

TELEVISION INTERVIEW ON ATN-7 BETWEEN THE
PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. SIR ROBERT
MENZIES AND MR. RICHARD CROLL, ON SUNDAY,
27TH OCTOBER, 1963

MR. CROLL -- Sir Robert, coming right down to tin tacks, you are having an election now, are you not, because you feel you will win?

SIR ROBERT -- Well, I hope I'll win. That's not the only reason for having an election, but it is a very good one.

MR. CROLL -- You said last week that you thought you might lose eighteen months ago. Do you feel possibly you might have lost in a year's time?

SIR ROBERT -- Well, nobody can look ahead for a year. All sorts of things can happen in a year with a Government that has a majority of one.

MR. CROLL -- Would one of the things that might happen, Sir, in the year be a credit squeeze?

SIR ROBERT -- I don't think so. In fact, I'm quite sure it won't.

MR. CROLL -- A number of economists and Mr. Calwell as well have said they feel it will happen. Do you feel that there are boom conditions at present?

SIR ROBERT -- No, but I think the conditions are good, that they are improving. I don't expect them to reach boom conditions at all. After all, we have all learned a good deal from past experience.

MR. CROLL -- This is suppositional, Sir: If they did, would you hesitate in putting a credit squeeze on again?

SIR ROBERT -- I don't answer hypothetical questions of that kind because of course, you see, the moment I said "Yes" - and I don't say "Yes - it would be said: "There you are". I don't contemplate that there is any real possibility of anything that could be called a credit squeeze. I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Calwell keeps on repeating this because the right way to create uncertainty in the country is to make that kind of statement.

MR. CROLL -- Now, Sir, undoubtedly the employment position is much better and the economy is more buoyant. You said last week this was due to your wise considerations, but do you feel since it took three years this is likely to have occurred automatically?

PRIME MINISTER -- I don't think so. I think that all policies take a long time to work out. In fact, you have put your finger right on the spot. If a Government wants to have long-term policies and see their working-out for the good of the country, it must have a proper majority. That's why I have said so far as I am concerned in this election, I want a good working majority myself or I want to see the Labour Party have one. I don't want to see any Government in Australia moving along carefully on a precipice because that is inconsistent with long-term planning and long-term policy.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, you said that your Government's activities brought the country back to a state of prosperity that it now enjoys.

SIR ROBERT -- I didn't say that was the only thing.

MR. CROLL -- Would you say that some of these policies, Sir, were Labour policies that you put into effect?

SIR ROBERT - Well, don't ask me to define what is a Labour policy, because I must tell you, as you know, that the Labour policy over the last five years has included everything in heaven or on earth. They've had a go at all things. They've been on every band wagon and so who am I to say that some policy of mine isn't some policy that at some time they have advocated. I wouldn't dream of it. I'm too busy attending to my own.

MR. CROLL -- Becoming more specific, Sir, some of the Labour policies put forward in the 1961 election.

SIR ROBERT -- No, I think there has been a great misapprehension about that. I don't think there is any real comparison, to say the policies they put forward in 1961 were the policies we were adopting in 1962. They had a superficial resemblance. They are quite different in fact.

MR. CROLL -- In February, 1962, you decided on special State unemployment grants, housing grants, increased Government spending, extra endowment, tax rebates, motor vehicle sales tax reductions. Now, wouldn't you say, Sir, that they do follow the 1961 election policies put forward by the Labour Party?

SIR ROBERT -- I don't think so. As I tell you, who am I to pick out from Labour policies what is the policy and what isn't. Why the other day I think Mr. Calwell was saying very heartily that the Labour Party would increase the Defence expenditure. This is marvellous. This has all the charm of novelty. But I have only to go back to Dr. Evatt to find that he wanted to reduce the then Defence vote by £40M. So what?

MR. CROLL -- But, Sir, didn't you say yourself to Mr. Calwell the other day - "Let's not go back to 1956."

SIR ROBERT -- Did I?

MR. CROLL -- I believe so. You were reported as saying that.

SIR ROBERT -- That's a different thing. I think he asked me whether I remembered some particular statement in 1956. I don't undertake to remember everything I said.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, coming to what Mr. Calwell said about Malaysia in last week's interview on this station. Last Sunday, Mr. Calwell said he would defend Malaysia under an emergency situation but in long terms they wanted an agreement, a treaty. Do you feel that this is unfair?

SIR ROBERT -- I feel that this is, of course, a complete change of front on his part.

MR. CROLL -- But do you feel it is unfair, Sir?

