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"THIS WEEK" PROGRAMME

TV INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER

MR. JOHN GORTON

Interviewer : John Boland

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Q. Prime Minister, the last time that I spoke to you on "This Week", Labor looked to be a lot more formidable. You appear since then to have toughened your own mind more away from a liberal ideological attitude which you were thought to have in view of the Prime Ministers we have had in the past. Sir Robert Menzies was more or less a hard-line Liberal and Mr Holt virtually followed on in the same sort of pattern. But you cut defence spending and you gave Billy Wentworth carte blanche on social services and things like this. But now all of a sudden, you have really got down to hard politics almost as though, "Well, I'm Prime Minister and I am going to get stuck into being Prime Minister and this is going to be hard politics from here on in." Now I mention this because two big issues have occurred within recent weeks :- The law and order legislation and of course the very hard line and the way in which you have grappled with Mr Whitlam this week over his statement on the Vietnam issue, particularly in relation to conscripts not wanting to go to Vietnam and what they should do about it.

PM You mean telling them to disobey orders?

Q. Yes. Now is this a pretty fair assessment of a change in John Grey Gorton?

PM I don't think it is at all. In fact I can't see any evidence of moving away from a liberal - (with a small "l") - attitude. Perhaps you would explain why you think there was?

Q. Well, those two points alone....

PM All right. Let's take those two points. One question you called law and order. My approach to that is this, that people have a right to dissent, people have a right to criticise, people have a right to object to what a government is doing and to try and change it or to make a government do something else and they have a right to congregate for that purpose. There is no question of that. In fact I believe that that kind of right of dissent is the sort of right which Liberals, more than anybody else, would want to sustain and would fight to sustain. There is no question of that. But we also believe that there are civil rights for the majority of people in Australia, and that those civil rights should not be infringed by demonstrators preventing the majority from using the streets if they want to use them, or intimidating individuals amongst them, or in any other way violating the civil rights.

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- Q. Is this law and order legislation that you have in mind, is it pretty tough and a little undemocratic in certain areas?
- PM No.....
- Q. Do we need this in Australia - that's the point I'm getting at?
- PM Well let's examine whether we think we need it or not. First of all, of course, the Commonwealth's writ in relation to the making and enforcement of laws does not run in most of the areas in the States. But we had a situation arising where small numbers of people would go into a National Service office and tear up the records, pour ox blood on the floor, terrorise the public servants working there. We had a time when a group of people walked into Mr Snedden's office and locked the door and sat there and abused him and played the camera on him so that if he answered them at all, they could say that he was abusing them. We had instances of stink bombs being let off in post offices which people have a right to use. I think we do need to have sufficient penalties for that kind of action to make that kind of action really punishable.
- Q. Now you want this punishable under Commonwealth law rather than under State laws. Don't you feel that our laws which exist at the moment are strong enough?
- PM No, I don't because I think you will find that people doing this kind of thing could be had up perhaps for trespass, possibly for trespass, under State law, possibly fined \$5, perhaps \$2 or \$3 for obstructing the footpath or for invading somebody's house. I don't think that is sufficient. Now, of course, we can only apply laws to our own Commonwealth property or in the A. C. T. or the Northern Territory.
- Q. Well fair enough. Now what do you think should be a more stringent policy. You are looking at bigger fines? Or do you feel they ought to be shoved in clink for a couple of days for doing this sort of thing? or what?
- PM Well let's just say there should be, I believe, after conviction according to law, and only after conviction according to law, of course, there should be greater penalties for those kinds of actions which I have just described.
- Q. Now the other very interesting thing is the trapping of Mr Whitlam this week into the mutiny by conscientious objectors to Vietnam. This is something which has created a tremendous impact on the Australian scene. Labor looked to be at perhaps its most formidable best, particularly after cleaning up Victoria.....
- PM Well....
- Q. I'll discuss that separately with you.....

PM I enter a caveat on that!

Q. The point I want to make here is just how many votes do you think there is in Vietnam now in Australia? What sort of an issue is Vietnam as far as getting votes is concerned now?

PM I don't think I could make an estimate which would be worth very much. I am sure that most people would wish that the war in Vietnam were finished. There is no question of that. But I am also sure that very large numbers of people feel that we were right to go there and we should stay until the invaders have been beaten, that is, made to withdraw. But however much of an issue that is, I don't know but this isn't really the issue that arose....

Q. No, the mutiny issue.....

PM Yes, the offering of advice to young men to go into the Army and then to refuse to obey orders. That's the issue that is really significant.

Q. Do you feel that this whole Vietnam question.....you've got conscientious objectors, you yourself say, "Yes, Australia is a country which should have the right to dissent". I think that most Australians would agree with you on this mutiny aspect, but are there enough areas if someone doesn't want to go and fight in Vietnam? Now the gaoling of Brian Ross has created a tremendous impact on the Australian scene. Is that too harsh a thing?

