

TALK-BACK, RADIO STATION 3AW, PAUL BARBER,
MELBOURNE

16 FEBRUARY 1979

Paul Barber:

Did the resignation of Mr. Dunstan - did that come as a surprise to you?

Prime Minister:

Yes it did. I hadn't understood that he had not been well. I thought he might have been there for quite some time.

Paul Barber:

It's hard to be apolitical I know, but what sort of contribution do you think that he's made to Australia's political life?

Prime Minister:

He's made a distinctive contribution to South Australian politics, and flowing out of that has had an impact on Australian politics overall. He's been, I think, quite unlike any other Premier before him. He's made a very great contribution to the arts and to the development of the arts. He was different. He contributed greatly and he worked very very hard. I think it is a great tragedy that his political life has ended through ill health. He is, in general terms, still a pretty young man.

Paul Barber:

Ill health is the reason that we are all given for his resignation. I guess we should accept that. I am just wondering whether that raises the question in your mind about health among politicians generally, because most of them live fairly hectic lives. Is it a fairly common thing, do you think, that politicians perhaps get run down and does that affect their performance, do you think?

Prime Minister:

I think it can happen. It really is a most exhausting job - or most demanding job - put it that way. You have to learn to pace yourself because the demands on your own time are going to be inexhaustible. They just never end. In other words, you've got to know how to say "no". For every invitation that you can accept there are probably 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, that have to be refused. Sometimes people will press very hard, sometimes your friends will press very hard but if they come in late on top of an already busy schedule, it gets pretty difficult.

Paul Barber:

Have doctors ever warned you, or told you to slow down?

Prime Minister:

I think politicians often get told to slow down but the main thing is to pace yourself in a way that you can manage. You need to be able to draw on reserves from time to time because you have a busy period and then if some difficulty comes in on top of that you've got to pay attention to it. But this is part of the business of politics. I think you adjust to the somewhat irregular kind of life that is involved.

TALK-BACK QUESTIONS

Question: (Caller)

Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to ask you to live up to your 1975 promises to pensioners. Your Budget-time argument for 12-monthly increases instead of six-monthly due to the Consumer Price Index being cut due to the fall in inflation making the increases negligible, has been proved quite wrong, since inflation has again risen and your argument is no longer a valid one -- if it ever was.

Prime Minister:

Inflation hasn't risen. The December Quarter Consumer Price Index was disappointing, I agree with that but inflation has not risen. The move down has flattened out but the 12-month rate was significantly below the 12-month rate previously, and so inflation has come down and it is going to continue to come down. We had some very difficult decisions to make at the time of the last Budget over a number of areas and this was one of them. In 1975 inflation was 17 percent, it had been for a six-month period knocking 20 percent, 19 percent, and we have got a great deal more stability into the economy. But that did involve restraining expenditure over a wide range of areas. There are, again, many difficult decisions which in other times people would much prefer not to have had to take, but we believe that overall the Budget is working very much in the interests of Australia. We are starting to see now more life and interest, a stirring - as somebody else said - in industry and in the last few months of last year manufacturing employment started to grow for the first time in many many years. It's early days yet, but I think as a result of the kind of Budgets we have introduced, we are starting to see Australia on the move.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Would you be prepared to have another look at that pension situation, though, because it has been the cause of concern for a lot of our callers. They say, well-the rest of Australians have half-yearly indexation, why can't they?

Prime Minister:

Wage earners have half-yearly indexation, but alright, they got 100 percent last time, but they don't always get 100 percent. They get maybe 50 percent, 60 percent, or 70 percent of whatever the rate of inflation is. The commitment to pensioners, of course, is 100 percent, and that commitment is absolute.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Do you think that, as some of our callers suggest, that you are treating pensioners as second-class citizens?

Prime Minister:

I don't think so, because you see that makes a very great difference to -- if pensioners were to be treated the same as wage earners they would get the same indexation adjustment as wage earners. Now the Arbitration Commission sometimes says 100 percent but sometimes it might say 50 or 60 percent. I don't believe anyone believes that we should say 50 or 60 percent of the adjustment for pensioners -- and we've said it should be 100 percent. It will remain 100 percent, as it should. So there is a real distinction between the adjustments made for pensioners and the adjustments made for wage earners.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Can you still give 100 percent, though, by doing it twice a year?

