

"THIS DAY TONIGHT"

INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR
JOHN GORTON FOR A.B.C. TELEVISION

Interviewers: Mr Frank Bennett
Mr Michael Willesee

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- Q. Would you have liked to have made more changes in a new broom fashion if there had been more talent available in the Ministry?
- PM: Well I think that anybody in the position of a Prime Minister would always find that there were a considerable number of people among the private members whom one would very much like to provide with an opportunity, but one would also find that there are people already carrying out jobs and have been carrying them out for quite a long time and this creates a difficulty.
- Q. Mr Gorton, some commentators have suggested that you have been influenced by colleagues not to make greater changes. Is this so?
- PM: No, I don't think so.
- Q. You are quite happy at this stage with the extent of your changes?
- PM: This is the Cabinet and Ministry which I think - and it is for me to think and to take the responsibility - can do the work at the present time for Australia.
- Q. Sir, Mr Chipp, formerly the Navy Minister and Mr Howson formerly with the Air portfolio have both been removed from the Ministry. Can we ask you simply why?
- PM: Well, I think I can only answer that by saying that in the position where I am I have to select people, and I did want to give a couple of newcomers - if I can call one of them a newcomer - an opportunity, and there was no way of doing it unless a couple of places were made for that purpose.
- Q. Mr Gorton, we don't particularly want to push this point but are you concerned by the suggestions that will be made, in Mr Howson's case, that he went over the VIP controversy, and possibly in Mr Chipp's case that he went for supporting Mr Snedden?
- PM: I don't know what sort of allegations would be made on these matters. All I can say is I exercised a judgment which may be wrong but which was a judgment which was necessary. Well, it was a judgment which I only could make in the way in which our party is set up at the present moment.

Q. Can you amplify, Sir, the kind of portfolio that you see that you have given to Mr Wentworth - Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs?

PM: I don't want you to think that those are lumped together - he has got both those portfolios, that he has received Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs because somehow it goes with Social Services. This was not the concept at all. I think it is well known that he has had a great and continuing interest not only in aboriginal welfare but in aboriginal history. He has really made a study of this matter. This will not be a Department of State. It will be something that he administers in the same way that I administered Education once under the Prime Minister. In Social Services, I am hoping that he will bring to bear the talent that he has got for analysing and investigating and proposing new steps. This is something in which he might be of considerable value. An ideas man.

Q. Despite Mr Wentworth's talent that you refer to, he has been overlooked for about 18 or 19 years now. Why is it that he has been in the back benches for so long and now you have put him in the Ministry?

PM: I think the answer to that is something like the one I gave you before - that each individual man who preceded me has exercised his judgment in selecting those he wishes to work with him, and I have done the same, and it has happened this time to come out differently.

Q. It would seem to go beyond the competence of Mr Wentworth here. A lot of people would think that neither Sir Robert nor Mr Holt trusted him. He sounds brilliant but sometimes he sounds erratic in the House. Are you concerned about that?

PM: No, I'm not. Not in the least. He is quite brilliant. All of his ideas of course, as is the case with almost any brilliant man, are not necessarily acceptable, and over the years he has put up a number of ideas. But some of them have been extremely acceptable, I think, for example, the unification of rail gauges in Australia owes a great deal to this kind of approach.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, Senator Wright comes into your Ministry with Works and Tourism. Here is a man who has - in your mind no doubt - an unfortunate record of voting against the Government. How did you justify his position under these circumstances?

PM: I felt that we needed in the front benches of the Senate somebody with good legal knowledge, because a great deal of the discussion that takes place in the Senate - not all by any means - but a great deal is centred around Committee discussions on Bills and legal implications, far more than happens in the House of Representatives where it tends more to be on broad principles. I felt we needed somebody with a legal capacity and, if I may put it this way - with an argumentative capacity, somebody with a force of argument, and I felt that he would be able to fulfil that role.

Q. At the moment, you are a bit light on with QC's in the Senate then?

PM: I think we had one other lawyer, Senator Laught, but I think he is not a QC. As a matter of fact, Senator Wright isn't a QC either, is he? I don't think he is.

Q. Could we ask on Senator Wright if you have come to some agreement with him about his rather wayward voting habits?

PM: Oh, I am absolutely sure that Senator Wright fully realises that when one becomes a member of a governmental team, one is a member of the team and one supports the team, and that is a completely different situation from being a private member, particularly a private member in the Senate where there is an idea that a thing should be looked at a bit more closely by private members.

Q. But despite this, you have left the Deputy Leadership of the Senate open, when on capability Senator Wright would appear to be the man to fill the job?

PM: Before I indicated agreement with that, we want to see how the Senate works for some considerable time.

Q. Mr Gorton, Mr Barnes is now Minister for External Territories only. Why this distinction?

PM: Because I feel that the problems in the Northern Territory are different in kind from the problems in Papua-New Guinea, and I feel that whereas the end result - Mr Hasluck put it that the end which the Northern Territory must attain is that of being eventually a State of the Commonwealth of Australia, an integral part of the Commonwealth of Australia. How far ahead that is, I don't know. But that, clearly, is what the destiny of the Northern Territory is. Now it is not at all so clear that that is what is going to happen in the case of Papua-New Guinea. Rather, I would see it developing towards a form of self-government, and then perhaps after that, from the basis of a form of self-government, whenever that occurs, if it wants a special association of some kind with Australia, approaching the then Australian Government.

Q. Mr Gorton, you have appointed Mr Lynch to the Army portfolio at a very young age at a time when our Army is fighting a war. Do you have fears about this appointment?

PM: I don't think so. He's 34 or 35 and there is usually quite a lot of energy and drive at this age. I feel he has had considerable managerial experience, personnel management experience, business experience, all of which should be helpful in the administration of a Department. Of course, neither he nor any other Minister would affect the fighting of the Department because that is a military matter which is done by the Chief of the Service.

Q. Finally, Mr Prime Minister, what can you tell us about the rumours that indicate a possible change at the Head of your own Prime Minister's Department?

PM: Merely, that there has been, I think fairly clearly, too big a load for one man to carry, in seeking to do all the Cabinet Secretariat work and be Head of the Prime Minister's Department at the same time. This has been recognised for some time but we are now carrying out fairly active sort of investigations as to just how this problem can be overcome.

Q. There is nothing concrete at this stage?

PM: Not now, no.

Q. Thank you Prime Minister.
