

Q. Well, Mr Whitlam how's it affected your running of this country having as you do the threat of an election hanging over your head every day?

Prime Minister: I've got used to it. A year ago it would have been very oppressive to me now we just go on regardless. And you know we haven't been frozen in our tracks by this constant threat, for instance, I think we are still a very active, I think, creative Government... you know, all these tax reforms, doesn't look as though we're just looking for next month or next year.

Q. But if you were confident that you had two years ahead of you would last Tuesday's Budget have been the same paper?

Prime Minister: Yes, yes, it is on that basis because there can be no swift change brought about in six months or twelve months.

Q. Would you not last Tuesday week have brought in more adventurous, less politically attractive tax proposals if you could have been sure that you had two years before the next poll?

Prime Minister: No, no. We wanted to bring in the tax changes we did partly because we thought they were fair. Partly because we thought that they would encourage people who needed encouragement.

Q. Do you think the uncertainty of the threat of an election hanging over you all the time is causing the Westminster system and our two party or three party system to be a little less suitable for our day and age now?

Prime Minister: That may well be. There's no question, It is an aberration to have a Government which is elected for three years under our system under threat of having to face the people every six months. This is an aberration and of course it did last year hinder us quite a lot, but I think we have got used to it and we are going on as if we have until the middle of '77.

Q. How should the system be changed now in the long term so that this shouldn't happen again?

Prime Minister: Well, one thing is, of course, that the Constitution should be changed to require that whenever there is an election for the House of Representatives, there is also an election for half the Senate. Thereby you bring home to the Senators, a sense of responsibility. If they decide there is to be an election for the other House then half of them have to face an election themselves too. The evil of the present System is that you can have people deciding there's an election

even although the people making that decision don't have to face the people themselves. If you synchronise the elections for the two Houses that will be a very great improvement - a great safeguard.

- Q. Mr Whitlam, when things go wrong in the Labor Party and goodness knows you've had your fair share of troubles since you've been Prime Minister. When they go wrong, do you sometimes despair and wonder whether it's worth all the effort you're putting into it?

Prime Minister: Of course.

- Q. When was the last time that you've had one of these 'downs'?

Prime Minister: I don't know. I'm pretty resilient. I recouperate fairly quickly. But of course, I and my wife too sometimes wonder 'is it worth it' but we always decide it is.

- Q. Are you a moody person? Some of your colleagues one talks to around the Parliament...say oh, don't go near him today, he's in such a damn bad mood, sort of thing....he'll bite your head off.

Prime Minister: I will bite peoples heads off - that's true. But I get over it very quickly. I'm not a brooding or vindictive person. I will flare up, sure, but it's soon over.

- Q. But what about moody for a week....

Prime Minister: No, I don't think I'm moody. I sometimes maybe pensive.

- Q. Pensive?...

Is the Cabinet system as you've got it now, is it working well? I mean in those Cabinet meetings that you've had there are you getting an exchange of views amongst your Ministers now-a-days?

Prime Minister: It is improving. Obviously they are better than when they first came in. The Ministry is very much better as a result of the changes that I made - the first significant changes I made since we got in a thousand days ago. The changes I made in July. Now the Ministry is very much better as a result of that. We wouldn't have been able to get so good a Budget as we've produced but for those changes.

- Q. But though, you would like this Parliament to run another two years, three years from...

Prime Minister: Of course it should.

- Q. ...But in terms of real -politik to use that hackneyed phrase that it is turning out to be, how long do you really think the Parliament will run?

Prime Minister: I think it will probably run, I think the chances are better that it will run till the middle of '77 than it will run only to the middle of '76.

Q. Why, do you think Mr Fraser won't have the guts to pull it on next year?

Prime Minister: No, I don't put it in that way, I'm not wanting to have any of that sort of confrontation or brinkmanship. Malcolm Fraser has got, I think, a better sense of propriety than his predecessors - as leader of the Liberal Party - I think that he looks a bit further ahead because he would hope to be a Prime Minister himself someday and he would know that two can play at this game and things can be bad politically or economically as they have been economically since we've come in everywhere in the world and a Government can be deterred from doing the right thing by the fear that it may have to face the people in the next few months. I think we've got over that fear - a year ago, it's true enough that we were oppressed by this idea that there might be an election again at the end of '74, there might be in the middle of '75, but we got over that and I think we now think that the better, the more successful course is to go for the long haul, you just can't get a quick solution, you won't get support for trying for a quick solution.

