



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MICKEY DE STOOP, ABC RADIO,
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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

DE STOOP: ... Bob Hawke visiting Newcastle today and we're fortunate enough to be able to catch him before he jumps in his chopper or his plane ... bring him up here. We're talking to him from Sydney. Good morning to you Mr Hawke. Would you please bring some sunshine. Our SES workers need a break.

PM: Yes, it's been terrible hasn't it. Not just in Newcastle but all round this region. Awful. I reckon you're starting to get webbed feet eh?

DE STOOP: What we're finding out now is the poor devils who thought that perhaps they'd got away through the earthquake without too much damage are discovering that there are all sorts of problems now that the rain is hitting.

PM: Yes, it is devastating. I just hope it clears up.

DE STOOP: Could you believe it Mr Hawke when you first came up here and saw the devastation?

PM: No, it was frightening. The thing that struck me about it too Mickey was how capricious it was. You'd see a building devastated then apparently next to it relatively unscathed. There was no pattern about it at all. But overall the impression was certainly one of devastation. I felt so, well just so terribly sad for the people who had suffered. The second impression of course was about the spirit of Newcastle. Quite magnificent the way people rallied around and worked and tried to help those who'd been, who'd either lost their loved ones or suffered damage. It was magnificent.

DE STOOP: Does this mean that you're going to make a big announcement of an injection of federal funds today?

PM: Well Mickey, what we've done is to really meet with the Premier. As you know I met with him very quickly afterwards and said well don't let's muck around and keep people in suspense about this. We have agreed that we will share all expenditures on the agreed measures equally and that we'll show greater than usual flexibility in applying some of the conditions, in

particular to concessional loans for both direct and indirect loss of business to assist the private sector. So we've agreed on that principle and we'll go about the business now of seeing what has to be done.

DE STOOP: I think a lot of people now are feeling that Newcastle has been abandoned. There is that feeling that no-one gives a damn now. They did at first but they don't now.

PM: There's no basis - as far as my Government is concerned there's absolutely no basis for that.

DE STOOP: So we will be seeing money coming through at a

PM: The actual payment of assistance is done by the NSW Government. They have local offices where, as we often don't have them there, and we will then be actually sharing the payments with them. But the actual outlets will be through the NSW Government offices.

DE STOOP: Ok, well onto the big issue today and I'd be delighted if you'd break it on my program of course. But I think I've got buckleys. When are we going to the polls?

PM: Yes you're right Mickey, you've got buckleys.

DE STOOP: No hints?

PM: No hints mate.

DE STOOP: When will Parliament sit next?

PM: When it's called Mickey.

DE STOOP: Any likelihood of an announcement today though, quite seriously?

PM: No. No likelihood of an announcement today Mickey, no.

DE STOOP: No? Next couple of days?

PM: It'll be sometime in the future. Good try, good try Mickey.

DE STOOP: What about by the end of this week?

PM: I don't know. I'll just have to consider the options. But obviously, in one sense, the continued speculation is not something I particularly appreciate. So I wouldn't want to be waiting for a thousand years to announce it.

DE STOOP: I think everybody wants to be put out of their misery now, particularly journalists.

PM: I thought you were going to say particularly Andrew.

DE STOOP: Put out of his misery?

PM: No, no, I didn't say that.

DE STOOP: Actually he hasn't done too well in the polls today. How do you feel about John Howard's position right now? How would you be feeling if you were John Howard?

PM: Well it's always the same with the Liberal Party. I mean they've got such a depth of talent. They have this fiddler's elbow in and out, in and out exercise with Howard and Peacock. When Howard's in he's declared unelectable, he's the most unpopular bloke in the business and Andrew Peacock looks attractive to them. But then they put the Peacock in and the reverse happens. He goes down and Mr Howard - by contrast Mr Peacock looks attractive. By comparison to one another they seem attractive apparently.

DE STOOP: On the other side you've got Hawke and Keating. How thrilled were you that John Button again prompted the idea that Paul Keating will take over if Labor wins another term?

PM: That was a nothing. As you know, it was a nothing. He had some aberration, didn't know what he was talking about. I'll be leading the Party in the election and through the next period.

DE STOOP: Is that sort of thing embarrassing for you though, or annoying at least?

PM: No. It was just a legless creature, that particular episode. A whole lot of people tried to stitch some legs on it. But it being without life and without substance, the legs refused to be attached. It didn't move.

DE STOOP: What do you say to someone like John Button, or John Kerin for that matter when they come out with statements like this that obviously must be of some sort of concern to you? What happens behind the closed doors? You can't put them on detention or anything can you?

PM: No. I've said a few words to John and I don't think you'll be finding any more problems from him.

DE STOOP: He wasn't stood in the corner for half an hour?

PM: No. There was no point in doing that. He got the message quite loud and clear.

DE STOOP: Onto a couple of personal things now. How's your health? A lot of people are saying at the moment you're tired.

PM: Eh?

DE STOOP: A lot of people have got the impression at the moment that you're feeling tired.

PM: No. Where'd you get that from? No-one's saying that at all.

DE STOOP: Janine Haines said it on the program the other day.

PM: Janine Haines. You're joking. The opposite is true. Everyone is saying that they've never seen me looking better. That's how I feel. I feel great.

DE STOOP: So you're in tip-top form at the moment?

PM: Absolutely.

DE STOOP: Fit as a fiddle?

PM: Fit as a fiddle.

DE STOOP: How are you feeling after watching 60 minutes last night?

