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PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH IAN McMINN, -MACQUARIE NETWORK
CORRESPONDENT - 28 JUNE 1984

McMINN: What I would like to basically talk to you about is the union thing in particular and, as I see it, as a catalyst in many things, Prime Minister, and that is as I see it, the Labor Party if you are beholden to sectional interests which are totally impractical and the Labor Party is not going to achieve in a social reform situation. And that is my basic position.

Prime Minister, you have been distinctly silent in the last couple of weeks and there have been many events that people would regard as set-backs to you. One of the bigger things that most people are talking about is the fact that the Victorian branch of the Labor Party last weekend decided that four right wing unions should not be re-affiliated. Since then there are appearances that the federal executive would intervene. So I would like to find out your falling on the Victorian branch's decision and what the Labor Party should do.

PM: Yes, Ian, before I go to those specific questions that you ask, let me make the point in response to your observation about my silence. I have taken the view that the matters will be decided at the top levels of the Party - at the national executive or perhaps the national conference - and I have not sought to go into the great public debate about it, but as people now outside the conferences have seen fit to air their views and like being involved in a lot of the expressions by others, it seems to me appropriate that I should respond to your specific question about the unions.

I have made it clear earlier in the year, Ian, that the four unions involved have a right to be affiliated to the Party. I have made the distinction between the unions and some individuals - if there are any individuals in respect of whom it can be established that they are either now or have recently been associated with some prescribed organisation like the NCC, then they would have to do the same thing as members of any other party. They would have to see the time before they could become members. But the principle regard to the four unions in my judgement is crystal clear. And that is that clerks, - men and women, in Victoria; shop assistants, men and women, in Victoria, are entitled through their union, if they so wish, to be affiliated with this party which is a trade union based party. Let me make a particular point in regard to the

shop assistants. I must say I find it totally amazing that the party in Victoria could have in the State election in 1982 have accepted willingly financial support and the availability of resources from that union to heavily support the Labor Party in that 1982 State election and then in the next year in 1983 happily accepted \$50,000 from this union. Now, I don't know where principles start and end if you recognise this union, accept their support in so substantial form, but say, no, they are not entitled to be affiliated to the Party.

McMINN: But Prime Minister, aren't we really talking about authority, now. I mean, you are in the happy position, if you like, of commanding popularity within the Australian community. The Labor Party seems to be commanding the same popularity, but it seems that you have been challenged on the very thing that could undo you and that is your own credibility - that is are you controlling the Party or is the Party controlling you?

PM: I don't think it is as simple as that. I have never sought, from the moment I obtained the leadership of the Party to say that I controlled the Party, but I believe what is clear involving your question, I think Ian, that the people of Australia, given the Party under my leadership and the sort of support to which you are referring and my leadership is significant in that. And it is important, I think, that the people of Australia see that the sorts of principles which I have clearly enunciated, are accepted by the Party. That doesn't mean in any way explicitly or implicitly but there can't be debate or there shouldn't be debates, about issues that - on the one in particular that you have raised, the question of rights of unions to be affiliated to the Labor Party. The principle is crystal clear. These unions are official, registered unions which in other states are affiliated with the Party. They are affiliated with the Trades and Labor Councils. They have been operating under the law where leaders are there as a result of democratic elections under the law. Now this Party cannot get into the position in my judgement where it is going to have double standards, where you will say yes it is your right to have, for instance the builders labourers, for instance a union which has consistently since we have been in government fought to try and undermine the Prices and Incomes Accord and that was the case of a particular union in Victoria. But you are not going to have another union or unions in because you don't happen to like their leadership.

McMINN: But aren't you treading on dangerous ground here. It seems to me the feeling was that you had a successful national conference and no-one rocked your boat then it would seem to me from what you are saying and from what other people that I have contacted have said, that you are prepared to take it on. There is a risk, sure, in taking on the Victorian State Branch.

PM: It's not a question of taking on the Victorian State Branch. What is involved in politics it seems to me is to be prepared in the appropriate forums to argue the case, the principle. For instance on the question of uranium, it was put to me in 1979 as we came up to the ACTU Congress that the clear position that I had was one for which I wouldn't be able to get the numbers at the ACTU Congress and indeed some of my friends said, look, we'll put the resolution because we don't want to see you in a position where you can't carry it. And I said, look, the position is clear. The principle is clear and it is right. So I argued for it. And may I say that in 1979 that I said that I understood the trade union movement and I knew that they would support my position and not the position that was carried and of course I have been proved absolutely correct on that.

McMINN: Has it hurt you, Prime Minister, to sit back over the last couple of weeks now and watch what some people could perceive as the undermining of what you have achieved in the last year or so be the things that people are reading every day. Does that worry you?

PM: Obviously any political leader would be quite dishonest if he didn't acknowledge that he would not rather see a position where his Party was not engaging in exercises which could potentially do damage to his Government and obviously I would be happier if that were not occurring, but I believe that the people of Australia, as distinct from perhaps some people who are getting carried away on single issues, of passionate concern to them, that the people of Australia are continuing their very very large support for this Government because they understand what the basic issues are. They understand that they wanted the economy turned round out of recession into growth. They understand that under my Government we now have the highest rate of growth in the western world.

McMINN: But why don't the people in your Party or some of the people in your Party understand that?

PM: Well, I think the majority of them do and they will show that by the way they make their decisions at the conference, yes.

McMINN: Are you sure about those very key issues, the foreign banks, Timor and more particularly uranium.

PM: I am confident that common sense will prevail.

McMINN: What are you going to do Prime Minister, to tell the Australian community that basically this growth of concern at the grass roots of the Party does not influence you as a Government - in other words you are still on course with most Australians.

PM: Well, I think I need to say very little about that. I mean we have had a series of polls within the last week. We've had the Gallop Poll - out of the Melbourne Herald group which showed 55% support for the Government which is 5½% above March '83 in the election. 73% for myself, we've had the Bulletin this week showing a 53% support for the Government, still very, very much up above the election and over ..% for myself. Interestingly in that, well over 90% support of Labor vote is for myself. So, these things are there and people understand them I believe.

McMINN: So, I guess on the Tuesday address to the Conference you'll be talking about the achievements of this Labor Government. Is there any possibility that you'll also talk to the Party, or the broad mass of Australians on the basis that you are in control?

PM: I think that is understand. Certainly, my speech will cover a wide range of issues Ian. I don't want to - and I know you don't expect me to canvass them in detail, but I'll certainly be going to the achievements of the Government, and the confidence the Australian people have in the Government. And the importance therefore for the Party, this goes back to one of your earlier questions - importance for the Party to not do anything which is going to in any significant way undermine the basis of that support.

McMINN: Specifically, if I can go to Thursday and Friday of the National Executive - what do you think is a reasonable outcome. Do you think that two of the unions should be re-affiliated, do you think that the four of them should? Do you take on the Victorian Branch, what are the mechanics of it as you see it?

PM: Oh well, the mechanics are I believe that there are already a couple of appeals in, or on their way as I have been informed by the Secretary, and the Executive therefore will discuss it. It is quite clear and that the principles that I have referred to in my earlier answers to your questions are universal. I don't think they allow distinction.

McMINN: Can I ask you one final thing Mr Hawke, and that is Mr Hartley standing for the number 3 spot in Victoria. Is it wise?

PM: I believe that the Victorian Branch will make the right decision in this matter.

McMINN: But you wouldn't like to see him there?

PM: Well, let's not discuss hypothetical questions. He's not a candidate. As I say I believe that the Victorian Branch will make the correct decision.