Q. You said two can play at this game - does that mean that you've gone back on your earlier undertaking that you'd never knock back supply...

Prime Minister: No I haven't, I haven't, that is very strongly my view - I would still say that if for instance the Labor Party was in Opposition and I was in the Parliament, I would still think it improper to use a majority you had in the Senate or half the numbers because that's all you need - half the numbers in the Senate to refuse supply. I had a big battle in Caucus on that in 1967 - I won it and it is till my view but quite frankly, if Supply was refused by the Senate a second time, it would obviously be very much more difficult to keep one's colleagues to the proper course thereafter.

Q. Your expectations a probability - I'm putting words into your mouth, I suppose, but the probability is in your mind that Supply next year will go through.

Prime Minister: I believe that is probabl .x

Q. Sir, with hindsight, Mr Barnard's resignation - was that a mistake politically.

Prime Minister: Ah oh yes, it was obviously - in the light of the result - yes.

Q. What about your going overseas last Christmas - again with the benefit of hindsight, was that a mistake politically?

Prime Minister: No, I would do it again, it was time that a Prime Minister visited countries which are so economically important

to us and from which so many migrants have come. I know I had a terrible blast and the polls were bad but look after the Terrigal conference, look after the deposition of Mr Snedden - we soared - the electorate is very volatile and I will do what I think is the right thing and one of the things that a Prime Minister has to do is from time to time, make overseas visits - nobody can represent his country as effectively as a Prime Minister.

- Q. Can I suggest to you, though, Sir, that because you went on that trip and the tag is now attached to you - Whitlam the tripper overseas and that sort of thing - are you going to have to wear that and wear the effect of it electorally.

Prime Minister: Maybe I will, and I shall - and I don't mind - it was my duty to go. It was time that a Prime Minister did visit some of those countries - I mean, we had got on the wrong foot throughout the 1960s with every member of the Common Market - it was about time that somebody went from Australia and showed a cooperative attitude.

- Q. You haven't committed yourself as to whether or not you'll be going away this Christmas.

Prime Minister: No, but if I do go, obviously it has to be at a time when Parliament is not sitting which means one goes at Christmas or in mid winter.

- Q. Would you like to go away again this Christmas?

Prime Minister: I'd like to, of course, but no arrangements have been made. If I think I should - I shall.

- Q. No one would accuse you of being lazy in the job but can I ask you to ponder on the question of whether or not you spend your time efficiently, spending as you do, so much time tripping around Australia giving these learned discussions and learned papers to these miniscule audiences in such out of the way places - there's tomorrow - er, where are you going, up to the north coast of New South Wales, Murwillumbah?

Prime Minister: Yes I am, but I'm not giving a lecture and it won't be a miniscule audience - what happened is, I've been asked months ago, I was asked if I'd open the new Civic Centre in Murwillumbah - well why not - I don't suppose a lot of people are yet accustomed to the idea of a Prime Minister arousing interest in local government circles - well my Government has shown a very great interest in local government, so I've been asked and I'm free to go, and I'll get pleasure out of it - and I would guess that the public around there will show some interest in it, or even pleasure.

- Q. Surely there's more electoral kickback for you - that's the business you're in, of winning votes - there's more kickback for you if you get out on the stump in Sydney or Melbourne to a big crowd.

Prime Minister: But I do constantly - it's true that I would have been to the outback to remote places, not that Murwillumbah's terribly remote - it's only about an hour and a quarter from here - by air, but it's true that I would have been to these places more than any other person who's had this job but after all most of my engagements of course are in Sydney and Melbourne. And if I give a learned address as I did last night in Canberra - or as I did a fortnight ago in Melbourne - there'd been hundreds in Canberra last night - a thousand in Melbourne. Sure I put quite a lot of work into it but they were important occasions, important subjects and I'll use the research that I put into it on these two occasions to other purposes. I know, but you can't be on the job the whole time, and I can't get any great relaxation going to a bowling club or that because people will always say I don't want to talk shop, BUT - now I might as well go where I enjoy it, to some of these country towns and I've had some excellent days there and I enjoy it and they seem to.

