



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH CLIVE ROBERTSON,
NEWSWORLD, 21 MARCH 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

ROBERTSON: Mr Hawke the first time I was aware of you, you were long side-boarded, dark haired, boss of the ACTU with a lot of fire and I remember you being interviewed by two people in Perth and they must have offended you and you walked out. So they called you back and of course you had all the trump cards. You don't seem to do that so often now.

PM: Well, perhaps the interviewers are better and perhaps I've matured. I don't think it is often much value whether it's on a TV interview or anywhere walking out on anything.

ROBERTSON: It made good television though.

PM: Probably did. It wasn't done for effect, I must have been very annoyed Clive.

ROBERTSON: You seem to be somewhat toned down. I remember they used to say to you 'Oh Hawke's going to change', this is no disrespect, they used to say 'Hawke's going to change when he gets into Government, he can't be the ocker sort of bloke of the people, he's got to moderate a little'. Yet you seem to have swung back a bit, because you are very good with people, out on the hustings, out with people. You have something that perhaps a lot of your colleagues don't quite have. Are you conscious of that?

PM: Very simple, I know it doesn't sound funny, I hope it doesn't. I just do love people, I get on very well with people, always have. It's nothing that's come to me as Prime Minister, but all my life I've mixed with people right across the spectrum. I really enjoy people. For a lot of politicians it's a chore, going out and mixing and meeting. Not for me, it's a stimulus, I enjoy it.

ROBERTSON: It comes across well. I wonder if, on either side of politics, whether many understand how important that is.

PM: I think a lot of them don't Clive. I'm not one of the Canberra knockers about the geography of Canberra, I think the idea of having a national capital is good but there is something about it in this sense that some people tend to think that that's where it all happens, that it really is

the centre of the Australian universe. Well that of course is nonsense. It's convenient and proper I think to have a national capital but you've got to be out there meeting and mixing with people. You get your strength from it, it's a two-way thing.

ROBERTSON: Give you a buzz does it?

PM: Yes it does actually, it does give me a buzz really.

ROBERTSON: Do you get down occasionally and need that sort of response?

PM: No, not very often. No, I'm not a person who gets downs really. I mean, occasionally you get a bit tired, but I just have such - I suppose I've expressed this by a love affair with the country, I just love Australia. I think it's just so far and away the best country in the world. I love the people and so it's very hard to get down being Prime Minister of Australia, I mean it's just an enormous privilege to be leader of it.

ROBERTSON: Not a bad job is it?

PM: I just do think it's the best country, I think we're the best people and I'm proud to say it.

ROBERTSON: Do you ever, in your quieter moments at home when the phone is not ringing and you're not under pressure to make decisions or anything, are you ever sort of, a little in awe of the amount of power you have in a country like this?

PM: It's a funny sort of thing Clive. Although I've had positions of power, it's been a while now as President of the ACTU for ten years and Prime Minister now for six. I can honestly say that I don't think about power. I'm not flash in my lifestyle and I mean the exercise of power has never seemed to me to justify the parading and pomposity of so many leaders I see around the world. I bought when I was in Brussels once, there is a magnificent poster shop there and there was one that struck me, it was done in beautiful gold it was this sort of throne and a pair of general's boots, just the throne and the boots and the dust and the ashes. I've always had it displayed. I think it's a very salutary reminder of the transience of people with power. What I'm interested in is the sorts of things that you can do, being in a position of power, but the actual power itself has never been a fascination for me.

ROBERTSON: It's interesting you should say that because our conception is, of course, that the politicians' *raison d'etre*, is their *raison d'etre*, they just want to be in power. You don't find that?

PM: No, it would obviously be dishonest Clive, if I didn't say that I hadn't pursued the position of power. I have. I wanted to be Prime Minister, I wanted to be Prime Minister for a long time. But I can honestly say, you know I think people who are with me would testify to this, that it's not a thing that I flaunt, it's not a thing that exercises the mind. Here I am, Bob Hawke, powerful Prime Minister. What I am interested in is the things that you can do being in that powerful position, but I know that when the great prospectives of history are written, the pomposities or pretentions of any individual myself included, will be just as dust. The important thing will be, well did that fellow do something at that time that made some marginal differences? And I hope that will be the judgement.

