



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, SYDNEY TOWN HALL  
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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on the question of the Chinese students, there's some doubt about whether the full 20,000 will be able to stay and what status they will have.

PM: Well let me say this. I have been amazed, if I can put it that way, by the media in this last week. I see that I have changed my mind, retreated. There's been no change in my position, no retreat. There seems to be a complete incapacity to understand the very simple propositions which I put and some distinctions which I made. Now let me make it clear. What I said was something that should not have surprised anyone because I'd been saying it for 12 months. And that is that in regard to those people that had come here pre-Tienanmen that there were special circumstances that applied to them and there would be a special category. The details of that of course I had in some sense talked about with Mr Hand before I made any public comment. He is preparing a submission for Cabinet on the basis of the discussions that we had, and the details of how we'll work out that special category will be considered and determined by Cabinet. But there will be, as there must be, and as I've made quite clear over a period of 12 months, special consideration as to how you deal with the problems of those people. For those who came after that I've made it clear, as will be the case, that the presumption will be that those people will return to China. Now I noticed that in the process some people seemed to have had a difficulty in making the distinction between that and what I had to say in regard to what in shorthand terms are called the Cambodian boat people. Now obviously I understood, and do understand, ... involved in what I said, that for those who get here, those who've arrived, there are legal processes to which they are entitled. And to be technical about it that's the DORS, the Determination of Refugee Status, DORS. And people get here whom are able to use those processes to determine by definition whether they have refugee status in the terms under our legislation, and internationally recognised, which would enable them to qualify for residency here under the refugee category. What I was trying to make quite clear and which I repeat again is that as far as I and the Government are concerned there needn't be some expectation that there is simply a great open door here for any people who want to come. People are saying oh but look at the difficulties they encounter in getting here. Sure, but where do we draw

the line? Say two hundred people have come, they've encountered some difficulties. Alright, they get here. What if it's two hundred thousand, two million? It's got nothing to do with whether they are Cambodians, whether they are Irish, Greek, Italian. The fact is that I am making it quite clear as far as this Government is concerned that we as a sovereign country will determine our immigration policy and its content, its size. And let no-one think that we're just going to stand idly by and allow others by their autonomous action which reflect some perhaps unhappiness with the circumstances in which they find themselves in their own country, that those people are going to determine our immigration policy. That's not going to happen. Now those things I made quite clear in my comments last week. There was no equivocation about them. They were intellectually integrated, politically integrated and intellectually and politically proper. If people haven't been able to understand it don't accuse me of some changing. There has been no change. What I say now is precisely what I've said before.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, why did you bypass Cabinet when you were making that decision?

PM: It's not a question of bypassing Cabinet. As I've just indicated, I had detailed discussions with the Minister before I made the observation that I did. I've been Prime Minister for seven years. On many occasions where there is a matter of public concern and interest I, with the responsibility I have as Prime Minister, have made it clear what I believe the Government's position would be. And I am quite certain that the Government's position will be as I have indicated. Now as to certain details, particularly as to the details of how we work out the special category for those Chinese that were here prior to Tienanmen, then those will be a matter of detailed discussion and determination by Cabinet.

JOURNALIST: Mr Wellington Lee and some other people in the Asian community have said that some of the students, the Chinese students, don't deserve to stay here.

PM: Yes, well Mr Wellington Lee over the years has made observations which don't always emanate from his concern with matters of immigration as such. I mean he has his political sympathies and positions and if he sees an opportunity to attack the Government he's been prepared to do it over the years. And that's - good on you Wellington - that's part of this democracy and I welcome that. But I don't take any particular notice of Wellington Lee. I understand what the realities are. And they are, they've not only been recognised in this country, but it defies description that anyone should suggest that in regard to people who were here before Tienanmen that you don't have to have some special considerations as to how you deal with that. We will, and as I say the details will be worked out in discussion with my Cabinet colleagues.

JOURNALIST: Will you take into consideration their skill level, their educational level?

PM: As I say, the details of how these things are taken into account are properly for decision. The important thing that I've done is to make clear that this country will compassionately and properly understand that there are special considerations that have to be given to that group of people.