Q. In politics as in everything else, everyone loves a winner but do you feel in your own Caucus now that there's a fair bit of criticism of you in the way you're handling the job.

Prime Minister: Oh I suppose there is but they seem to be fairly satisfied that I'm a satisfactory person to lead them.

Q. Only fairly satisfied - you're not...

Prime Minister: Well, you'll think I'm terribly egocentric if I expressed the view which I believe they hold of me.

Q. What are your relationships with...

Prime Minister: After all a great number of them wouldn't be there but for me and they think the best chance of augmenting their numbers is with me - now does that satisfy you?

Q. How does it satisfy the Caucus might be another question.

Prime Minister: Well they've not shown any dissatisfaction.

Q. Mm

Prime Minister: But they're entitled to - I welcome, I mean if anybody's got a complaint about me I'd rather them tell me even in a Caucus meeting than to bottle up about it.

Q. What are your relationships now like with Mr Rupert Murdoch?

Prime Minister: I haven't seen him for a couple of months actually.

Q. Last time you saw him was it a friendly meeting or...

Prime Minister: Yes, yes always, yes.  
Oh, he's a would be politician so like all politicians, we learn to dissemble.

Q. A would be politician...

Prime Minister: Well, I think that one of the shortcomings of the media in Australia is that people that run the newspapers would in fact like to run the country - I mean there's some sad desicated characters like Warwick Fairfax - there are some thrusting ones - so far frustrated like Rupert Murdoch.

Q. What, frustrated because he's not running the country?

Prime Minister: Yes.

Q. I see. Sir, you've often expressed your admiration of the Public Service in many speeches but are some areas of the Public Service letting your Government down?

Prime Minister: Oh, I wouldn't say that - the Public Service is a superbly competent dedicated lot of people - I mean I know - I see the permanent heads and the second division people - and the hours they work and the ideas they come up with, the way they'll respond to a lead is remarkable. I think we have done a very good job as a Government - a whole range of issues - right basic changes and reforms - we couldn't have done any of them without the assistance of Public Servants.

Q. Sir, would you rate the State Premiers on a scale between more uncooperate and the most cooperative.

Prime Minister: Oh, all of them are uncooperative when they believe it suits them...every one of them. Now I haven't graded them all I must confess I've got through a few since I was there. Since I came in there's been a change of Premier in Western Australia and in Tasmania and in New South Wales.

Q. Sir, what are the expectations...

Prime Minister: I mean - you want me to give a...quite obviously ah, Mr Dunstan and I have achieved most in cooperation because Mr Dunstan saw the wisdom and he has benefited from it in cooperating promptly with the initiatives that my Government has taken in the whole range of activities.

Q. Sir, one of the expectations I suggest that a lot of people placed in you when you came into Government was that you do away with a lot of the featherbedding and the sectional interest influence over the process of Government. Things that came up in the Combes' report - the superphosphate bounty - things like that. Now, has the actual system of Government - the two party system and your Caucus system prevented you from being as thorough in this area as you would have like to have been?

Prime Minister: Oh, of course, it has - oh yes, we haven't been as thorough and as fully rational as we wanted to, and particularly a year ago there was a loss of morale and People started handing out hundreds of thousands or in some

cases millions, to prop up industries or particular companies which had, without justification as it turned out. At least we did it openly when we gave money to A.P.P.M., I said well at least put it in an Act of Parliament - don't conceal it. I'm not particularly keen about it, but if the Opposition is against it, make them stand up and defeat it - well of course they didn't.

Q. We'll just end now, but just to end on, how's Mr Fraser been going as Opposition leader?

Prime Minister: Magnificently in the media.

Q. How do you think you'll go against him in the...

Prime Minister: I mean in the newspapers - in the newspapers - I'm not suggesting in the electronic media - Oh, I think he'll be pretty heavy going in an election - you know, I think it's been shown since the Budget - you know, his first reactions were quite off key to the Taxation reforms which are the biggest things which have happened in this field for a quarter of a century - he got off on the wrong foot completely - he showed his hand - he showed that he was still the elitist and still the dyed-in-the-wool conservative.

Q. Do you think you can beat him?

Prime Minister: Yes - give me a campaign and I'll beat him or anybody else the Liberals put up.

Q. Well, Mr Whitlam, thank you for appearing on STATE OF THE NATION tonight.

Prime Minister: Thank you.

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