ROBERTSON: Harking back to those days with your long side-boards and your dark hair, of which you have a lot which I would like when you die if you could will that to me.

PM: Do a deal mate.

ROBERTSON: You were described as loving a drink in those stories.

PM: That would have been an understatement.

ROBERTSON: Yes. How bad was the drink?

PM: I was never an alcoholic in the sense that I could never work. I mean I worked, always worked very hard, always worked very hard. The reason I gave it up in the end, I just realised one night - it was not the most elegant position, I was having a wee as a matter of fact and I wasn't full. But it's not a time when I normally get into profound thinking when I'm having a wee, but I just and I thought well - I got to the stage where at the end of the day I'm looking forward too much to a drink, it was becoming something of a crutch to me. And I thought that was pretty unintelligent. So I just gave it up then and that's nine years ago now, I haven't had a drop since.

ROBERTSON: How do you do that? I mean anyone who's got a problem with drink admitted or otherwise, wonders how a man can do that.

PM: As I say, I wasn't an alcoholic in a sense that I just was being destroyed by it.

ROBERTSON: Alcoholics never admit they are anyway.

PM: Well, no I think I can be objective about it just in terms of the amount of work I did Clive. I mean anyone who knew me knew that I worked very hard. I did both here and when I was overseas, I worked very hard. But I know, looking at myself honestly, that I wasn't working as

PM (cont): efficiently, anywhere near as efficiently as I could have because of drink. I just didn't think it was an intelligent position to get into, to have it there as a crutch, that I needed it. And so I said no.

ROBERTSON: Who was most surprised, yourself?

PM: In one sense I was. I know that Hazel was very, very pleasantly surprised.

ROBERTSON: How did you break the news to her?

PM: I just told her.

ROBERTSON: And she said 'yes dear'?

PM: She said 'I hope that's going to work'.

ROBERTSON: You're also accused, I use the word accused because no-one likes of being a womaniser. What do they mean by a womaniser?

PM: They mean that I wasn't faithful to my wife.

ROBERTSON: Was that true?

PM: Yes.

ROBERTSON: Did you stop that?

PM: Yes. I don't think it's a thing Clive that I want to talk a great deal about, but the one thing I do want to say about it is the enormous, I don't know whether debt is the right word, but well I just do feel indebted to Hazel that she understood that it was a part of a pretty volatile, exuberant character and she knew that my love for her had never changed. I've always loved Hazel, always will. She understood very helpful.

ROBERTSON: What do you think of the woman?

PM: She's just an incredible woman, an incredible woman. She's a woman who, and I don't say this against her father who was a remarkable bloke in his way. But he had an idea as a lot of parents did in those days in the immediate post-war period that a place for a woman was not in a university, whatever her IQ. Hazel had consistently duxed her class in primary school and secondary school was just told 'well that's it, you don't go on to university, you go into a commercial career'. She's a very talented pianist too and so I've always felt very, very strong feelings about how this woman who had the capacity to have done a university degree and done anything in that area was stopped from doing it and yet was able to retain her charity towards her father and towards those who stopped her doing this with no sense of jealousy about other people who'd had the opportunity and the privilege of doing it.

ROBERTSON: How did you meet her?

PM: Through the Church. Dad was a Congretational Minister as you know and she was in the same Congretational Church, it was a couple of suburbs away and we met through that. We started going out together when we were about 17 so we've been together for over 40 years now.

ROBERTSON: It's a long relationship isn't it?

PM: It is and I guess there are not very many women who would have put up with me in all that time.

ROBERTSON: Does she always agree with your decisions, I mean does she - ?

PM: No, not with every decision.

ROBERTSON: Does she have much influence if she doesn't agree?