JOURNALIST: You must have been disappointed though that your decision sort of seemed to unveil a bitter new dimension to the Asian immigration debate.

PM: Well I don't think it did. It's very interesting. What it did unveil was a lack of capacity on the part of many people writing in the media to understand fairly simple facts. But I'm used to that after seven years. I don't get terribly worried about that. One has an educational role in these matters. I think that in regard to the issue itself that it would be fair to say that people did, generally speaking, including those who I think misunderstood what I was saying, certainly none of the people who've written in the media I think, nor Australians generally, have taken the view that we shouldn't have a compassionate attitude on these matters. I haven't felt that that view has come through strongly.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what do think of Mr Loosley's plan to change preselection rules in the State?

PM: I think that is a matter predominantly for discussion here within the State branch of NSW.

JOURNALIST: Is it a good idea? Bob Hogg is proposing a similar change nationally.

PM: I think it's a good idea that these matters should be discussed within the Party.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, you mentioned the Budget in your speech and there has been a figure floating around that you're going to make cuts of \$1.6 billion to the Commonwealth Budget in the forthcoming Budget. Is that figure right?

PM: That's a good try Amanda. A very very good try. You know that in this funny period that we're getting into now in the pre-Budget that there are all sorts of figures and ideas floating around. Now that's good, it's part of the process of public debate and democracy. But these things will be determined in the now awful period that's coming up of weeks and weeks in that Expenditure Review Committee. All I will say is this, that there will be decisions which will involve reductions in Commonwealth expenditure. Because that is necessary if we're going to meet the task that we have. And that is to ensure in the interests of this country that in the period ahead there be a position

where production is greater than demand. Because that is necessary to attack the twin problems of our external account and of inflationary pressures. So we'll play our part in Commonwealth fiscal policy and of course if we also want the States to be involved in some expenditure restraint we'll have to show some ourselves.

JOURNALIST: Mr Greiner said that on the area of microeconomic reform his government has done more than most and he's asking for some tax rebate powers.

PM: Yes well if you read all that Mr Greiner has said over the months and the years it makes very interesting reading. He's the one who said at times, perhaps most vociferously, that there's a need for restraint by the States. Then when you look at what's happened in NSW the performance doesn't quite match the rhetoric. But I'm not here to engage in a slanging match with Mr Greiner, as attractive as that may appear to be. I mean I hope that Nick Greiner and all the State Premiers, irrespective of their political persuasion, are going to accept that we all, all of us, have a responsibility to match as politicians, and as decision-makers, the economic challenges confronting this country. That involves some hard decisions on the part of all of us.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, in terms of the public debate ... process of democracy, is it a wise move to throw a television news crew out of the Conference?

PM: That's a matter for the decision of the Conference. All I can say is that every other television station seemed to think it was appropriate to meet the requirements of the Conference. That's their business.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Mr Howe seems to be foreshadowing changes, possible changes to Medicare. How far can those changes go?

PM: I don't put specific limits on that. I have a position where in Brian Howe I have a Minister of outstanding competence, great track record in the broad area of social issues. His reforms as Minister for Social Security were historic. He blended this great capacity for compassion and targetting for eliminating unnecessary expenditure but while ensuring that those in need were better looked after. A great record there and he seems to be bringing precisely those characteristics and qualities to the discharge of his new Ministry. I am quite confident, knowing Brian as I do, that he will be having a quite wide-ranging examination of this area and be bringing to Cabinet proposals, which I don't know the detail of yet as I'm talking, but which will be characterised by those considerations. That is to eliminate waste - if that can possibly be done - to make for better targetting but to ensure that those who need protection get it.

JOURNALIST: Are we talking about modifying or rebuilding Medicare?

PM: I'm not making any positions about it because I want to have further discussions with the Minister and we'll want to see what his proposals are. But it will ensure that whatever is done you can rest assured that the characteristics of Medicare will stay. And that is that for the people of Australia they will have universality and they will have equity.

JOURNALIST: Is Mr Cameron as bad a pollster as Mr Loosley seems to think he is?

PM: Now this is almost sub judice.

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