

CARLETON: Good evening and welcome to This Day Tonight from Canberra. If there was an election tomorrow then few would give Labor any chance at all of being returned to power. But of course there's not going to be an election tomorrow and if Mr Fraser is as good as his word, there won't be an election at all this year, and that's possibly just as well for the man who tomorrow celebrates his 1,000th day as Prime Minister of Australia.

CARLETON: Mr Whitlam, do you think its possible to pinpoint any particular reason or group of events that'll explain that great turnaround from the euphoria of December 1972 when you swept into power, to the doldrums that you're in now?

PRIME MINISTER: I think there are two matters, both continuing matters, not sudden matters: one is economic and is universal; one is political and is peculiar to Australia alone.

CARLETON: Well, explain the political one first.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, the process of obstruction that my Government has been subjected to in the Parliament. This is a process of obstruction which no previous Australian Government has ever endured and also it is a process which was never forecast at the 1972 and the 1974 elections. Now this is, of course, a very great difficulty for government and for business. They're always kept in a state of uncertainty.

CARLETON: But how does that obstruction explain your low standing, or your Government's low standing in the community. Because you can't get those particular Bills through the Senate?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh yes, well there's almost a score of them. Also, of course, there's not only the obstruction of the Senate, there's obstruction by State Governments which have challenged legislation which has gone through the Parliament in the High Court and then there has been a general obstruction by all the parliamentary devices which have been discovered in the last two and a half years.

CARLETON: Well you seem to be suggesting, Sir, that if you could have got those Bills through that are under challenge in the Courts or by the States or in the Upper house, then you would be less unpopular than you are at present

PRIME MINISTER: Of course, a very great amount of the legislation which we have got through is obviously beneficial but it's taken a dickens of a time to get it through. Take the Trade Practices legislation; everybody now applauds it. It took a year and a half to get it through. Then look at the various Securities legislation which has been foreshadowed for about four years. It's still stalled. There's no doubt that the people would benefit from it if it had gone through in the normal process. There's legislation like the offshore resources. It was brought in by our predecessors five and a half years ago and it's still under challenge in the courts. Now there's no doubt that we'd benefit if this matter had been resolved years ago.

CARLETON: You'd be more popular if those...

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there's no question that these pieces of legislation are important. They were put to the people and presumably endorsed by them at successive elections and they're been stalled by one means and another.

CARLETON: Now on the other side, the economic side, universal as the problem might be, why can't Labor, Labor of all parties, cure unemployment and cure inflation?

PRIME MINISTER: Well you can ask why can't Governments of both sides of politics cure unemployment at the moment. Wherever you go, in North America, Western Europe and Australia, you get the worst unemployment for 30 or 40 years. Now we may be responsible, some people would think, for the position in Australia. We obviously aren't responsible for the position in North America, where it is worse, and in Western Europe, where it is just as bad. Some countries are worse, some countries not as bad.

CARLETON: How do you look back to that 1972 campaign though, where you berated Mr McMahon right round the country when unemployment then was approaching two per cent?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, its twice as bad now, of course it is, but it's at least twice as bad in every other country too.

CARLETON: Sir, if things look....

PRIME MINISTER: There's no country in the world that's anything like Australia where unemployment is not worse than it was 2½-3 years ago.

CARLETON: Sir, since the Budget of last Tuesday, I think politically things have been looking up for the Labor Party.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh undoubtedly, undoubtedly.

CARLETON: It's only ten days admittedly...

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

CARLETON: ...but nevertheless...

PRIME MINISTER: But things change very quickly in politics. Your original statement of course overlooks, I would suggest, the fact that politics everywhere in the world is very volatile at the moment, and during the course of an election campaign things can - do - change quite remarkably. If you look back 2½ years ago, most of the people who were heads of government then, no longer are. In the present circumstances I've been remarkably durable.

CARLETON: You've done well to survive do you think?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes indeed.

CARLETON: You have done well to survive?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you look around - how many people who were Presidents or Prime Ministers in December 1972, in comparable countries, still are?

CARLETON: Let's go back to the Budget then of last Tuesday, sir, and I'll suggest that your stocks are looking higher over the last ten days.

PRIME MINISTER: Certainly.