Prime Minister:

I know, but you said put them on the same position as wage earners. That's not a very good thing to do -- if wage earners are only 50 percent of the adjustment.

Question: (Paul Barber)

By giving it to them at the same time as wage earners?

Prime Minister:

That's not putting them on the same position.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Let's take the proposition now of giving the 100 percent to them twice a year.

Prime Minister:

We've made our decision in relation to that.

Question: (Paul Barber)

You wouldn't consider it - or reconsider it - again?

Prime Minister:

At Budgets, in theory, one looks at all aspects of Government expenditure. I wouldn't want to build up expectations of a change of policy.

Question: (caller)

Recently your Government introduced bills into the Federal Parliament designed to outlaw compulsory membership of student unions and the Australian Union of Students however, your will remember that this legislation only applies in Canberra and there are many tertiary students who are wondering what your Government and what you as Prime Minister can do to protect the rights of students in all the Labor states and in Queensland where tertiary students are still forced to join student unions before they can commence their tertiary education. Now, is there anything your Government can do to protect the rights of these people?

Prime Minister:

The legislation that has been introduced in the Federal Parliament will be passed because we believe that it is totally wrong that a price of getting a degree or a tertiary education is to join a students union which might be pursuing activities which are totally against the views and inclinations of the student. In addition to that, we don't believe compulsion of that kind is right. If student bodies want support they should be able to attract support and I think that is the way it ought to be. Now, Victoria has made some moves in that direction. Western Australia has. I would hope that other states will follow the Commonwealth legislation. I think it is very strange that in universities people claim this is the place of academic freedom, this is the place of intellectual freedom, this is the place where you will freer than at any time in your lives and then the very first thing you have to do in a university is compulsorily join a quasi-political body.

Question: (caller)

When you first became Prime Minister you promised open Government and had several sessions of meet the press. Why have these been discontinued and replaced by talk-back radio at a state election time?

Prime Minister:

I go on talk-back radio right throughout the year and not just at a state election time and I think shortly before Christmas and throughout last year in different states

Prime Minister: (continued)

I take the opportunity of talking with people whenever that's possible. So far as press conferences are concerned, I have press conferences on a continual basis, when it is necessary; not every Monday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock but when there is something to communicate, something of importance, there is a press conference for the media. It might be in Canberra, it might be in one of the capital cities. Yesterday there was a press conference for the ethnic media and about 30 journalists and editors came along to that. Now, I think really I am quite accessible and whether that is on talk-back or press conferences, or television, one way or the other.

Question: (caller)

I've just come back from a time abroad and learnt with great dismay that tanks have been put on blocks, as it were, out of commission. Now, the war that your Government put us into, and in which some of us suffered very badly, what is the defence policy of this country? Are we serious about defending it?

Prime Minister:

Yes of course we are and I think it ought to be understood that it ought to be understood that for each of the last three years significantly more dollars and more in real terms, more resources have been made available to defence. What we're seeking to do is to make sure that a larger proportion of the total defence vote is spent on capital equipment. During the previous administration, in one year, the expenditure on capital equipment was as low as 6 percent -- I think 5.7 percent of the defence vote. Well now we've got that figure back to between 14 and 15 percent. It's still not high enough. Part of the process of getting the percentage up has been to keep a very tight rein on other elements of defence expenditure. It has meant a tight rein on elements of training programmes but in the longer term interests of the Australian defence force, in the interests of getting more modern effective equipment, we felt that this has been necessary. Only a few days ago we made decisions which will increase the rate of increase in the defence expenditure over the next few years a bit above that which would have been envisaged some months ago.

Question: (Paul Barber)

What's your reaction to the criticism of the RAAF chap in Perth, I've forgotten his name, who complained on his retirement there a couple of days ago, about the fact that there was too much civilian control of our defence forces and he said that the military people weren't getting a fair say. Is that justified criticism do you think?