PM: Not with every decision. Well, another great strength of Hazel, she doesn't try and in a sense take advantage of the fact that she's the Prime Minister's wife, that she shares the same pillow with me and has the opportunity of perhaps getting to me in a way that no-one else can. She doesn't do that. We generally have a feeling Clive which is on the same wavelength, so the reasons for disagreement are very rare.

ROBERTSON: What nickname does she have for you?

PM: I don't think she has any nickname really. No, it's just Bob. Bob and Haze, Bob and Haze.

ROBERTSON: We've had this little funny one, of course, you probably won't mention it. She recently had some cosmetic surgery, I'm surprised she told anyone. Is that part of the necessity, is it?

PM: Well I mean, she didn't set out to make an announcement, it became known. She felt it appropriate to be straightforward about it and that's one of the things about her which is so attractive I think that she is a straightforward person.

ROBERTSON: Do you think she needed the facelift?

PM: Well I didn't think personally. I think she's very attractive. I mean I don't think she looks nearly sixty, she's in her sixtieth year and I think she's remarkably well preserved. But this is a personal thing and I think what she said was right, if people, not just Hazel, but if people feel that they are going to feel more comfortable doing it, then by all means if they're in a position to do it. She had my full support in doing it and still has.

ROBERTSON: I didn't think she needed it. Pass that on to her will you?

PM: That's very kind of you.

ROBERTSON: Well that might make her feel bad now that she did it. She should've rung me first.

PM: No, no, ...

ROBERTSON: Now the media. You've been very clever with the media over the years. I was given a list of instructions of how to deal with you.

PM: Were you?

ROBERTSON: Of course.

PM: I bet you screwed it up and took no notice of it at all.

ROBERTSON: Well I bore it in mind, but I thought, well if you wanted to play a game or whatever that's entirely up to you. You're boss man. They said that you'd try intimidating me earlier on to try and get the trump cards, that you can change very quickly from suddenly snapping or what have you. Is this a conscious thing that you've got to be in charge all the time regardless of the questions or is it just what the media seem to bring out in you?

PM: No. Well, I mean if we rolled the tape on what we've been doing here I think you'd see I don't feel any compulsion to be in charge. But what I do feel a compulsion about is to have integrity from the interviewer. If someone plays games with me, then they'll find the sharp Hawke.

ROBERTSON: Have any defeated you? I mean are there a few that you'd rather not talk to again?

PM: I cannot recall anyone who's defeated me. I think however that the sharpness of my reaction at times where I've been confronted with something that I've thought is not proper that that may not have won me the points. But I've been satisfied that if I'm faced with some crap or some lies, then I just don't take crap and lies lying down. I deal with it. It doesn't necessarily mean you always win the points I suppose.

ROBERTSON: It must be very difficult for you, you've been in the limelight for a long time, to know that anything you say is taken down and used in evidence, out of context, years later. Does that make you very cautious in the way you say some things? Does it make you slow down what you say, or use words that are general and non specific? I mean, how do you defend yourself?

PM: I suppose at the margin you do that Clive. But I've taken the view in public life and I've been in it now for nearly 30 years. I went to the ACTU in 1958 as advocate and I started my first case in '59 so that's 30 years now. Really, I've operated on the principle in public life, say it as you see it, say it as you feel, you'll get some losses at times if you do that but overall in the end I think people - I hope though what they say is 'well, when you've got Hawkie you're getting it as it is from him'. I think if you try to be too - let me just qualify it. Every politician at times has got to be a little bit careful. There is not a politician alive that doesn't have to be. But basically I call it as I see it.

ROBERTSON: The most unflappable man I have seen on television has got to be Paul Keating. He could tell us the end of the world is coming next week and phrase it in such a way that we wouldn't worry. Do you admire that in him, that unflappability?

PM: Yes, it's not just that, there are many things I admire in Paul Keating.

ROBERTSON: Is that a coldness though, his unflappability? I mean, he doesn't have your, there's been no opportunity for us to see your ability with the common man in Keating. Is that something he should work on?

