



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, 6 SEPTEMBER 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: How close to settlement do you think the pilots dispute is now?

PM: One can't say how close it is. All one can say is that the airlines, the Government, the ACTU are committed to seeing that the outrageous claim of this groups of people, this has been made outside the guidelines which is applicable to others, will not succeed. We will continue to do everything we can in terms of providing planes from the RAAF, accelerating the availability of aircraft and pilots from overseas to assist the airlines in providing as substantial a service to the public of Australia as is possible. I hope that the evidence which is increasingly becoming available that pilots are now signing up under contracts with the two airlines will persuade their colleagues that they should do the same. But it would be improper for me to put some timetable on how long it will take to see a resumption of normal services in this country. But I repeat, let the Federation know that the determination of the Government and the airline industry and of the trade union movement is unaltered. This claim will not succeed.

JOURNALIST: Sir Peter Abeles said last night that some stand downs had already taken place. Is any talk of compensation off the agenda?

PM: Let's get it quite clear on this question of compensation. There is no suggestion that there will be any consideration of compensation for losses suffered by the airlines. The only matter which will be on the agenda - and I will take it for a determination by my colleagues at an appropriate time - is whether the Government in the unique circumstances of the airlines should provide some recompense in respect of employees in the airlines who are not being stood down. In regard to the tourist industry, for whom I share an enormous concern at the losses that they are suffering, in their case they can and are standing down their employees. In the case of the airlines that is not a realistic possibility. So the only matter that can be on the agenda is the possibility of recompense for the unique circumstances of the airlines for assistance to their employees who cannot be stood down. Now as I say in regard to that matter we will give consideration to that at the appropriate time.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, are you satisfied that what is being offered to the pilots by Sir Peter Abeles and Ansett falls within the guidelines?

PM: Yes I am. I mean what we've witnessed in this tragic dispute is the additional tragedy of an irrelevant, confused Opposition. The latest episode of which was the pathetic picture of this Opposition spokesman, Mr Jull, last night getting into the media of Australia and putting out a series of calculated misrepresentations. But that's not surprising because the handling of themselves in this matter by the Opposition has been dispicable and deplorable. The fact is that when this matter was before the full court of the Industrial Relations Commission the spokesman for the airlines made it clear at that point that when they went into a position where they would have to have negotiations with their individual pilots that they would make the contract available for perusal by the Commission. That's been done. These talks of 28.6% salary increases is an absurdity. But as I say it fits in with the pattern of total irrelevancy and misrepresentation which has characterised the Opposition in the whole of this matter.

JOURNALIST: ... the Opposition's tactic, the Halfpenny tactic, that they now seem to have adopted.

PM: Let me say these things; I repeat here what I said in the Parliament that last week when very serious allegations were made against Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen - and there were some exultation in Labor ranks - I went out of my way in the Caucus to say that as far as I was concerned and this Government was concerned there was a fundamental principle that applied and that is that any person accused or charged is innocent until proved guilty. That is the first point to make. The second point to make is that there seems to be some belief on the part of the Opposition that I may have some brief for Mr Halfpenny. I don't think there is anyone in the country who's had more disputes and fights and fundamental practical and philosophical disagreements with Mr Halfpenny than myself and that remains the case that Mr Halfpenny - as with any other individual in the community including Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen - is entitled to the benefit of that principle that if charges or accusations are made they are innocent until proved guilty. The third point I make is this; that the insinuations of the Opposition in this matter are beneath contempt. It is the case that Mr Halfpenny has been associated vigorously with Victoria and the Victorian-based consortium in representations on behalf of that consortium. But the insinuation that somehow or other if Mr Halfpenny himself has been guilty of anything - and I repeat he is innocent until proved guilty - that that has anything to do with the way in which the tender has been awarded is beneath contempt because it involves the presumption that a whole range of people in the Navy right through - and not only serving officers but officials - have

(PM cont) been involved in some corruption. The fact is that in all the processes there has been virtually unanimous recommendations to the Government from serving officers, Defence officials, Attorney-General's, Finance, that the contract which the Government awarded is the right one. So we just have further evidence in this matter of an Opposition which, without any question, has in virtually everything it has done and is doing is reaching levels of contempt unparralled in the history of this country.

ends