SIR ROBERT -- No, what he's doing there is, in the first place, lining up for the first time with what I said, that if Malaysia were attacked so that its independence was threatened, we would join with Great Britain in defending Malaysia.

SIR ROBERT -- He didn't say "yes" to that when I made the statement
(Contd.) in the House. I gather from you that he has now said
"Yes" to it. If so, that's a great advance in his
thinking. The second thing that he said in the House
that he has now repeated is that he wants a treaty, a
mutual treaty. Now, what does that mean? A treaty
with Malaysia, under which we help Malaysia and
Malaysia helps us, presumably a military alliance.
He knows as well as I do and as well as you do that
Malaysia will not make a military alliance; it
insists upon being an unaligned country. Its attitude
in that respect is just like the attitude of India.
It is no use asking an unaligned country to abandon its
most important national policy just to make a treaty
with us.

MR. CROLL -- On the other hand, Sir, if Malaysia would make a
treaty with you, would you accept it?

SIR ROBERT -- Yes. I regard that, of all the academic questions
I have ever heard, the most academic because Malaysia won't.

MR. CROLL -- But is there any reason why we should commit troops
to Malaysia if she won't make a treaty with us?

SIR ROBERT -- Every reason because the existence of Malaysia is,
I think, of very great importance to us. Very great. The
defence of Australia, for a start, is not to be conducted on
the Australian coastline. It is very important that there
should be a strong, powerful, independent country lying across
that part of the world. Very important.

MR. CROLL -- So drawing these threads together, it means then
that both parties would go to the help of Malaysia in an
emergency; both parties would accept a treaty if it were
offered, the only difference being that you feel Malaysia
wouldn't offer a treaty whereas Mr. Calwell would like to
push for a treaty.

SIR ROBERT -- Well, I am sorry to have to correct a great deal
of that. You tell me now that both parties will go to the
defence of Malaysia - that has never been said in the House
either by Mr. Calwell or any of his members. That's point
No. 1.

MR. CROLL -- Did he not say it in his speech in September, Sir?

SIR ROBERT -- No, he did not. Point No. 2 : I say I am not
going to ask Malaysia for a treaty because I am not going to
ask for the impossible. I know a great deal about the Malaysian
policy. I know the views of the Tunku and I know that it is
just not on, and to say we are prepared to make a treaty when
you can't get one is, I think, misleading. So that our
positions are not identical. Mr. Calwell in the House said,
"The condition of our going to the help of Malaysia is a
treaty." That's a very different matter.

MR. CROLL -- I thought that Mr. Calwell in the House, Sir, said
that he would go to the help of Malaysia in an emergency.
They thought it was a very important thing. However, they had
amended their election platform as it stood.....

SIR ROBERT -- He said this to you last week. He didn't say it
in the House.

MR. CROLL -- I was merely thinking of my reading through of his remarks in the House on that date.

SIR ROBERT -- I read them through with loving care to find out whether he had ever said that. No.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, passing on to the Naval Communications Base. Mr. Calwell said that the Labour Government wants joint control. Now, would you say this is unfair?

SIR ROBERT -- I would say that this is wrong. First of all, the United States of America would not have agreed to establish this base at its own cost - and it is a very very expensive one, running into scores of millions. The United States would not have been prepared to do that if it had if it had been at the price of joint control; that is to say, not consultation - because we have always agreed about that, but a joint control in the sense that both parties would have to consult each other before messages should be sent out in time of war. For all I know, both parties should be able to have a censorship of the kind of message sent out. Now this, of course, is unworkable.

MR. CROLL -- And yet Mr. Calwell says that in his talks in America, the Defence chiefs are quite willing to renegotiate the treaty.

SIR ROBERT -- Well, I understood that he said that. I have no evidence of it.

MR. CROLL -- You disbelieve his words, do you?

SIR ROBERT -- Well I do, quite frankly. You first of all, of course, have to define "Defence chiefs". I've known people who have had an earnest yarn with a serjeant-major down the street and who then can give you the military view. We deal with the American Administration.

MR. CROLL -- If the American Administration did grant joint control, would you accept it?

SIR ROBERT -- Certainly.

MR. CROLL -- Then, you feel it would be better for us to have joint control?

SIR ROBERT -- No, I do not.

MR. CROLL -- Well, why.....

SIR ROBERT -- I do not. If they want it, we'll have it, but what you have got to get into your mind is if that had been the condition, we wouldn't have this state. Neither would I offer joint control in their place. They are using this as a signalling station. They are spending a vast mass of money on it. They are the people who are the sheet anchor of our defence in the event of a war. Why should they put themselves at the mercy of a veto by an Australian Government?