Prime Minister:

I don't think it is at all. The other day we had in the Cabinet when we were discussing defence matters one civilian, the Secretary of the Department of Defence, but four Service chiefs -- the Chief of each Service and the Chief of the Defence Staff. We now have one civilian department, there used to be four, five if you like -- the Department of Defence, three Service departments and the Department of Supply. That's now embraced largely in one department and civilian numbers have been cut very greatly. I think in any defence structure where you've got uniformed people and civilians, you are going to get an argument about appropriate balance.

Question: (Paul Barber).

Are you worried about morale in the armed forces - almost everyone of these chappies that retires has a moan about morale in the Army, or Air Force or Navy.

Prime Minister:

People would like a greater rate of increase in expenditure - in defence equipment and for various defence purposes. I can understand that. If we didn't have budgetary restraints I'd like a greater rate of increase in defence spending also. But people ought to look at the figures and ought to know that substantial additional resources have been devoted to defence year after year. Now the restraint has come on recurrent costs and some training activities but we believe that's been necessary in the interests of making sure that the maximum - as much as the vote as possible - goes into defence equipment. Modern equipment is so vastly expensive. I think in the last war the best fighter, or Spitfire, might cost 7,500 pounds but now you are talking to \$20 m to \$30 m for a modern replacement fighter, or something of that order.

Question: (Caller)

What I want to know is this -- every week more and more pensions are needed and necessary, or not necessary. Every deserted father, every deserted mother wants a pension. Every single father, every single mother wants a pension. Now, as there is more divorces every week, more single mothers presenting babies every week, the taxpayers that are staying together, the taxes are getting higher and higher; how much higher will they have to go to be able to cope with all these pensions that different groups of people are all clamouring for. Does it mean that our taxes are going to go higher and higher and a single person that is hoping to get married these taxes are so high he just even can't afford to save for a home themselves - who are doing the right thing by getting married in the normal, decent way.

Prime Minister:

In the substance of your question is a very important thing because every thousand taxpayers are today supporting a much much larger number of pensioners that would have been the case 10 years ago. I haven't got the proportion but it might be 50 percent more, it could be approaching 100 percent more. That obviously puts a great burden on those who are paying taxes and you rightly draw attention to that. But we have been able, over the last three years, to reduce taxes and it is hard to understand in the bulk terms, but income taxpayers this year - in spite of that temporary tax increase in the last Budget - are paying \$3,000 million less tax than they would have if the tax scales that prevailed when we took office were still in force. Now you translate that back into the savings of a husband and wife with a couple of dependent children and it still is a very substantial saving of several dollars a week. We understand and are very much concerned about the point you make - about high taxes and we would like to be in a position to reduce taxes further.

Question: (Paul Barber)

How temporary is that tax increase?

Prime Minister:

The legislation runs out on the 30th of June. We don't have to anything - the legislation just runs out. We introduced in that way - we said it would apply for this year. There are many demands on Government. We were just talking about defence; that's one demand on Government. Earlier there was a suggestion that the pension should be increased more often. Now, for education and a whole host of services people are always saying "please will you spend more". We believe that Governments have got to show maximum restraint because if not, Australian taxpayers are going to be pressed right into the ground.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Just behind that lady's question, there seemed to be the philosophy that hand-outs are too easy to get in Australia. Would you agree with that?

Prime Minister:

Sometimes I think so, yes. I think...

Question: (Paul Barber)

Could you put a percentage on that?

Prime Minister:

No, I don't think you can. I think the basic thrust of the purpose of most pensions is probably right and proper. But for every particular pension there are probably some who abuse the system and take advantage of it.

Prime Minister: (continued)

We all know in this city -- but it is quite impossible to quantify -- there are some people who do casual work, cleaning up a garden, cutting a lawn and the going rate for that I am told, in this city and in Sydney, is \$30 or \$40 a day. Some such people are probably also getting unemployment benefits, two or three days casual work, and then are better off than many people on a permanent job and paying their taxes.

