hawke?

PM: My shins are in the very best of shape. The outstanding loser out of Saturday is John Howard. Just look at the three areas where the people of Australia had something to say. And look at it in terms of Mr Howard and the Federal Liberals. First of all Scullin, where even with the donkey vote they could only get a five per cent swing, which is well within the normal by-election experience, achieve 22.7 per cent of the total vote and with the donkey vote. A massive rejection of Mr Howard's concentrated campaigning in the electorate. Western Australia - a disastrous day for the Liberals. In the Lower House they lost three seats to the Nationals, one seat to us. And they lost seats in the Upper House to the Nationals and the Labor Party. And Mr Burke and his team are to be congratulated on increasing their vote. A complete repudiation of the Federal Liberals. And in Tasmania, Mr Gray held office. It looks as though the number of seats will be the same probably. But Mr Howard was repudiated during the election. Mr Gray told him to keep out, he treated him like a leper. He didn't want the Federal Liberals in Tasmania. So, whichever way you look at it, a very, very black day for John Howard and the Federal Liberals. And I congratulate Mr Burke particularly in Western Australia for this historic achievement - a return of the Labor Government, successive victories for the first time in 30 years there.

JOURNALIST: What conclusions can you draw from the resurgence of the National Party in Western Australia?

PM: I think you have to say this, that there is concern in the bush, and understandable concern about the position in which they find themselves. But they repudiated the Liberals and there is some sort of a protest vote there. Of course, what you have got to understand is the relationship between the Nationals and the Liberals in Western Australia is a poisonous relationship and so I think understandable that there was some sort of swing in the bush. But as far as the federal picture is concerned, no comfort for the major party there. And I don't think the National Party generally would be sensible to take any comfort from the present position because in my travels around the country I don't believe that the rural interests of this country see the National Party as their saviours.

JOURNALIST: Do you think there is any message there though for the Federal Government?

PM: I can only, in these circumstances, pick up from Mr Howard. Mr Howard said give Mr Hawke a kick in the shins. Now, it was said in regard to Scullin that it had to be a swing of at least 10 per cent to be any adverse message. They were battling to get five per cent and that was with the donkey vote. As far as Western Australia is concerned - an improvement in our overall position. And Tasmania has been out of the mainstream of, if you like, of federal politics now since 1983. What you have got to face up to now is what I have been saying for some time. I said clearly following the South Australian results. The Liberal Party is in total disarray in this country. It has been repudiated by the electorate. It hasn't won an election in mainland Australia since 1980. The Liberal Party is on the nose with the Australian electorate because they are irrelevant, they insult the intelligence of the Australian people. In election after election they come out with their irrelevant, ideological nonsense which has nothing to do with the real interests of Australian men and women. And while they continue to behave in this way they will be treated as they consistently are - as an irrelevancy, an ideological, divided irrelevancy in the Australian political scene.

JOURNALIST: Why can't the Labor Party do better in Tasmania?

PM: Well, we suffered badly in 1982-83 down there over the dam issue. And that has been a residual factor. Mr Gray has been able to capitalise on the divisions that that caused within Tasmania and within the Labor Party. Now, I am confident however that, as far as the next federal election is concerned, we will be able to improve our position. I mean, after all if you have got no seats in the House of Representatives, you have got nothing but room for improvement. I think we can do that.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, you really wouldn't want the result in country Western Australia to be reflected in a federal election though in country seats, would you? So what will you be doing to ensure that doesn't occur?

PM: Well, there are a number of things. I have asked Mr Kerin to prepare a submission for Cabinet to analyse what are the possible areas in which we can do something more to assist rural Australia. Secondly, I have started myself now to go out and meet individual Australian farmers. And I must say as a result of the experience I had during this week where I was able to sit down and basically listen rather than talk to, listen to farmers, their wives and their children, I certainly have got a sharpened sense, if you like, of the tragedy that exists out there. They understand that there are limits to what the Federal Government can do in this area. But I must say that when those submissions from Mr Kerin come before the Cabinet, we will be looking at them sympathetically to see what more we can do. You have got the tragedy, as I say, of very, very efficient Australian rural producers suffering now basically as a result of the corruption of international markets which has ruined the price situation for them. That means that they concentrate even more particularly on their internal cost structure. We have got to see what we can do to help them in that area.

JOURNALIST: Having regard to the nature of the campaign in Western Australia, how would you see the future of Aboriginal land rights legislation from here on?

PM: Well this is a matter which will be brought before the Cabinet by Mr Holding in the near future and as I said over there, I believe that we are going to be able to reach a situation where the interests of the State as well as of the Federal Government will be able to be accommodated. I said that in Western Australia and I believe that has been accepted there.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, interest rates and petrol prices are fairly significant costs for farmers. Is there anything you can do for them in those two areas?

PM: Well, I have got nothing to add to the answer I gave before and I'll just repeat it. When Mr Kerin brings his submissions which will be basically concerned with the cost structure of farmers, we'll be looking to do what we can. I am not saying anything in advance of the Cabinet consideration of that submission.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, are you disappointed in the performance of Mr Wriedt in Tasmania?

PM: I think Mr Wriedt had a very difficult job and I think he did as well as he could in the circumstances.

JOURNALIST: Do you believe he would survive a challenge?

PM: Well, it is not for me to intrude. I don't know whether if there were another nomination Mr Wriedt would be It may not be a concept. I simply don't know and because I don't know I not going to proffer an opinion.

JOURNALIST: Would you like to make a comment on the Philippines election?

PM: Well, I don't know that I can say anything very penetrating on it. I have been kept informed by my own people and what they are saying is that you are just getting these different assessments. I would say on the basis of what has been put to me that it looks as though Mrs Aquino has polled well and has polled well enough to win if the elections allowed to run its fair course. That seems to be evidence as it is put to me.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, have you had any information on whether or not they have polled?

PM: Well, my sources within Foreign Affairs are, over the weekend, analysing the information that's available in from a number of sources. All I would say is in a preliminary sense the indications that everyone has got not just those in official positions here. It seems to be that it hasn't been an entirely fair election.

JOURNALIST: Would you welcome an Aquino victory?

PM: Well, let's wait and see the outcome. I mean I have made my comments about the present situation in the Philippines and it has incurred some cancellation of landing rights, I believe.

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