



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, FLEMINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE, MELBOURNE, 5 APRIL 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke aren't your priorities slightly out of order in spending this money to have a public relations campaign when anyone who's ever tried to ring a refuge knows you can't get on the phone. Someone I know who works professionally with them said that she rang at 3.00 am because of this, and when only one in five women can get into refuges shouldn't you be building more refuges and providing the escape routes before doing the big public relations stunt?

PM: I thought we were going to have a press conference not a public debate. But let me make the point that we have very substantially increased the funding for refuges in the period since we've been in office. They were first funded under the Whitlam Labor Government in '74. The funding was cut out at the Commonwealth Government level in 1981 by the Fraser Government. We reintroduced funding in 1983 and have successively increased the amount of funding and have committed a further substantial amount over the next 3 years. So it is not a question of what we're doing now, being in substitution for an increase in funding. The increase in funding has taken place, there's not a limitless amount of money available to Government but we have accorded a significant priority to it and it's a perverse assumption on your part - and it would be rejected by 99.9% of the community - that you shouldn't be undertaking a campaign, as I say, to break the silence.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke do you support an inquiry into the NSC?

PM: We don't see a need at this stage for a Commonwealth inquiry, it's essentially a matter at a state level. But what I have done to try and ensure that at the Commonwealth level we can do everything to be of assistance is that I wrote on Monday to about 7 or 8 Ministers who could in some way or another through their Departments or agency's for which they are responsible, have some connection with the NSC and have asked them to meet together and their Departments so that we can have a full understanding of what involvement there is at the national level with any of the operations of the NSC. And then I've spoken to Mr Cain and indicated to him (a) that I'm doing that and (b) that we'll make all information available that we've got to the Victorian authorities. Now that's the role that we have properly discharged, there's no need on any evidence

(PM cont) available for the Commonwealth to be having an inquiry.

JOURNALIST: The Democrats are supporting at the very least a Senate inquiry.

PM: The Democrats by definition will support an inquiry into anything.

JOURNALIST: On this issue here, does it disappoint you to learn that the Victorian Government for example has cut funding for child care workers when refuges like this so heavily depend on them?

PM: Well I don't accept your assertion that the Victorian Government has overall cut funding for child care. I mean that hasn't been brought to my attention. I don't accept your assertion that it's done that.

JOURNALIST: Workers are now preparing to strike.

PM: Well that's another proposition. I don't accept your assertion that the Victorian Government has cut funds for child care. I don't accept your assertion.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke on the NSC are you satisfied that Australian security has not been compromised?

PM: Yes I've already said that and so has Minister Beazley. I of course made an inquiry when this issue arose and I'm informed by the authorities that there is no security compromise or security connection. The allegations have you know ranged all over the place that there's a CIA connection and other connections. Well I am informed that there is no substance in those allegations. Now over here there was a question about child care. Let's be quite clear about child care as far as my Government is concerned. You won't get me on the back foot about child care, I'll be right aggressively on the front foot because no Government in the history of this country has come within a bull's roar of doing what we've done on child care. Let's get the facts and let's get them straight. Now since we've been in office we have created 64,000 new child care places. We have allocated funds for another 30,000 so that by the beginning of the 1990s there'll be 94,000 child care places which will involve what - this. It will involve a trebling in our period of office of child care places. Now as I say that's the outlay by my Government in regard to child care places. It does more in our period of office than was ever done in the whole period of Government before we came of office in 1983. So you won't get me on the back foot about child care. The rest of the political spectrum, the conservatives, need to hang their head in shame in terms of looking at what this Government has done and is committed to keep on doing in the future in regard to child care.

JOURNALIST: This morning in The Age a Gallup Poll was published saying that the Liberals would've won the last federal election had one been held in mid March. What do you have to say about that?

PM: I'm very happy about where we are at this stage. I mean if you look what we've been through with high interest rates, which we've had to bring in, the rather poor balance of payments figures, and the CPI figures -

JOURNALIST: What about the -

PM: Are we going to have a debate or are you going to ask me a question and I can answer it, ok. That's the usual rule. Now what I'm saying is that for them to be where they are now they should be very disappointed and if they were content as to where they are you wouldn't have the position which is in fact going on now of a determined effort to displace Mr Howard, which is what's underway at the moment. Now if they were content about where they were that wouldn't be what's happening. Now I'm simply saying to you we've had to do some tough things. No-one likes, no politician in his right mind likes having a tough, tight monetary policy but it's necessary. The national account figures which just came out at the beginning of this week show a very simple statistic, that there's been a 4% growth in production, we've had a 4% growth in GDP, but we've had an 8% growth in consumption. In other words we are importing to fill that gap and we're importing at a level which we can't sustain so we've got to bring back the level of activity. Now people don't like those sorts of things. Now even in that situation the Opposition is depending upon the preferences of the minor parties in this hypothetical election. The fact is that when we go to an election it won't be a hypothetical one, it will be the real thing and we will win.

JOURNALIST: The Poll also shows that your own popularity is slipping.

PM: Well if we talk about my popularity against the other which is - I haven't seen the figures today -

JOURNALIST: Down to 47.

PM: Down to 47? What's Mr Howard's and what's the preferred Prime Minister's? Still a 3 to 1 ratio.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke with the situation in Namibia hotting up will you still be sending the 240 troops?

PM: I will be going there this afternoon - to Holsworthy - to farewell them.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke the same question. There are reports that the Rules of Engagement for the troops in Namibia aren't sufficient and they could wind up being in danger. Are you concerned about that?

PM: We have said and the Minister has said that this is no Sunday School picnic that our contingent is going to. It's a dangerous situation, not simply for the reasons you're referring to, but there are many mines that have been laid in the region where our fellas will be involved in defusing that position. So it is a dangerous situation. The previous Government - which made the commitment and which we're honouring and are pleased to honour - understood that it was a potentially dangerous situation.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke you've spoken gratefully of your wife's forbearance in your earlier exuberant times. Would you have been happy to extend to Hazel the same sexual freedom as you were able to enjoy?

PM: Pass that one.

JOURNALIST: On a local level Mr Hawke, the Greensborough by-election is coming up. There have been numerous debates between the two Leaders. The Liberal Party asserts that if it's a win for the Labor Party here that it's a vote of confidence in your Government's economic policies. The Labor Party asserts that if the Liberals win that it'll be a block of supply next in line. Does it concern you?

PM: I'm not quite sure if I follow all that.

JOURNALIST: The Liberals claim it's a vote of confidence in your policies if the labor Party wins.

PM: Do they?

JOURNALIST: Would you accept that as a vote of confidence?

PM: Well I would've thought that the issues that are going to be involved in the Greensborough by-election are quite complex. I certainly don't take it as a vote of confidence one way or another in the economic policies of my Government. I simply believe that Mr Cain will win the by-election, I think he'll win it for a number of reasons. I would think that the person who's got to really worry most about the Greensborough by-election is a bloke called Kennett.

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