Question: (Paul Barber)

So we've still got the bludger in Australia, you'd say?

Prime Minister:

Well, the chap might be working but I think it is abusing the system. Now, it's quite impossible to quantify and I don't attempt to, but we know there are some people who do this.

Question: (Paul Barber)

And that's worrying you?

Prime Minister:

When I see a system being abused, of course you would like to do something about it but in this particular case, the case I mentioned, I think it would be very hard to have administrative procedures that stopped it.

Question: (caller)

I'm afraid we Australians are beginning to doubt your credibility and I regard you as becoming perhaps one of the most unbelievable governments in the world and the point which I wish to draw to your attention is not just merely the falsity of many of your promises or many of your ...

Prime Minister:

I think it would be a good idea to say which ones instead of just making general comments and allegations over the station all the time.

Question: (caller)

I will do that Mr. Fraser. The main point I wish to discuss with you is the secrecy of your Government, which of course is the most secret in the western world.

Prime Minister:

This really is a great deal of nonsense.

Question: (Paul Barber - to the caller)

Can you give an example?

Question: (caller)

Yes. The figures show that the documents of the Fraser Government, when compared with Great Britain and the United States, are the most secret in the world. Nearly 100 percent of the Swedish Government documents are available for public perusal and 50 percent of the British Government documents are open for perusal - but 25 percent of the Fraser documents are open for perusal.

Prime Minister:

I think that this really is a great deal of nonsense. I've never seen statistics of this kind put together and the reports that have been published in the time of my Government have been full and open and that's going to continue to be the case. A Senate Committee is examining at this moment freedom of information legislation and we are committed to making as much information available to the public as is possible. I'm quite certain that we've acted upon that. You know, the person who just asked that question seemed to have a large number of allegations to make but I don't think he had any substance in any part of it.

Question:

I wanted first to congratulate you on the (inaudible). I think it's a very part for Australia to get into the international market somehow and about the taxes -- how can we expect the reduction of taxes when people don't want to work. After all, if they don't work, they don't earn any money and they don't pay taxes and then the Government is asking to give them money - but they can't make it because if you start printing money then we are back to square one.

Prime Minister:

I think I agree with everything that you've said. If governments print money we just add to inflation and that a lot of damage to everyone. The more people do work the more production and productivity there is in Australia, the more chance there is maintaining, or reducing taxes and not having to increase taxes.

Question: (Paul Barber)

What about this idea of people not wanting to work. I mean could you put a figure on how many Australians...

Prime Minister:

It's quite impossible. Quite obviously under present circumstances there are people who want to work but find it very difficult to get work. On the other hand, I think we all hear stories of some people banding together in houses and living together and not really going out and looking for a job and maybe not taking a job when it is offered to them. I've heard of instances of this in the city and in country areas and I think it is one of the symptoms of

Prime Minister: (continued)

The circumstance where unemployment is too high. But when there are more job vacancies, as recovery in the economy gathers pace, I think it will be much easier to test people and see whether they really want to work or whether they don't.

Question: (Paul Barber)

You say you've heard instances of people doing that sort of thing. What have you done about it? Have you sent Commonwealth people around there to find out why they don't want to work?

Prime Minister:

Basically, if people apply to a particular employer for a job and don't want that job they make it perfectly plain. They are often doing so so that they will remain on unemployment benefits. I've had a number of employers, small and large, making that point to me.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Have those cases been followed by one of the Departments?

Prime Minister:

When that does happen the employers are meant to make their names available to the Commonwealth Employment Service and then -- if somebody is sent along to apply for a job and turns up without any shoes and looking unkempt and dishevelled for a job where a person requires some neatness, and inside job and this sort of thing -- quite obviously he is not trying to get the job and doesn't particularly want it. If somebody is in that category, they don't really deserve to remain on unemployment benefits. You can't always get employers to take the action...

Question: (Paul Barber)

...to any employee that might be listening to you this morning who has that sort of situation, to ring up the Commonwealth Employment Service and tell them.

