

"A CURRENT AFFAIR"

Interview given by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. William McMahon, CH, MP, on Channel 9 television network

8 MARCH 1972

Interviewer : Michael Schildberger

Q. Good morning, Prime Minister. Firstly, congratulations on one year in office.

PM: Thank you.

Q. Have you found being Prime Minister very different from the way you expected?

PM: Yes I have. It has been far more unpredictable, and I believe, far more difficult than I expected it to be. But you learn to live with it and that is what I have to do.

Q. In what ways more difficult?

PM: Because you are always on the job. You can't ease up for a moment....over the weekends, the holidays, when you come back to The Lodge, when you go to bed at night, the problems are still with you. You have to try and solve them.

Q. Prime Minister, twelve months ago when you became Leader, there were considerable divisions in the Party.

PM: Yes.

Q. Now it appears from the outside that there also divisions, perhaps even worse.

PM: No, I differ with you about "ev en worse". I don't think that's a proper way to put it. In fact it is not. But of course you will find differences of opinion within a Party like mine where you have got people of a very high order of intelligence, people of great vigour and independence of mind, and they want to express their views and you can't object to them doing it. But on the whole, I think, we are much better off than we were a year ago.

Q. Does it concern you, though, that there are these possible divisions and that the public hears about them?

PM: Yes, it concerns me, but I don't think it can be stopped, and I think the public are wise enough to realise that in a big Party like ours, with a large number of people of the kind I've mentioned, I think they understand, because they understand Australian political life.

Q. Prime Minister, now that you are heading for another day's work, what is foremost in your mind at the moment?

PM: Well, we have a Party meeting this morning, and the House meets this afternoon. And there are half a dozen motions on the business paper of the Party, and I am thinking about those at the moment. The most important of them is that we will be considering some industrial legislation relating to the civil service today. That is important and we will give notice of a bill in the House this afternoon or tonight.

Q. Do you keep thinking about China, the economy, the doctors at the moment?

PM: Yes, I must think of the lot of them. For the time being I will eliminate China because I insisted that the Minister for Foreign Affairs takes over responsibility for the China problem. The others I will have to watch carefully myself, particularly the doctors. *China*

Q. Back to your own Party at the moment, PM, do you feel there is any feeling of despair among Parliamentarians about the recent poll result?

PM: I think there is disappointment, yes. But not despair. I don't think you could go that far, and in any event, I believe when the next unemployment figures come out -- and I think they will be pretty good -- then I think you will see a change of mind, because you can get affected by momentary influences.

Q. You have often been criticised for not making enough decisions.....

PM: No, I don't. What I would like to have done is for a record of all the decisions we have made over the last year to be published, and I am sure when they are published the public themselves - and they are the judges - would come to the conclusion it has been a remarkably good performance over the period of a year, and a more remarkably good performance when

you realise the difficulties we have had to face. They are pretty good and I am proud of them.

Q. There are many who say, particularly Labor supporters, but even strong Liberal supporters, that perhaps it would be time for a change of Government, that you have had a pretty good innings. Could you agree with this?

PM: No, I don't because what the people must remember, and I believe what ever person asking questions must remember, is that the Labor Party don't know where they are going. If you look at the major issues, do they know where they are going on industrial lawlessness? Mr Whitlam says, yes, they would impose fines -- he is overruled by his own Party. Do they know where they are going on the problem of inflation? No, Mr Whitlam says they won't have general price control. His Party overrules him. Do they know where they are going on defence, and our wish in the Liberal Party/Country Party to be able to play our part in the defence of South-East Asia? No, they would abolish National Service and destroy our defence system and withdraw troops from Singapore/Malaysia. So a very wide spectrum they are guilty of both evasion, and; I believe, of deceit. But with us, our policies are positive, we've made them known and we will keep on emphasising them. So I believe it would be disastrous for this country. If I could put one other aspect to you, if you look at all the promises they are making, it must be obvious they couldn't be fulfilled without even worse inflation than we have got today and without punishing the Australian people.

Q. Do you worry about the pressures of the DLP and the Country Party?

PM: I don't think there are many pressures from the Country Party. In fact I am sure it is exaggerated. And in truth I get on very well with Doug Anthony and with the rest of the Country Party members of Cabinet. So far as the DLP is concerned, until the moment, they have been very good friends of mine, and the only great difficulty I have had with them is over the amalgamation. What must

What must be remembered is that we must make the decisions and we make them in the nation's interest, and if we think we are right, then of course for the moment we have to disagree with them, and we have done so on this occasion. But generally speaking, I think I could say that I am on very good terms ~~with~~ certainly with Vince Gair, Mr Gair, and also with Jack Kane.

Q. When you arrive at work, now, Mr Prime Minister, do you worry about the crises that you might face today?

PM: No, you can't worry about them because you have got to be reading the papers and reading the minutes you get from the Department and signing the letters, and you haven't got enough time to worry.

Q. Prime Minister do you feel -- and I don't mean to be nasty with this question -- that Mr Gorton is still looking over your shoulder?

PM: I don't give it very much thought. You have got so much to do in this business of being a Prime Minister, so many difficult decisions to make that you have to concentrate on the business of Government and try and forget the personalities. So I don't give that much thought, I have to confess.

Q. Do you think Mr Gorton has become somewhat of a folk hero now to the public?

PM: I don't know about being a folk hero, and in fact I won't comment on him at all. I believe that it is better to keep personalities out of these problems and get on with the business of government and that is exactly what I intend to do.

Q. Prime Minister, on that subject, what do you believe has been your great achievement during the first twelve months?

PM: I think there have been a number. The first one that I had to face was the problem of the Premiers and Commonwealth/State relationships. That was a pretty difficult problem and I believe we have solved it. And if I could put it to you this way as frankly as I can, had it not been for the

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BHP issue on price rises, the last Premiers' Conference would have been a triumph, the only one I can remember. Secondly, overseas we had to repair a few bridges between the United States and ourselves and I am sure we have done it. Third, we had the problem of trying to control industrial lawlessness, and I think this is one of the major issues that will face the people at the next election. I have said to you that today we will be giving notice of a bill that I think will indicate clearly where we stand. But on such matters, other matters as education, as immigration and a dozen and one other, if we can only get our message to the public, I am sure they will realise that we have done a tremendous amount in a year and we have done it under difficult conditions.

Q. Any failures?

PM: Yes, of course there have been. Not so much failures but we haven't been able to achieve all our purposes. It is best to admit that and to admit it clearly. But on the whole, and pretty substantially our way, what we have done has been in the interests of the nation.

Q. You must have a particular goal for the next twelve months?

PM: Yes, first of all to get economic conditions running along well so that we can cut unemployment down to an acceptable number, so that we can give people reason to believe that they have confidence in the future and we can do all those things in health and in education and in public works and services of the kind they want and they should get, and if we can control inflation and get control of industrial lawlessness, we will ensure they do get it.

unemployment

Q. Prime Minister, do you have any fears for the next twelve months?

PM: Not fears, exactly, no. I believe our main problem is of communication with the people, and if we can go on the way we have been going on and putting up the performances and getting them recognised, then I believe the people will have their confidence restored and they will have complete confidence in the Liberal/ Country Party and make certain we win the next election.

Q. Thank you very much indeed, Prime Minister.