PM No, look, there are these opportunities for people who either dislike bearing arms at all or dislike a particular theatre of war. Let's take the people who dislike bearing arms, who have conscientious objections to going to war at all in any circumstances. Now provision is made for them to claim these conscientious objections, to go before a court, to have them investigated and if they are upheld, then those people are excused from all service and their conscientious beliefs are respected. Then you have another group of people, and these are the people Mr Whitlam is talking about, who do not have conscientious objections to bearing arms, who do not have conscientious objections to war, but who are worried about going to - in this case - Vietnam. In another case, it might be some other theatre. They are worried about going to some particular theatre, they don't want to go there. Now they haven't got to do that either because if they feel that that is likely to happen, then provision is made for them to join the CMF, in which case, they are exempt from call-up. And that is a proper and legal way for a young man who is prepared to bear arms but doesn't want to go to a particular area to see that he doesn't go to that particular area. But when you go beyond that and say that in spite of the fact that you have got this legal way of avoiding this service, I advise you to join the Army and to refuse to obey an order to go to a particular place, that is saying to a young man, "Although you have a legal redress, I advise you to take an illegal method which will land you in a lot of trouble."

Q. ~~Now both these two issues~~ look to me like election issues, with a Senate election coming up. Now November 29 has been nominated. Are you still very keen. Should I say November 29 has been speculated upon.

PM I rather think November 29 is a Sunday, but. . . .

Q. Well it might be 28, Prime Minister, I think you might be right! Anyhow, in that area. Are we pretty close to the mark here? You know, these are two good big election issues and you have got to have a Senate election.

PM We have got to have a Senate election, yes.

Q. Well.

PM And we will be having a Senate election this year.

Q. So it is in November some time?

PM Well you said that, I didn't.

Q. Well we are going to have one this year and that we know. Now this raises another interesting thing because last week the Labor Party appeared to clear up their problems in Victoria. In other words, they placed a 12-man Executive and sacked the entire Labor organisation in Victoria. The DLP said that if you can sack the Victorian Executive, in fact Senator McManus, I think it was, held out an olive branch and said "Well, we might be able to talk turkey", and their State Aid policy became general once they had decided, right, the Victorian Branch goes and they are replaced by this 12-man Executive until such time as we fix the whole thing up, and State Aid is right, and this Trade Union Defence Council is out. These are the two big DLP problems. Now the DLP has sort of been like a monkey on your back because they have knocked you around on this States Tax Receipts thing.

PM I wouldn't say they've been like a monkey on our back. In many, many fields we have precisely the same beliefs. We believe, both believe that Australia needs proper defence forces. The DLP goes further than we do. But we both are in line on many foreign affairs and defence policies.

Q. But do you think there is an endeavour here. would you like, for instance, to have a straight-out fight with Labor in the Senate election, rather than be worrying whether the DLP are going to win, because there is not a great deal of difference now between their policies?

PM Between the DLP and the Labor Party policies?

Q. Well, if.

- PM I draw your attention....not to my remarks, I'm not going to speak for the DLP, ~~but to some~~ of the remarks that Senator Cair made yesterday, for example, on this latest call for mutiny.
- Q. Yes, I agree....
- PM Mutiny, incidentally, means two people or more, I understand. Let's say the call for soldiers to disobey orders.
- Q. But he won't play ball with you on this.....you're in trouble on this one, aren't you?
- PM On?
- Q. On collecting the Receipts Tax for the States?
- PM Well we will have to see what happens, won't we?
- Q. Do you think you can get them on side, or do you think if you call a Senate election on these issues, that the DLP could lose out because they are not so far behind or they are not so far in front of Labor policy now in many respects, ~~except~~ on defence as you just mentioned.
- PM I think there is more similarity between Liberal policies and DLP policies than there is between Labor policies. And after all, we are talking as if the Labor Party branches were all cleaned up and they weren't affected, any of them, in the way that the Victorian Executive was affected.. Now the Victorian Labor Party Executive has been defended in the past by Mr Whitlam. When we said it was run by faceless men, that it was undemocratic, we didn't get agreement. But now he calls it something which has been an authoritarian and undemocratic junta, as undoubtedly it has been. But we don't know what is going to go in place of it yet. Certainly there is a 12-man committee that has been put up to suggest new rules, but a number of those people on that Committee are from the old undemocratic junta, so described, and I notice, for example, that the man leading their Senate team, Senator Brown, was one of the strong Left-Wing supporters of this undemocratic, authoritarian junta. Now let's wait and see what does come up. I think, you will remember at the time.....
- Q. You sound almost as though you are pleased that Senator Brown is leading the Victorian Labor Senate team.
- PM Well, I think it is a pretty clear indication of what is likely to be an attempted facelift rather than a change. I don't know this field as well, for example, as a supporter of the DLP, Mr Santamaria does, but I notice he came out saying that all that happened was they had stopped being Maoist communist controlled in the Victorian Executive and are now controlled by Moscow communists. This was an article in the "Herald". But I don't know the details of this, the ins and outs of this, but after all, that came into my mind because you were saying about the DLP and.....

Q. Well the reason I bring this up is you have now said, "Right the Senate election will be this year" and I am tipping November, and so are a lot of other journalists. There is nothing unique in my saying this. The situation now arises that there are a lot of Labor voters. . . . I mean the Labor Defence policy itself, other than Mr Whitlam's recent statements which have become quite a political thing. . . . looking at it in cold hard politics, the Government have trapped him beautifully, haven't they? Let's be political about this.