PM: I'm on record as saying that I think Paul probably needs to try to get a bit more time to get around, but that's been said in a very positive sense. I just take the view that in terms of his professional capacity as a Treasurer, he is easily the best Treasurer Australia has had and one of the best that's around. He's so absorbed with that that he doesn't have very much time for these other things. I think that he understands that as time goes on he wants to find a bit more time to do that.

ROBERTSON: Does he want to find time to be Prime Minister do you think?

PM: Yes, of course he does. That's a perfectly legitimate ambition on his part.

ROBERTSON: But not now?

PM: No, no we have a very clear and amicable understanding. I don't think our relations have been better than they are now, at any stage.

ROBERTSON: What's his clock collection like?

PM: I haven't seen it all, but what I've seen is very impressive. It's a great tribute to Paul, he is self educated in this area as in most areas. He left school very early and his knowledge of economics is colossal. Self-taught, he had an intuitive understanding of finance

PM (cont): and economics which he's honed up and in this area of his passion for that period, it's not only clocks but he's extremely well read and articulate on the history, the art, the culture, the politics of that 19th century period and it is something which he's also turned to his advantage in that he got in early and these things are valuable.

ROBERTSON: Like everything If you had to write a reference for Mr Howard, now I want you to be charitable here, forget about politics. If you had to write a reference, literally a reference for Mr Howard, what would you write?

PM: That's a good question. If I had to be absolutely fair I would say that John Howard is a hard-working assiduous man. I think that's true. That he, if it had to be honest, it would have to have the warts as well as the pluses, ... the hard-working and the assiduous is there, that I think that any person he worked for, outside of politics, he'd be loyal to. I mean he tried to get Andrew's job and so that's fair enough, I tried to get Bill's job. If I was writing a reference for him outside of politics I believe he would be loyal to those for whom he worked. So that's it - assiduous, hard-working, loyalty, commitment. Those things I'd refer to.

ROBERTSON: It's not bad.

PM: Well, I don't think he'd come to me for a reference.

ROBERTSON: No that was my next question but I think you've probably pre-empted that. A lot of true blue Labor voters say Hawke is not a Whitlam. Whitlam was the last of the real Labor type Prime Ministers, that you've gone a bit to the right. Do you find that there are shoes there that you're still trying to fit into or - ?

PM: Certainly not. May I say that they don't say that to me. There was a period I think when there was some thought that when we had to do a lot of the tough things that we weren't historically Labor because the truth is that the Hawke Labor Government is squarely in the historical Labor tradition. I'm not talking about the Whitlam position, I'm talking about the historical Labor tradition. I mean, what is the Labor tradition so that we don't waffle. Let's get down to the realities. The tradition of Labor is that the resources of the country should be used to give the ordinary person, those not born with privilege, the best possible chance. Now, how have we done that? Well in obvious ways we've done it, without going into a long political spiel, but just going to the guts of it. Jobs - no kid or person is going to have a chance of developing if they haven't got a job. So we've created 1.3 million jobs which is four times faster than Fraser and Howard. It's more than twice as fast as the rest of the world. No Labor Government has ever done that, but then secondly and what was fundamental for me, I said it at the beginning, one thing we are going

PM (cont): to change is that no kid, if we can help it, is going to be able to be denied the opportunity of education because they come from lower income parents. When we came to office, 36 percent of kids stayed on in school, one of the worst in the western world. It's now 58 percent and we'll have it up to 65 percent at the beginning of the And we've done that by pouring money in, it used to be \$23 the secondary education allowance for lower income and middle incomes, it's gone up now to \$50. So the kids from working class families and middle income families who are not going on to school and who are therefore being denied for the rest of their life Clive, the rest of their life, the opportunity of developing their talents Now that's what a decent Government, a decent Labor Government is about. Those sorts of things.

ROBERTSON: I might mention, since you brought up political issues, there's not much money in the till though. To keep going like this, you'd have to be an idealist won't you?

PM: You can't do everything for people.

ROBERTSON: You really have got troubles financially?