MR. CROLL -- Why then, Sir, was not all this put in the agreement?

SIR ROBERT -- All what put in the agreement?

MR. CROLL -- That they want sole control.

SIR ROBERT -- But this is in the agreement.

MR. CROLL -- Sole control?

SIR ROBERT -- Yes. The whole terms of the agreement are quite elaborate.

MR. CROLL -- The whole terms of the agreement - do they not say that there is no necessity for sole control. In fact, do they not say that.....

SIR ROBERT -- My dear boy, an agreement is not an argument. It is a document, a legal document, and the agreement excludes joint control, and there it is. If the Opposition comes in and wants to renegotiate this contract, very well, it will.

MR. CROLL -- This is once again a case in which Mr. Calwell was not telling the truth in a statement in the House?

SIR ROBERT -- Look, I don't use language of that kind. I am not here to call anybody a liar. I am just stating what I know because I deal at the administrative level, not with some vague person described as a Defence authority or something of that sort. That is the difference between being in Government and being in Opposition.

MR. CROLL -- Your statement is at variance then with Mr. Calwell's?

SIR ROBERT -- Definitely.

MR. CROLL -- Passing on to defence, Sir, and the new bombers that have just been ordered, why is it that they took so long when Mr. Osborne, your Air Minister in 1960, said that they were of immediate importance then?

SIR ROBERT -- Well, could I answer that question by putting this to you. There is a great argument going on at present in some quarters that we should have taken the TSR-2, whereas we have in fact taken the TFX. If we had dealt with this matter in 1960, it wouldn't have accelerated the result because both the TSR-2 and the TFX are still on the drawing board and have been for a considerable period of time. What would we have got in 1960? You don't go along and buy aircraft (I only wish you could) off the shelf - good ones, up-to-date ones.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, it has been said that the Canberra has been obsolete since 1949. Surely we could have got something that was a little more up to date.

SIR ROBERT -- I can see you are a great reader of Mr. Calwell or perhaps of Mr. Whitlam. Let me tell you and tell everybody else that the Canberra couldn't have been obsolete in 1949 because the Canberra prototype flew for the first time in 1951 and I was in England and they asked me to go out to Biggin Hill and christen it "Canberra". That was the first Canberra - 1951. Now, I might think that you are obsolete at the age of one, but I wouldn't have thought you were obsolete at the age of minus two or three years.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, might I make an amendment to that. Firstly, I have been reading Mr. Calwell because this is a reply to what Mr. Calwell said last week and secondly that was my mistake because 1949 should have read 1959 and Mr. Osborne made his remarks in 1960.

SIR ROBERT -- Oh, but you share the mistake because Mr. Calwell himself said that the Canberra was obsolete in 1949. If the position is that he made a trifling error of ten years, well that's a great weight off my mind.

MR. CROLL -- Sir, it doesn't make any difference to the fact, however, that three years have elapsed since it was decided that it should be of immediate importance and it is only weeks before the election before something was done.

SIR ROBERT -- Well, I don't agree with you that it is three years since it was decided that it was of immediate importance. A great discussion has been going on about this and expert advice has changed from time to time. For a long period of time we were told that Priority No. 1 should be the fighter and we now, of course, find ourselves coming into possession of the Mirage which is the best fighter, by common consent, in the world. Then we began some time ago to investigate the possibility of an ultimate replacement for the Canberra. People talk about the Canberra as if it were obsolete. It isn't. It is in a great deal of use in many countries of the world, but we said, "Well, now, we will consider whether we can get a reconnaissance bomber which will be an effective modern replacement, supersonic, for the Canberra and we sent a mission around the world months ago - I announced it months ago - to make an evaluation, and as a matter of fact, I brought with me this morning, by a piece of intelligent anticipation.....

MR. CROLL -- Sir, I wonder if I might interrupt there because the programme is nearly over.

SIR ROBERT -- Well, I won't quote it.

MR. CROLL -- One final question and that is how much will the new American bomber cost us?

SIR ROBERT -- The new American bomber will cost very very considerably less than the TSR-2, on any modified terms, would have cost. The difference, I am not at present allowed to say the precise figure. I'll have to discuss with Mr. Townley when he comes back next week, but I can say this, that the difference between the cost of the one and the cost of the other so much favours the TFX with its much bigger orders, of course, that they give in America, so much favours it that no government could have accepted the responsibility of spending the taxpayers' money except in the purchase of the TFX.

MR. CROLL -- Thank you very much indeed, Sir Robert Menzies.
