



PRIME MINISTER

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BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
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Interviewer : Paul Lynch

Q. Prime Minister, criticism was often voiced of you as a Prime Minister in your first months in your present office, as being a man who had a good technician's interest in the process of government and of politics, but not a man who had a very clear picture of where Australia would be perhaps five or ten years from then. Do you think that in recent months, you have altered this impression?

PM: Yes, I think first of all that the criticism is a little unfair because I had to fit into the office and I faced difficulties of an unparalleled kind. I don't think any other Prime Minister had to face the same number and range of difficulties that I had to face. Then when I found that the economic conditions were changing and that I was getting increasing control over the Party, then of course I could adopt the proper role for a Prime Minister, and that was to take a national approach and a vision for the future that I think has been evident, really evident over the course of at least the last eight to ten months.

Q. Which would you describe as the foremost of the new directions that you have pointed out in the last eight to ten months?

PM: Naturally enough, I would like to look first of all at problems like education, of what we did in the Budget with the reduction of taxation, of the support for pensioners, and half a dozen other policy changes of a radical kind that we introduced there. I would like to look at the health changes that we made, and our changes in international relations as well.

Q. In terms of international relations, Prime Minister, what new directions do you see there?

PM: In recent days we have become a member of the United Nations Security Council which has the problem of looking after world peace. We have become a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, one of the most important economic committees that there is. Recently a delegation came from Japan, headed by Mr Ohira, accompanied by four other very senior Ministers, to talk over our common economic, trade and social relationships. All these indicate that other countries are very interested in us, they know the influence we have in the Pacific Theatre, and they are confident that we in Australia will play our part in trying to ensure peace in this area and make our contribution to development at the same time.

Q. In domestic terms, Prime Minister, you have been talking more or less about the matter of relationships between governments - relationships between Australians and the way individual Australians lead their lives. What do you think are the most significant changes for which you would care to take responsibility?

PM: First of all I would have to mention the taxation changes and the changes relating to social services, welfare, housing and also hospitals and medical attention. These all concern and affect the individual. But we have gone even wider than that in the education and arts. We have done more in actual performances than I can remember has ever been done before. We have assisted, too, with conservation and environment, and we have done a lot to help the aborigines. So that if you look at these cultural matters, then I think you can accept the fact, once you look at the record, that these have been remarkable developments and they are taking us into a new kind of a world, and a new vision of the kind of world you want for succeeding generations of Australians, because I believe now, we must concentrate more and more on youth and give them the opportunity to express themselves, to find delight in their surroundings, and to be able to fully join in every aspect of the life of the community.

Q. Final point, Prime Minister, and fairly briefly, I'm afraid -- to put to you the question that it was claimed you couldn't answer in the middle of last year : What do you see as being the future of Australia?

PM: I don't know of any country at all that has a brighter prospect than we have, providing only we have sound and sensible government and proper management of the business of state. We are a wealthy country. We can become increasingly wealthy. We can give our people greater opportunities than they have ever had before. We can give them the education they need, the health services and the housing they need, and this, after all, is the foundation on which they, the people themselves, can spread their wings and I think get into a new age of a new development that will bring a great deal of contentment and happiness to them.

Q. Prime Minister, thank you very much.