PM: We've got troubles externally. We have a significant debt which is largely in the private sector's hands, but a significant debt. We can't keep going at a level of activity which is going to suck in imports and add to our external -

ROBERTSON: But are we in trouble as such?

PM: No, we've got to be very careful but to say we're in trouble is putting a one sided picture. I mean, you know the rest of the world, I mean I would put this. There is just about every other country in the world would want to swap with Australia. You look at all the pluses we've got.

ROBERTSON: But even so Mr Hawke, if you say it was a domestic situation, you are at home and your kids are at home, right?

PM: Yes.

ROBERTSON: You're the boss of the ACTU and you've got this level of indebtedness for the family. What would you say to the family? You'd say 'we've got to cut down, Bankcard is out, we can't do this, this is the way it is, no more steaks'. That's what you'd do isn't it?

PM: We have been. I mean -

ROBERTSON: You're not actually saying that are you? I asked someone why does Mr Hawke and Mr Keating say this, and they say it's not political expediency to say we're in trouble.

PM: But it's not right to say that we haven't told the message as it should be. I was criticised by a lot of people in my Party before the '87 election for doing just this. They said 'you can't go and tell them things are crook and they've got to pull their belts in'. I said well that's the way it is and I went out and told them. I mean, John Howard was saying here is a \$26 a week tax cut and I said that's irresponsible, we've got to tighten our belts - and we won.

ROBERTSON: I don't see your statement as being emphatic as you say it is. I don't see that you keep reminding us that we're really in trouble.

PM: Because I don't that's the accurate way of putting it, to say that we're in trouble. I've said, just last week when the balance of payments figures came out, I said I'm glad that they're at the lower end, but then I said there's no room for complacency, we've still got to slow things down. We can't keep pulling in imports. That's what I really Why would I be running a tight monetary policy like I am now? I mean it's deadly, a tight monetary policy for a politician. Most people don't like high interest rates, but I've said to them we've got to have a high, tight monetary policy, we've got to have high interest rates to calm things down.

ROBERTSON: Is your mortgage paid off, is it?

PM: Yes, it is.

ROBERTSON: That's nice isn't it?

PM: Well, I'm lucky, but I had to go through the tough times, I really did. I was just thinking the other day, the times that Hazel and I went through, they were tough.

ROBERTSON: Getting onto other things now, as we tend to say, in your travels you have been involved with protocol. Sometimes you don't look terribly comfortable. That's only my perception. Are you?

PM: No, as I was saying in earlier part of the interview, all this pomp and ceremony has never meant anything to me. I always have to have someone there putting me in the right direction. I mean I never get excited about this, it's something that's got to be done. I accept that it's part of the job, but it's not something that I like very much.

ROBERTSON: I'm told that you have, quote, appalling table manners.

PM: That is appallingly untrue.

ROBERTSON: Well why do they say that?

PM: Who's they?

ROBERTSON: I knew you'd say that. I'm not going to reveal it. I'll tell you later.

PM: Will you? OK. It may be that people are referring to the fact that I'm not a diner outer and this business of spending hours at a dining table gives me the irates. I mean people on the dinner circuit, the restaurant circuit - count me out. It just is something that I've never ever been interested in.

ROBERTSON: Well what does that do to you when you're there and you have to be there?

PM: Well, I hope I can make interesting conversation but I really find sitting around at a table for hours and hours, it just is not something that grabs me and perhaps that feeling has come through to people.

ROBERTSON: Now you are looking very fit.

PM: Never felt better.

ROBERTSON: You are looking fit and ... reflect on this, I was saying to someone, I said 'gee he's fit'. I said 'yes well who wants a sick tired old Prime Minister, bad for moral'. How do you keep fit?

PM: Thanks to Hazel basically. She's got me on to the body is just a machine. I mean, with a motor engine you wouldn't put crap into it because you know that run down. This is a much more sophisticated machine our body, so what you put into it really determines to a very large extent how you'll operate and function and Hazel's really got me on to the sensible dietary regime and I get a fair bit of exercise so if you get good intake and exercise and once you put your head down you can go to sleep, which I can.