Prime Minister:

Well they ought to. What they ought to be doing is saying "look, that bloke you sent me down didn't really want the job because this is what happened" ...

Question:

And his benefits will be stopped?

Prime Minister:

They would be stopped for a time, yes. I don't anyone to assume that I'm saying that's everyone. I know very well it's not. I know there are people who want to work and who find it very difficult to get work under present circumstances.

Question: (Paul Barber)

I'm surprised at what you say about long hair, and thongs and that kind of thing...I wouldn't have thought that the appearance necessarily meant that the person didn't want to work.

Prime Minister:

Well if somebody wants a receptionist and you turned up with no shoes on and whatever--you said thongs -- I meant no thongs either.

Question: (caller)

Have you every thought of the superannuation people. My husband is a public servant and at 60, as a returned serviceman, he can retire now but he goes on a 45 percent pension and I have been listening with interest to the elderly pension during the week. We have to pay taxes, we don't get any reduction on rates, phones, medical and things like that. Now, I'm an arthritic and on one of my tablets it's \$27 for 100. I often wonder if the pensioners think of these people that are paying superannuation and then they just don't get any benefits at all.

Prime Minister:

If you are on those tablets as a result of a doctor's prescription for arthritis isn't that on the national health?

Question: (caller)

No, it's not. They are \$27 for 100 and I have to take four a day which means every 25 days you have to pay \$27 for tablets.

Prime Minister:

I'd - not necessarily over the airwaves -- but I'd like to look into that if I could and I wonder if it would be possible for you to leave your name and address with the station, and the name of the tablets, because I would like to look in and find out why they are not on the national health.

Question: (Paul Barber)

What are you going to do with your pension, by the way, when you retire?

Prime Minister:

I don't know. I haven't really thought about retiring yet.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Have you thought about what you're going to do with the pension though?

Prime Minister:

I'd probably go fishing.

Question: (Paul Barber)

I don't know whether there's many pensioners in the community who could do that on their pension these days?

Prime Minister:

I think a lot of people in Australia go fishing. It hasn't got to be an expensive pastime.

Question: (caller)

Australian petrol prices have gone up 47 percent in the last year, thus putting Australia in the bracket of three nations with the highest petrol prices in the world. Your Government's policy is to put the Australian price on an equivalent basis with other nations but we have surpassed all but two other countries. I would therefore like to ask, is your lack of concern based on the fact that you are chauffeur-driven in brand new Government vehicles on petrol paid for by the people and not personally by yourself.

Prime Minister:

No, not at all. I suppose if you want to deal with it on a personal basis you could say that on the farm we use a great deal of petrol and that's gets paid for as anyone else's petrol gets paid for. I think you misunderstand the basis, or the reason, for the Government's policies. We were in a situation where oil search in Australia had stopped. People weren't drilling for oil. They weren't developing further existing holes because this is an expensive business and explorers, developing companies, could get more by exploring and developing oil in other places where they'd get something much nearer to the world parity price for whatever they found. The policies of the previous administration stopped oil search just at a time when there was a severe world crisis in oil. Now, as a result of our pricing policies, and as a result of some other inducements oil search is again getting underway in a healthy fashion in Australia. As a result of our policies by 1984 or 1985, 30% to 40% of the oil that we will be using will be coming from reserves that have been proven, developed, as a result of our changed policies. So I think that is showing that they are being successful.

Prime Minister: (continued)

Now if we don't find oil, or more oil, you have to buy an increasing proportion from overseas, from the Middle East and from other countries and you are certainly going to be paying world parity prices for that. There's really no alternative. There are one or two major countries that don't have their oil priced on a world parity basis and they are in real difficulties as a result of it and in conducting an energy policy -- in fact, they just haven't got an energy policy. Oil is in a general scarce position throughout the world and to think that Australian motorists, or any other motorists, or any other motorists can go on getting it under its commercial and economic price is just not real life.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Just back to your personal problems with petrol on the farm -- I'm probably putting my foot in it here -- but isn't rural petrol subsidised?

