

TELEVISION INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON, FOR
CHANNEL 10 NETWORK

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Interviewer: Michael Peterson

Q. Prime Minister, what do you see as being the issues which will win and lose votes on October 25?

PM. I don't know what will win and lose votes but I think the issues that are important are the questions of the different approaches to defence by the Labor Party and ourselves - defence and foreign affairs, the responsibility of the suggestions I made to the Australian people as to how their general levels of living can be increased and their judgment as to whether wild irresponsible promises are made or sensible promises are made.

Q. You speak of foreign affairs, do you see it as being as important as it was in 1966 - Vietnam?

PM. I don't think there will be the same concentration on the question of Vietnam as there was in 1966. I think the reasons why we went there were good and the reasons why we are there are good. This is not something that I would say encompassed the whole of the field of defence. The real differences as I see them are, for example, that the Opposition would reduce the size of our army by one-third because they would abolish National Service training. They would pull out the Navy, Air Force and Army from our association with Malaya and Singapore. They would, I think, weaken the ANZUS alliance by arguing in a pettifogging way about the establishment of bases in Australia for our joint defence. Matters of this kind, I think, are more important.

Q. You are also completely on the opposite side of the fence to them with nuclear non-proliferation, aren't you?

PM. Completely. We believe that we should not sign this treaty until we are assured that other countries have also all signed, and also that we have proper protection for Australia, something we can really rely on. I am shorthanding because there are other matters as to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, inspection of our defence sites and things of that kind. They would rush in to sign it straight away, and hope for the best for the future. That I think is the difference.

Q. Still on defence - the DLP bases a great deal of thinking on defence. Are you concerned in any way that the DLP might withdraw preferences?

PM. I would be disturbed. It would be a pity from our point of view if the DLP withdrew their preferences. But we can't tailor our policies to what any other party wants. I don't quite know how the DLP could with honour and principle support a party that would immediately withdraw all troops from Vietnam, that would immediately sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, that would immediately withdraw all forces from Malaya, that would immediately abolish National Service training. It seems to me that these fly directly in the face of what they would expect to happen. But this is for them to decide.

Q. But would you expect, though, that their preferences would all go your way again because of these reasons, because they might not like your foreign policy but they liked the ALP's a lot less?

PM. I cannot see how it is possible for them not to dislike the ALP's defence and foreign policies far more than they dislike ours. Now it is for them to decide what they will do. One of the items in this field which has never really been worked out is that we have said that we think we must defend Australia, we must show that we are prepared to take action ourselves to bring up our own defence forces, to build them up if we are to expect support from the United States or the United Kingdom for that matter. There has never been an indication from the Labor side of the House what their approach to defence would be, except that they would abolish National Service training and except that they would do these other things I have mentioned. Whether they would devote resources to it or not, I don't know and nobody else in Australia does.

Q. Still on the DLP and how they may or may not support you on certain things. If, for instance, and I have posed this to Senator Gair already, they withdrew their preferences and directed them to the ALP, would this almost put you out of office?

PM. I don't think so, no. But it would make a difference to - I can't tell you the number of seats - 6 or 8 seats or something of that kind.

Q. Do you see the possibility - it might be a foolish question to ask - of losing any seats in the House of Representatives this year? In other words, can you repeat 1966?

PM. Well, I don't.....let me put it this way. It would be a very great achievement to repeat 1966 because the 1966 vote was the highest vote that the non-Labor parties have ever received. And since that time at least four of our seats have been adversely affected by redistribution. So if we did repeat 1966, we would be doing better than we did in 1966 and that means we would be doing better than the all-time record. And I hope we do!

Q. There are those political commentators who say if you personally don't repeat 1966, then you have failed to a certain extent. How do you view those comments?

PM. I would think that was rather absurd. If commentators are saying that, what they are saying is if somebody doesn't achieve better than an all-time record, then they have.....

Q. Can we perhaps go back in time to the time when you became Prime Minister. The public image that went out at that stage was of the ex-fighter pilot, one of the boys, etc. The image these days..... my image of you is that you are looking considerably more tired than you were at that time. Are you in fact? Is it taking toll of you physically?