PM: Proud of my wife.

DE STOOP: Yes, she came over well didn't she. But were either of you expecting it to be taken, the angle used where we saw headlines yesterday morning 'Hazel Hawke - I wanted a divorce' and that sort of thing being plastered over everything.

PM: Yes. It was pretty crappy sort of media handling I thought. Because as Hazel made it quite clear, what she'd done at a rather difficult period was to find out what the options were. But she never initiated anything. Quite properly in those circumstances had a look at her options. But still that's I suppose a way you sell newspapers isn't it?

DE STOOP: Do you ask to see - I was just curious when I was watching it last night, I wondered if you get to vet anything?

PM: No, of course not. I would never dream of asking to vet anything she was doing. I mean any more than - I mean we're equals. She doesn't seek to vet what I'm doing. Why would I ever seek to vet what she's doing?

DE STOOP: It's just that it is the Prime Minister y'know. It just occurred to me -

PM: Hey listen. When we get up and talk about equality we mean it. It's not something we say and don't mean. I would never think of vetting what she was going to do.

DE STOOP: Do you think most people care anyway? I mean most of us go through a tough patch somewhere in relationships. Do you think the majority of people really care that there might have been a hiccup for a period of time?

PM: I wouldn't think they would now. I think they would be interested in what the state of our relationship is. And it's manifest how good that is. But I think history in this respect is not of great interest to most of them.

DE STOOP: Ok, well onto international things now. Nelson Mandela has been released. Everything seems to be happening very quickly in the world at the moment doesn't it. But this is the latest in great moves, in my view anyway. But what does it mean to us and does it mean we will be lifting sanctions with South Africa?

PM: It means the stage has been set where we can consider what the next steps are in that regard. We'll be having a meeting with Commonwealth Foreign Ministers on South Africa, a committee that was established back in 1987. They'll be meeting in May. I think that will be a time when there'll be the first formal review. I think the right way of putting it is that the stage, as I've said before, that by the actions of President de Klerk the stage has been set for negotiations between the government of South Africa and the representatives of the black population. And that is something that we ought to welcome. I have welcomed it. The next thing is the actual negotiations. If the government of South Africa is serious now about negotiating towards the creation of a democratic multi-racial non-apartheid South Africa then of course if they are prepared to have those negotiations then we ought to be looking at the lifting of sanctions. But as someone said when I was in New Zealand, on this issue, 'you don't get gold medals in the heats'. What has happened is that they have certainly done some important and necessary preliminary work. We'd be churlish, as I've said, if we didn't recognise that.

DE STOOP: But a little cynical about the timing?

PM: No, I'm not cynical. I think that President de Klerk is operating under considerable difficulties with a lot of the white population in South Africa. I think he's given evidence that he is serious about trying to move towards change. The important thing is, is he going to do it? Is he going to complete the process? I mean the worst thing in the world would be to make these decisions but then keep the actual practice of apartheid in place. That's not acceptable. But, as I say, he does seem to be serious about moving to meaningful negotiations.

DE STOOP: Without trying to trivialise it, it would be a great period for cricket wouldn't it?

PM: Well, I think it would be great not only for cricket but great for all forms of contact. I don't like to see a situation where a country of that size and importance is isolated. As I've said always, we see no virtue in sanctions as such. They've always been seen simply as a measure to bring South Africa to the negotiating table. And they have obviously worked. No-one will be happier than me when the time comes that we can with confidence lift them so that we can meet them on the sporting field, the cultural field and in every other medium of contact.

DE STOOP: I thought about you when you were over in Auckland because last time, well a couple of times ago that we were speaking I asked you who you would really enjoy and who you do enjoy sitting down to at a dinner table, considering that quite frequently you're stuck with people that you probably don't particularly want to spend a whole evening with. You said one of the most fascinating people for you is the Queen.

PM: Well she is, to me, an important person. Given the unique nature of the Commonwealth, when you think of it, here is an organisation which covers so much of the world's population, from the second largest nation in India down to tiny specks of atolls in the Pacific, from rich nations to the poorest nations, every colour, creed you can imagine. An important part of keeping that organisation together has quite frankly been the commitment, involvement and personality of the Queen. She is remarkably well-informed about her Commonwealth. She can speak intelligently about every nation within it. She's given a sense of unification and continuum to it which I think very few people could've done. She also has a good sense of humour.

DE STOOP: Yes you said that. So you had a chance to sort of chat while you were over in Auckland?

PM: Yes. I had, well I was sitting with her in the stadium for a while but then we, I had a private audience with her later on on the Saturday afternoon. We had a very delightful yarn as usual.

DE STOOP: Terrific. One quick thing. You're coming up to Newcastle. Do you think you've been forgiven for the frigates yet?

PM: I don't think it's a question of being forgiven. I don't think Newcastle people when they came to think about it would forgive me as Prime Minister, any more than the rest of Australia would, if I made a decision on a wrong basis. And there was no doubt that on the basis of the economics of it that that was the correct decision. But it was a decision which also involved an

enormous increase in jobs and investment for Newcastle. And I'm pleased to see the investment plans that there are in a whole range of industries for the Hunter region, not just Newcastle but for the region. It has a very very bright future. That pleases me because I have a very soft spot for the people of Newcastle and that region.

DE STOOP: Have a great day up here. Thanks for your time on the program. And you won't be tempted to sample the wine?

PM: No, it's ten years Mickey, ten years.

DE STOOP: Congratulations. Have a good day. Bye

PM: Bye.

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