CARLETON: Now every armchair economist and yourself also, talking of about this...

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I'm an armchair economist!

CARLETON: Talking about business confidence, now how do you measure this ephemeral thing - how do you know when your Government has got the confidence of business?

PRIME MINISTER: When business is making decisions to employ more people or buy more equipment.

CARLETON: It's as simple as that?

PRIME MINISTER: They're the principal things.

CARLETON: Sir you've got to hold a half-Senate election before...

PRIME MINISTER: Before the end of June next year.

CARLETON: Yes. When are you going to hold it?

PRIME MINISTER: May or June.

CARLETON: It certainly won't be the end of this year?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh no. I wouldn't be thinking so. I know there has been a practice to hold elections for half the Senate in the preceding December. My own view always has been that you should have the Senate representing the people's view as close to the time they take office as possible. I think May or June.

CARLETON: Sir, what chance do you think that your Government has got of persuading the unions to accept that very special form of indexation that you are asking them to accept now, namely that the tax increases that came from last Tuesday week's Budget, are not included in the indexation calculation for the next quarter?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh we've got a reasonable chance of persuading the unions to it, but of course where we have to persuade is before the Arbitration Commission, and every State Government has been persuaded by us to support our general approach in these National Wage Cases. This has been a remarkable achievement. After all what a government does is not merely what is done fiscally, its also what is done monetarily, and what is done in respect to incomes and we have a remarkable success in putting our point of view to the Arbitration Commission in respect of incomes and I hope we will continue to.

CARLETON: Why did you finally sack Mr Cameron?

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that Senate James McClelland could do the job better. I transferred Mr Cameron; I didn't sack him. I've sacked one man. But obviously the changes that have been made in the Ministry have strengthened the Ministry. We couldn't have got as good a Budget as we have, had I not made those changes a couple of months ago: the first significant changes, incidentally, for 2½ years.

CARLETON: Sir, have the farmers - the beef industry aside - have the farmers still never had it so good?

PRIME MINISTER: Well in some cases - obviously in the sugar industry - that would be the case.

CARLETON: You're being very specific there. What about the wool industry itself?

PRIME MINISTER: Well you can't say primary production as a whole, because obviously primary production varies according to weather and according to overseas markets. Overseas markets for sugar have never been so good. Overseas markets for beef have never been so bad. But you can't blame us for the beef markets. After all, if Japan or Western Europe cut down entirely and if America compels us to make voluntary restraints, you're left in the lurch, and this has been a very cruel thing for them to do.

CARLETON: Has Mr Connor lived up to your expectations as Minister for Minerals and Energy?

PRIME MINISTER: In many respects, more respects, yes. In some other respects, of course, he's had disappointments because, for instance, of the delays in the courts, or by the States. Obviously, when it comes to coal markets or arrangements of iron ore or for pipelines, he's overcome all the resistance overseas and at home. On things like offshore matters or uranium, there have been difficulties.

CARLETON: What about relations with the business community?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the coal producers swear by him. They've never had it so good.

CARLETON: What about Mr Hawke? Do you think he'll succeed you as Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know. He has to get into Parliament. Look, for the last 12 years - for the last 12 years I have been urging Mr Hawke to go into Parliament. I still do, but I think he ought to get a move on. He has to make the decision.

CARLETON: Sir, on a program like this it's obligatory really to ask you what's been your greatest success in this 1,000 days, and what's been your greatest failure?

PRIME MINISTER: I suppose the greatest successes have been in the fields of education, hospitals, now taxation reform - those would be the big ones.

CARLETON: And on the other side?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh well, we are victims, of course, of this general economic malaise and we've had to learn the hard way to cope with it.

CARLETON: Yes, but what have you done that has been an actual failure that you shouldn't have done?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I don't want to be specific - you can discover those things. It's too close to me.

CARLETON: Mr Whitlam, we'll leave it there for now if we may, but point out to the audience that you've agreed to appear on State of The Nation later tonight where we'll look at some of the more philosophical aspects of your Government and your own very particular style of leadership.

PRIME MINISTER: Is this just a commercial?

CARLETON: A commercial for later tonight.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh.

CARLETON: Thank you so much for now.