PM Look, we didn't set out to trap him at all. We didn't lead him to say this. He just came out and said this was what he was doing for some reason that I don't know. We found out, in fact, by accident the sort of advice he was giving and the sort of approach he was taking. In one sense, yes, this, I think, must be very politically damaging to him, and certainly it would prevent the use of armed forces containing National Servicemen. Somebody could say, "I don't want to go to Vietnam", somebody else could say, "I don't want to go to Malaysia" and the whole thing breaks down. But nevertheless, believe it or not, I am rather sorry that it has happened because I think it is a very grave thing for a leader of a political party of the size of the Labor Party to give this kind of advice and to take this kind of an approach. I think it is something that I don't believe could happen in any other democratic country.

Q. You would like to be out of Vietnam. I think the Americans would like to be out of Vietnam. I think that goes without saying. Is there any chance that before the Senate election, that you could announce further Australian troop withdrawals?

PM The first battalion to come back that we have already announced is due back some time in November, as I understand, but any future action would be purely speculative and would depend upon the success of the Vietnamisation campaign.

Q. You are up to date with this. You know, you are in constant touch with this, more so, probably than anyone else. Do you feel that the Vietnamisation programme is going along sufficiently successfully enough to announce again this year, or to have the possibility of announcing again this year that we would withdraw a further battalion of troops?

PM That is far too iffy and speculative, I am afraid for me to comment on that.

Q. Well, now, there is another thing that comes to mind. With these two issues that you have got going now - law and order and Mr Whitlam's dilemma on mutiny, would it be possible for John Grey Gorton to say, "Now I may be able to hold a double dissolution on these two issues, and one or two other issues". Is that a possibility?

PM Well ~~there is always a possibility~~, I suppose, but this again is far too speculative a thing and I would think on the whole it was fairly unlikely that a government with over two years to run would call a double dissolution unless it was absolutely necessary. I would like to use my own phrasing again for what you call law and order, because I think it is more accurate, and that is what we are out to do is to protect the civil rights of people against their being interfered with by demonstrators. There again, there is a big difference between us and the Labor Party.

Q. What else do you think could become an election issue for the Senate election, other than these two matters that we have discussed pretty fully? What else do you feel strongly about? I have got something in mind that I would like to ask you but I would like to know whether you have the same idea before I perhaps telegraph my punch here.

PM What do I feel strongly about that we should do.....

Q. Yes, what do you feel should be another election issue? I mean, you are going to set the terms on this.

PM Yes, well, it depends. I mean, you can have an election issue where you say, "We, the Government, believe this should happen, and this is the goal we are working towards" and you can have the Opposition promising anything at all and trying to make that an election issue. And indeed it is not altogether easy to have real issues, significant, far-reaching issues at a Senate election because we have just had an election at which a policy for three years was set out. But I believe one of the most important things we have got to do is to contain inflation, is to stop inflation growing. Now we have given clear evidence of our approach to this, of our concern with it. The promises, high, wide and handsome and unlimited that have been made on behalf of the Opposition would undoubtedly cause inflation and damage to all those on fixed incomes least able to look after themselves and to those in the country who are in the rural industries having a very, very hard time indeed.

Q. Now there is a point here and I think we should both acknowledge it. You mentioned hardship. The pensioners, their 50 cent raise from the Federal Treasurer... is there likely to be some sort of help to them before the next Budget? Now, I just want to point this out. In Victoria, for instance, the Housing Commission, for the pensioners, put up all the pensioners' rents by 50 cents and so the 50 cents the Government gave them went nowhere. It was spent before they got it. You have been acknowledged as probably the most social-service Liberal Prime Minister that we have ever had. This was quite a shock this 50 cents.

PM I suppose it was and yet there has never been as much done in the field of social services as has been done in the three Budgets that we have brought in. This operation this year because of the inflation of which I have spoken was a holding Budget as far as the pensioners were concerned; not as far as social services were concerned because the health scheme coming in this year should, I believe, give great benefit to people. But merely looking at the rate of pension for base pensioners in the last three Budgets, the rates have been raised including the 50 cents far more than has the cost of living increased in that time. There have been two big increases and this small holding one. All I can say is that we have not changed our approach towards social services. We have given full evidence of that in the tapered means test, in the whole variety of smaller things, with assistance to handicapped children, with paying pensions at single rates to people who are separated, with the rates of the pension themselves, and this is an approach we propose to continue.

Q. Prime Minister, I think time is running out on us now, unfortunately, but do you think that it is possible to increase the pension before the next Budget - another 50 cents, a dollar or something like that?

PM You are asking me for Budget information kind of stuff now.....

Q. Well I am asking something which could be pretty important with the Senate election coming up.

PM I would not believe that bribery should enter into a Senate election, and inherent in what you are saying since you hitch the two together, that is why I make that comment.

Q. But you do think that perhaps they could be helped sooner or later?

PM I think that we as a government will continue the same approaches that we have had in the past and that the pensioners' lot will continue to get better.

Q. We haven't got very far on that one! Thanks very much Prime Minister.