ROBERTSON: How much sleep would you have on average?

PM: It varies. I suppose when things are pretty tight and tough, six hours perhaps. But I can go on less than that for nights as long as I can grab eight or nine.

ROBERTSON: What's the nicest thing anyone has ever said about you? Forget about modesty now, but the way you have evolved. The nicest thing.

PM: The nicest thing I've had said to me was by a lady, I was out in the hustings some time ago and she said to me, it's the thing I want to feel and I think she said 'Australia is a better place now'. She said we like one another now more than we used to before you came'.

ROBERTSON: It's nice isn't it?

PM: It's what I hope, that's what I hope the judgement will be and to have it said by this lady was beaut.

ROBERTSON: You've heard of Dame Nellie Melba haven't you?

PM: Yes, I have.

ROBERTSON: She kept leaving. I wonder when you're going to - not throw in the towel, what's the expression? Retire perhaps ... Would you retire too?

PM: Well, I've gone on record as saying I'd like to get on that side of the table on television. I really do, I don't have a great compulsion to write a book but I have had the opportunity Clive in this position of meeting a whole range of people around the world and in this country who, in my judgement, have been significant in changing things or creating the conditions for change, have influenced people and events. I would love to do a series of interviews with some of these people on television so that I could share with millions of other people my understanding of the influence of those people.

ROBERTSON: I wonder if you'd be a pussy cat as an interviewer?

PM: I hope what I'd be is that people wouldn't know Bob Hawke was there. I think that's -

ROBERTSON: The means, not the end?

PM: Yes, my model of an interviewer was Freeman in Face to Face. Remember the BBC series about 20 odd years ago. Brilliantly well informed and researched, didn't have a script there, question A,B,C ... He just flowed because he knew enough about it, flowed with the interviewee and so what was coming across was the interviewee. I think the big mistake with interviewers Clive is that they try and project themselves. The secret of interviewing is to know the subject so that you can get that person there giving out what they've got to say.

ROBERTSON: A couple of ancillary questions here about the new Parliament House. I won't ask you how we can afford it in the light of things but it's there. It appears now you can drive straight in and not have the confrontation on the steps which is a thing we miss. You might not always miss it, but it's not a bad vehicle for covering the events of the day. Do you miss that at all?

PM: No, basically because I've substituted for it. I mean it wasn't good for the media, it wasn't good for me. It was physically and, in every sense, it was crazy. So what we've substituted there, they are happy about it and I am, is that we pretty regularly have the meeting inside, in a press conference situation, I think it's better.

ROBERTSON: Inside I gather there's a \$90 million circa, \$90 million setup of television cameras everywhere. Is that going to herald one day having parliament broadcast?

PM: Well my view about it is that I think it would be a good idea, but I don't know whether people will want it or not. But my own view is that I think it ought to be and this is a purely personal view. I'm not talking about the Party or the Government or the Parliament. I think it ought to be televised and so that the stations could make their judgement about how much they wanted to show. I don't know that people would want to have it on permanently but it ought to be capable of being televised permanently so that it could be televised. I think the only thing you'd have to watch then in fairness, is that it wasn't just dramatically spectacular grabs of grubby stuff. I mean that would be a bit unfair to the institution and it would be to any human being. I mean just to get the bad stuff is to project the wrong image. So I think you need to get some balance.

ROBERTSON: Well it would be a nice justification for the money spent on what's already there wouldn't it?

PM: Yes, I think -

ROBERTSON: Why was it put in, for that -

PM: On the assumption that it would be used, that people would want it televised at some stage I think.

ROBERTSON: Final question. What is it that really moves you in the world? That always gets to you? Mine is reading poetry. I can't read poetry without crying. What's your emotional Achilles heel?

PM: Hurt. I can't stand seeing, particularly people who can't I can't stand people being hurt, and hurt particularly unfairly. If I see a child being hurt, my emotions come up. That's the thing that hurts me. Hurt.

ROBERTSON: Mr Hawke, thank you.

PM: Thanks Clive.

ends