PM. I don't think it's taking toll of me physically - oh, I suppose..... I wouldn't know. It might be to some extent because I have travelled all round Australia almost constantly and spoken to people - I don't know how many meetings we have had this year but something like 80, speaking to people all over the place. But after all this is a fight and even when one was flying aeroplanes as a fighter pilot, one occasionally got tired but one kept on fighting and one did it just as well as ever, and I propose to do it just as well as ever.

Q. Coming to October 25, we've talked a considerable amount about defence, etc. Is this, I take it, the issue - the defence and foreign policy that you would like to go to the electors on?

PM. This is one of the issues which I think will be of most importance in the elections. I hope it will be because I think it is of most importance to Australia. But there are many others as well - questions of development, questions of social welfare and questions of trying to build a society that lives with the greatest amount of national unity that is possible.

Q. Do you see this year - I was just thinking of State Aid and it led me to think of the Independents and people standing on the question of State Aid - do you see it as being a year when maybe an Independent or two could be returned to Parliament?

PM. I don't believe there will be Independents returned to Parliament. No. There will be quite a lot of Independents standing - anti-State Aid people and some group called an Australia Party or something like that. I don't quite know where that springs from but you could regard them almost as Independents. There are a number of others but I would doubt very much whether any of them would in fact get elected.

Q. On the question of State Aid, do you see any point in anyone standing on an anti-State Aid ticket, with the thing being a matter of fact with almost all major parties?

PM. Yes, I see some point in it from their approach. You see, we as a Government are providing aid to independent schools which I think is going to be of great assistance - not to the schools themselves but to the individual pupils who are in those schools, and we are providing it on a different basis from that which is suggested by the Opposition. We are providing much more than the Opposition.

Q. Would you care to explain the basis for it?

PM. Yes, well. May I go back a little when I explain? Previously, when we provided capital grants for science blocks, we divided that money up so that 25 per cent of it went to independent schools and 75 per cent of it went to State schools, because that was the ratio of enrolment. And we did the same thing in libraries when we provided capital grants. Then we looked at the whole field generally and it became quite clear that the vast amount of public money, the vast majority of public money that was going to education was going into the state school system, and that if people were going to go to independent schools, and they are, then it was essential for Australia that they should be well taught and that they should have the facilities for education which they required. So we said, right, we will help the state school system by providing teacher training, by increasing the amounts we are providing for teacher training and in other ways. But we will give a grant per capita to the pupils at independent schools, and not divide it up. To put the thing in a nutshell, the Opposition is prepared to give far less assistance to independent schools than we are prepared to give and at greater cost to the community. So if an anti-State Aid candidate got a significant vote then they could regard that as a vote against the provision of assistance to independent schools.

Q. Can you also draw the line of distinction for us between your policy and that of the ALP on health?

PM. Yes, we hope to retain a voluntary health scheme and to improve the benefits which come from that voluntary health scheme. Now, at the moment the hospital benefits are really no problem. It's the medical benefits which need to be improved. The Opposition proposes to introduce a compulsory scheme and this scheme involves a levy of $1\frac{1}{4}$ per cent, not on the taxation which you pay but on the taxable income you have, which would work out at about an 8 per cent increase in your income tax. For that, the Opposition would give you minimum coverage. And again, to use figures to try and put it in a nutshell, a single man now, once he earned any more than \$52 a week, would be paying more than he is at present for a minimum coverage. But also,

the Opposition scheme means there would be no tax deduction, and taking that into consideration, the result is that a single man who earns more than \$39 a week would be paying much more under the Opposition scheme than he is under ours. A married man earning more than \$63 a week would be paying more for a compulsory scheme giving minimum assurance than the voluntary scheme we now have. Now we believe the voluntary scheme can be improved and we don't think it necessary to put this great impost upon the people which the Opposition proposes to put on them.

Q. In what areas do you figure the current system can be improved?

PM. In the areas of paying doctors' bills and particularly specialist bills and bills for complicated operations.

Q. Still on money matters, it was said after the Budget that it had inflationary tendencies. This was said by many people including the Opposition. Can we look forward to any surprises, anything new in your policy speech to add or subtract from what was drawn up in the Budget?

