



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, HYATT ON COLLINS, 25 MARCH 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, is there any doubt in your mind about the outcome?

PM: I believe we're going to win, but I must observe the proprieties. The count is not finished. What I am saying is that on our best judgement in regard to the seats still not decided that the best bet is that we will emerge with a majority.

JOURNALIST: Where did it go wrong for Labor, given that it's going -

PM: Well, the answer, the answer to that is quite obvious isn't it? I mean, you don't need to be a genius to know that if you put Victoria to one side, it was virtually a status quo election.

JOURNALIST: Did Mr Cain ring with his apologies this morning?

PM: I don't respond to that question.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Beg your pardon?

JOURNALIST: What was the big issue here in Victoria?

PM: Well, there seem to have been a number of issues. We had that long stoppage involving the transport system and let me say that one of my casualties, one of my Victorian casualties with whom I've spoken this morning, said he was scratched, scratch ticket out of the, out of the election in his judgement - that that cost him the election now. So there were a number of factors.

JOURNALIST: ... Prime Minister, State issues were responsible primarily for the appalling result in Victoria?

PM: Well, what I'm saying is that as far as Federal issues were concerned, I think that probably Victoria was no more affected by them than the rest of Australia. There's no

reason why they should have been and if you put Victoria to one side and look at the outcome, it's virtually a status quo with some losses and offset by gains. Here in Victoria it seems to be the assessment, if you watched John Howard last night, John Howard was making quite clear what his assessment was, my own people are making that assessment. Now, in putting that, I'm not trying to just say well, we only lost seats in Victoria because of State issues. We could have lost seats in Victoria if the Victorian Government had been running, running as a very popular Government which it wasn't, but the extent of the loss in Victoria seems to me very much a result of State factors.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Beg your pardon?

JOURNALIST: What does the result mean for the National Party?

PM: Well, I would think one thing you can say with certainty it means a change of leader.

JOURNALIST: When will you be able to assure Australia's neighbours and allies that Australia does have a stable Government?

PM: I think they know that now.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what in fact do you think the elevation of Carmen Lawrence to the Premiership in WA has?

PM: I can't quantify it. It was obviously a plus.

JOURNALIST: The transport reforms in Victoria ... example of micro economic reform. How does this auger well for your determination to push ahead with such reform?

PM: Well, in judging my Government on micro economic reforms you don't have to look at ... systems in Victoria. I repeat the statement that I've made which has remained unchallenged throughout this campaign. I've done more with my colleagues in micro economic reform than has ever been done before in this country and we will continue apace with micro economic reform.

JOURNALIST: Was your policy suggesting that in fact the Victorian Government shouldn't have gone ahead with those sort of reforms ...?

PM: I think that there were arguments about not just what was done, but the way things were done and so on, but what we're about is in the Federal scene and I have a method with my colleagues of consultation and that has worked. I mean, the best illustration of that, I think, was that if you look at the, at the waterfront. During the campaign itself you had employers and users of our waterfront industry meeting, actually during the campaign and making the judgement.

Saying, firstly, applause to the Hawke Labor Government for what they'd done, b) what they were, as a way they were doing it and, c) saying that our approach was the way to go as compared with the way the Opposition was talking. So we've, we've got the, not only runs on the board but the procedure recommends itself to the people who are involved.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, given that you are acting in only a caretaker capacity, where does that leave any approach to the Reserve Bank on interest rates?

PM: It means that no ... no approach will be made to the Reserve Bank until I move from being caretaker to going into the fourth term.

JOURNALIST: So in other words any hope that people might have had for a reduction within a couple of weeks may now be extended by a couple of weeks possibly?

PM: I don't see, I don't follow your arithmetic. I don't believe that it's going to be two weeks before I'm confirmed in my fourth term.

JOURNALIST: When do you think that will be Mr Hawke?

PM: Well I can't be absolutely precise about that. This is a matter, in the end, for the electoral authorities, but I would hope that by the, by the end of this week ahead of us that we'd be in that position.

JOURNALIST: ... interest rates will come down by a percentage point in a few weeks time?

PM: I've answered those questions, I've got nothing more to add to that.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what would you have done differently?

PM: In the campaign?

JOURNALIST: Yes.

PM: Nothing that I can think of. I hope that that doesn't sound arrogant, but I look back over it and obviously there are one or two things that you would, would marginally change, but I made a clear decision before the election started which was this - that there were things I wanted to do and to promise to the people in this election, but that I wanted to make sure that in funding terms I had made the savings that would enable us to do that. So we sat down and did a lot of hard work in the Expenditure Review Committee, confirmed by the Cabinet, as to savings. Once I knew I had those savings then I, with my colleagues, worked out the funded promises we could make. Now that set the framework for Labor. I was able to go into this campaign with a promise, a plan, a vision, funded for the future and I believe that was the right way to go and it certainly set

the contrast with our opponents who still think that you can bribe the Australian electorate with billions of dollars of unfunded promises. So the basic framework I wouldn't, I wouldn't change. As I said with a little bit of flippancy on Friday when I was asked a similar question, I said well if I'd known how it would have been interpreted I wouldn't have had my tantrum of temper, as it was put, and ... sea of microphones at the Opera House which was, by the deep analysis of so many of you as seen as Hawke out of control. I mean, I wouldn't have given you that opportunity for misanalysis. I mean, I mean, I hate to have misled you. It's not fair of me.

