



PRIME MINISTER

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JOURNALIST: Prime Minister do you believe you'll get the French Government's support for your position on the Antarctic?

PM: It's too early to say but there's some indications that they are sympathetic to our position. I'll be talking with the Prime Minister on Monday and I think some of the officials might be talking before then. But there's certainly some indications that they are sympathetic. They've had some progress of course since we've made the decision. The Indian Government has indicated they are going to support us and that's I think very important so it's not as hopeless as I think some people thought it might be at the beginning.

JOURNALIST: So you hope to get some support for a World Environment Park down in the Antarctic on this trip?

PM: Yes I certainly believe that we've got a good chance of support here in France. Obviously the position of the United Kingdom and the United States is more hostile to the concept but I want to take the opportunity of explaining our position to them. I'll be meeting with Jacques Cousteau in the morning and I think it will be useful to be able to listen to what he has to say and I think he'll provide a fair bit of support obviously, for our concept. He's certainly recommending to the French Government that they should support our position.

JOURNALIST: Have you any indication that the French would be swayed by what he might have to say?

PM: He's obviously an influential figure here and I can't draw any conclusions until I've seen them.

JOURNALIST: Two Australian's bashed in Bougainville. Have you been briefed on that?

PM: Yes I've read the cables on that and I've asked our people to ensure that the appropriate protests are made and I believe they have been. This is an unacceptable sort of situation. This is not an attack upon Australians by the rebels but by the armed forces there that are supposed to be responsible for maintaining law and order. So we will register the very strong protest to the authorities about this.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke do you think that the UK and the US are exerting a certain amount of influence on France to get it to sign the Treaty?

PM: I've got no evidence of that although it would be surprising if, given what I understand to be the strength of their position, that hadn't been conveyed to other countries including France. But I don't think on its record France is likely to be pushed into a position by either the United States or the United Kingdom. I would think in terms of the pitch, my pitch would be as good as the Americans and the British.

JOURNALIST: What is your pitch going to be? What arguments are you going to use?

PM: Well basically straight forward. This is the last pristine continent. It is obviously extremely fragile and I think that what the nations who have spent some years now in trying to prepare the Mining Convention have got to understand is that we're living in a different period now at the end of the 1980s than we were several years ago when the work started on the Convention. We have more evidence now of the fragility of this type of environment. We have the Exxon disaster in the Arctic region up there in Alaska and so it's quite clear that you can't really protect this sort of environment absolutely, you can't have absolute confidence of being able to protect it. I think further now there is a greater consciousness right around the world about the responsibility we have to protecting the environment for the future. So my view would be that the nations would be responsive to the proposition that we should have an Arctic wilderness constructed within the Antarctic Treaty system. This will enable appropriate scientific work to proceed but in an environment where there should be no mining because it's no good really saying, as has been said before, 'well you can have a Minerals Convention with a veto in it upon mining'. I mean it seems to me to be a, when you come to think of it, the wrong way around it and we certainly won't be prepared to accept the situation which said, 'well yes you will sign the Convention and you can have a reservation which says however, we would veto any mining'. It's much more straight forward to say there is to be no mining. Let's (PM cont) construct a comprehensive environmental protection framework and within that try and advance the concept of the Wilderness Park. So I think it's going to be a much more receptive world environment for that than there would have been even two years ago.

JOURNALIST: Will you be raising the issue of the nuclear testing in the South Pacific during this visit to France, Mr Hawke and is there some irony in the French perhaps supporting our position on environmentalism in the Antarctic and still testing in the South Pacific?

PM: We'll make clear again our opposition to testing. It's well known, it doesn't need a great deal of repetition. But the point will be made. I suppose some people could say there is a paradox that there is their conduct of nuclear testing in the South Pacific but that they are obviously extremely conscious of environmental issues in other ways. But be that as it may I think what we'd do is to make our position clear as to opposition to the nuclear testing in the South Pacific but welcome the support of France in other areas where they are, in my judgement, taking a positive and realistic environmental position.

JOURNALIST: In Australia there's been some renewed speculation on the possibility of a half-Senate election separate from a House of Representatives election. Are you in any way attracted to that proposition?

PM: Well I know I've seen the speculation. I've got nothing more to say on that at all, nothing more.

JOURNALIST: Are you ruling it out?

PM: I just haven't got anything to say about it. I mean -

JOURNALIST: It rules it in, doesn't it?

PM: Well I suppose you can say it rules it in, rules it out. I mean you people will write your story whatever I say about it. I mean I haven't said anything about an early election for six months but that hasn't stopped you writing about early elections. I've not said anything about early elections, not anything about it.

JOURNALIST: Can you see any circumstances under which half the Senate will go to an election separate from the House of Representatives?

PM: I've got nothing to say about the question of elections because as soon as I say something about it you start furiously scribbling. So I've really got nothing to say about it. We'll just go on governing and let others speculate on this matter.

JOURNALIST: When you said there'd be no election this year are you talking about just the House of Representatives or were you including -

PM: That was the question I was asked. I always answer the question I'm asked.

JOURNALIST: Would there be any advantages in having a half-Senate election this year?

PM: For whom?

JOURNALIST: The Government.

PM: I don't know really. I'm not thinking about elections over here. I mean why would you be thinking about elections here in this beautiful environment.

JOURNALIST: Does your earlier statement ruling out an election apply to the half-Senate election? ...

PM: I said before what I had to say about it Michelle. I really haven't got anything more to say about elections now, nothing more to say about elections. nothing more to say about elections.

JOURNALIST: Just a question on France. How would you describe the state of Australia's relations with France at the moment and will they change because of this trip?

PM: I think one should say they are improving and they'll be better as a result of this trip. I mean with this Government as compared with its predecessor we are in a very, very much warmer and more constructive, cooperative position. I mean you take the area of the South Pacific in general and New Caledonia in particular. The Rocard Government has transformed the situation there. We welcome the Matignon Accord and it's very refreshing to see the results of the election the other day. There was a very significant participation rate despite the frank attempt to ... boycott. The participation rate was as high as it had been before - about 69% - and they are tackling what is the fundamental question there of providing accelerated training for the Kanak population so that by the time 1998 comes there will be a solid core of trained people professionally, academically, bureaucratically, technically, to be able to fill the positions and to be able to cover whatever position is decided upon at that time. So we welcome those moves. We want to cooperate with them, assist them in the area of economic cooperation. There are moves for greater cooperation generally. The French Government was remarkably generous in its contribution to the bicentennial, very, very generous. We are ourselves being involved in now their bicentennial celebrations, the Revolution. So I would say that the relations now are very, very much better than they've been for a long time and I'm sure that as a result of this visit they'll be further improved as they will be (PM cont) further improved after the visit by Michel Rocard to Australia in August.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke do you expect Mr Bush to be more sympathetic to the plight of Australian farmers than Mr Quayle was on his visit?

PM: Well I just don't know. We've got a position I think where we'll make it clear that we believe that there has been damage to Australia. There may be argument that they want to push about the extent of this. But as I said just before I got on the aircraft to come overseas, I'm not going to allow that issue to dominate the discussions we will have in the United States. We've got so many areas of profound agreement. Some of the issues that we need to talk about that I'm not going to allow this important visit to be derailed by an over emphasis on that issue. I think the important thing there is that we should work together in the environment of the MTN negotiations of the Uruguay Round to press for the elimination of subsidies in this area of subsidy on production and exports so that we can get a freed up international trading system in agriculture. That's the important thing.

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