PM. Well, I don't think it had any inflationary tendencies myself because after all it did draw off about \$500 million as a surplus internally in Australia. It is fascinating that the Opposition should say that it has got inflationary tendencies because as far as I can gather they propose to make available an untold number of additional millions which can only have great inflationary effect unless, of course, they greatly increase taxes.

Q. We have talked about defence. We are now on domestic things. Would you like to see.....I'm sorry. You have already said you would like to talk about defence. Would you figure that the ALP would like to fight this election on domestic issues?

PM. Oh, yes, I think so.

Q. Why is this? For the Australian electorate?

PM. They would like to fight it on domestic issues because they have such a bad defence policy.

Q. In addition, do you feel that the Australian electors understand domestic issues more readily than they do foreign policy?

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Q. In addition, do you feel that the Australian electors understand domestic issues more readily than they do foreign policy?

PM. No, I don't. I think the Australian people have an instinctive feeling and knowledge that we are becoming more and more isolated in the world and therefore we need to build up our own defence forces, not necessarily to fight some other large country but as an indication that we are interested in our own defence and that we are doing something about it and that we are deserving of our Allies to come to our assistance. I believe they have this instinctive feeling. Labor policy is to break down our own defences.

Q. The F-111 comes under defence, and in the last couple of weeks you have made the announcement that we will buy the F-111 subject to conditions. I don't see that as being anything new if it is still subject to conditions. Can you perhaps explain that for me?

PM. Yes, because there were a number of factors concerning the F-111 which were not entirely resolved until the last six or eight months or so, or even less than that. That is whether the range was what we wanted or whether the bomb load was what we wanted. Above all, whether the United States was going to have sufficient aircraft of this kind flying around for the next period of time so that we could get our spare parts whenever we wanted them. This was a very significant factor. The one remaining significant worry, too, was the wing box. Now, we needed a service life for this aircraft which would carry it through into the 1980's. If a wing box wouldn't do that, then some way had to be found by which either new wing boxes were fitted or new wing boxes were developed. Now this has been found and there still remains the testing of these things, but at least we have reached a stage where we know that when a wing box becomes unserviceable it will be replaced at no cost to us.

Q. If, to quote an hypothesis, another F-111 crashed between now and the elections, or one or two, is it delicately enough poised to do harm to the Liberal Government?

PM. You are asking me to make a political judgment on what people would think. . . . but it certainly ought not to be, because the accident record of this aircraft is not bad. People think it is but it has got a better accident record than the Phantom, for example, given the number of hours it has flown, or the Super Sabre or any other of the F-100 series aircraft. It is not a dangerous aircraft at all.

Q. You would agree, I assume, that it has had tremendous publicity and must be something well in the forefront of Australians' minds?

PM. Every time it has had an accident, there has been tremendous publicity - I agree entirely - publicity which has never been directed to any other aircraft as far as I know. I think it would be well in Australians' minds, but what they have to decide is whether they think the Australian Air Force ought to have a strike bomber, whether they think that strike bomber ought to be the best available, and if they do think that, then they must decide that we should buy the F-111 because it is the best available strike bomber in the world today.

Q. Prime Minister, briefly, if you wouldn't mind summing up for us why Australians should vote Liberal on October 25.

PM. I think during the last twenty years under Liberal Governments, Australia has progressed at a pace at which it has never progressed before. I think we have shown that we are responsible, that we are not willing to make wild promises which can't be carried out, except at the expense of the people themselves. I think that if you look at Australia today, you will see that there has never been such a state of full employment, never been such a state of prosperity, never been such a state of opportunity, and I think it would be difficult for the Australian people to risk this by going into the wild schemes which are put forward by the Opposition. Further, I think that the defence of Australia rests better in our hands than in the hands of the Opposition and I believe the arguments put forward on both sides show this clearly. I also feel that sections of the Labor Party - not the Labor Party as a whole - are influenced in their attitudes by Communist-dominated unions affiliated with them and this is completely absent from the Liberal Party itself. On the record, on the existing situation, on the programmes put forward for the future, I think the Australian people should vote Liberal.

Q. Prime Minister, thank you.