JOURNALIST: ... you believe the debate over the MFP had any effect on the outcome?

PM: Well all I can say on that question about the debate on the MFP is that I'm very, very pleased to say that I was told in the end that, as far as could be ascertained, the, the MFP debate had not hurt us and that would confirm my judgement about the Australian people. But I want to -

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Well, can I finish? I want to say that the card that was played in the campaign and my opponents know the card and what the card was and why they played it was an extremely unfortunate event. I think one of the most unfortunate events, in, in the post war history of Australia and I'm glad that my judgement of the Australian people on these issues has been confirmed.

JOURNALIST: Will it be a Hawke/Keating leadership team going into the next election, Mr Hawke?

PM: Well Hawke will be the Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister is a matter for decision by the, by the Caucus. I'm pleased to see that Paul seems to be reconsidering his view, he seemed to have indicated earlier that he may not be interested in the Deputy Prime Ministership, he seems to be reconsidering that. So it will be a matter whether he decides to stand. If he stands, he obviously stands with a very good chance.

JOURNALIST: ... tip for the team on the other side, Prime Minister going into the next election?

PM: Well, I always in this political analysis look to history as a basis for informing my mind, and I look at their history. I think we may have come to the end of the hirdy girdy syndrome, so this time around it's John Howard, this time around it's Andrew, this time around it's John Howard. I think we've probably come to the end of the hirdy girdy. They'll change their game - probably a bit mischievous of me to really speculate, but I'm feeling slightly mischievous after a long night's sleep - I would have thought that the, the most likely sort of candidates that are emerging and ... who would have been now on the

5.
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telephone for hours and hours and hours, would be John Hewson, Fred Chaney - they've probably spent more time on the telephone both ringing and being rung and if they were betting, I would bet Hewson emerging as the leader. Now for the quinella I'm not quite sure, but it may be, it may be a Hewson/McLachlan quinella.

JOURNALIST: Do you think you now vindicated with John Stone having beaten you for the Rhodes scholarship back -

PM: Well, you know, one day you'll get it right, one day you'll get it right. I was never a candidate against John Stone for the Rhodes scholarship. I mean, that's now 30, nearly 40 years ago. You know, I've been telling people, you know, the facts about this thing. But suppose, reasonable hope that in 50 years, in half a century you might get it right.

JOURNALIST: How do you feel about Janine Haines bowing out of politics and also her claim that it was dirty tricks campaign?

PM: Well, I think, let me say this, I think that Janine Haines, you know, she's not my pin-up politician, but I, I look, no, no, let me say this, I think that Janine Haines did show a lot of courage. I think she showed a lot of courage in having a go and I think she is to be applauded for that. I always felt confident that Gordon Bilney would come through and, as you know, I'm not speaking after the event now, I said all along that I thought Gordon would get through and may I take this opportunity of publicly congratulating him and his team of supporters for their steadfastness. But I applaud Janine Haines for her courage and the fact that she's now having a little bit of, you know, post defeat complaints about others, well, that's understandable.

JOURNALIST: Are you worried about how the markets might react during this week of uncertainty?

PM: No, no.

JOURNALIST: Do you think Mr Peacock's delaying the inevitable by not conceding?

PM: Well, that's for, that's for Mr Peacock and those around him. Suffice it for me to conduct myself in the way that I think is appropriate.

JOURNALIST: What's required now for the rebuilding process here in Victoria?

PM: Well, the understanding that next time round we'll win a lot of these seats back, as I'm sure we will and I have already tried to speak to as many of the casualties as I could, there's two or three I've got to yet speak to, but I'm impressed by their commitment, which is an important part of the answer to your question. They haven't dropped

6.

their bundle and I'm also impressed by the pride they have in Labor's national achievement. It really warmed me this morning to speak to these people who've been beaten and they recognise the particularity of Victoria, but they had a great sense of pride in Labor's national achievement and that was great.

JOURNALIST: Is there any of those casualties that you're sorriest to see go?

PM: No, that would be invidious to people. I have come in seven years to appreciate all my colleagues. I mean it is true that in the earlier stages of our Government I guess the factionalism and the edges of factionalism were a bit sharper than. But I've come to appreciate the merit of all my colleagues and they have, in their various ways, I think, represented their constituencies very well, with commitment, with integrity and I'll miss them all.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, how do you think you'll be able to work with Ted Mack and Helen Caldicott if they're there?

PM: The first thing that one must say to that, the degree of work that will need to be done with them will obviously depend upon the outcome in the number of seats. If our majority in part depended upon them we'll obviously have to get a very specific modis ... I am hopeful that we'll have a majority in our own right. But I will obviously take the opportunity at an appropriately early time to speak with them if they would want to speak with me and I think I'll be able to have a civilised relationship with them.

JOURNALIST: Could Mrs Hawke tell us how she feels about the election result?

MRS HAWKE: I feel very happy about it. There's a tinge of sadness of course about Victoria but I think that nationally the Labor Party has done very well. And I think, in the end, I agree with Bob that they, they are pretty good judges.

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