Prime Minister:

For some people who live in remote areas the freight is equalised. But the margins in some country districts for the re-sellers is a good deal higher than it is in capital cities.

Question: (Paul Barber)

I suppose what I'm getting at is your petrol subsidised?

Prime Minister:

No.

Question: (Paul Barber)

You pay the normal price?

Prime Minister:

We are not in an area that is subject to fuel equalisation, if my memory is correct.

Question: (caller)

Mr. Fraser, yesterday morning I spoke to Mr. Wilkes on the open line and I spoke to him about the plight of the single income family today and at a time when there is great unemployment in our country there are very many married women in the paid workforce who are there simply for economic reasons. They would very much like to home caring for their families, but they can't afford to. Mr. Wilkes said that it wasn't a State problem, that it was a Federal problem and that only the Federal Government could do something about it. Could I ask you to comment, particularly as this is the Year of the Child -- could I ask you what your Government is considering in these areas?

Prime Minister:

We have a number of programmes which are designed to help families - one or two which are specifically designed to help single income families. This is one of the areas where I would like to be able to do much more but again, it's a question of resources. But, family allowance is a policy designed to help families and as you know the payments are made direct to the mother and on the basis of the number of children that you have. The wife's rebate in the taxation system for a taxpayer with a dependant wife, or dependant spouse I suppose is the proper term because it is not necessarily only the husband that works these days, does provide some additional benefit for the single-income family. In economic terms that benefit is nothing like as great as that which a family gets if both the husband and wife happen to be working. One way of providing greater help for the single-income family is to substantially increase the spouse rebate but to do that in a way which is significant and really noticable for individual families could cost \$600m or \$700m or \$800m so there are many problems. Sometimes you haven't got the resources immediately available to be able to tackle them in the way that you would like but the point you make about single income families is, I think, a very important one indeed.

Question: (caller)

I was wanting to ask about one of the promises you made in your policy speech that was not fulfilled and that was the service pensions for Allied ex-servicemen, who of course had the eligibility to receive them.

Prime Minister:

That was a commitment made at the last policy speech and it was a commitment to be implemented during the life of this Parliament, and it will be.

Question: (caller)

This is Mrs. Ellis of the Pensioners Federation. You will recollect that you met officers last October. My concern is this: that as inflation appears to be running higher than the Government anticipated, will the full flow-on of the increase in the Consumer Price Index in the financial year be paid in the November next pension cheques.

Prime Minister:

If you are asking will the adjustment be 100 percent of the Consumer Price Index change, yes it will be. The full flow-on will be paid, yes.

Question: (caller)

Mr. Fraser, I am the wife of an unemployed plumber who has gone through and got all his certificates, a qualified man, who has never been out of work in his life. Now, this a young country, I don't come from this country, I come from

Question: (continued)

Scotland and to me I think that a young country, gone to waste -- what I want to know is why the figures came out this morning -- half a million unemployed people. A qualified man -- you were talking before about unemployment, you touched on it -- about people going for interviews. Now my husband has gone for about five or six interviews and there has been 30 to each interview. I ask you, in this day and age I was shocked to think that a qualified man, a plumber/gas-fitter/welder, cannot get employment. Now what's your comment on that?

Prime Minister:

Many trades are in short supply, even in circumstances we have at the moment when we have far too many people who are unemployed. I tried to emphasise before that I wasn't trying to quantify the number who might not really be trying to get a job -- I said there were some and I also said I know there are many who do want to work and find it very difficult to get a job under present circumstances. What I would like to do is to get your name and address and the name of your husband and his qualifications, and make some inquiries, personally, because I would believe that the qualifications that you describe, it ought to be possible to get a job. Would it be possible to give your name and address to the station so that I can make those inquiries.

Question: (Paul Barber)

The figures she's referring to of course have come out in this morning's press. Can you confirm...

Prime Minister:

They haven't come out in this morning's press. They will come out at about 12 o'clock today.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Would you like to confirm at this stage whether in fact...

Prime Minister:

No, I haven't in fact seen the figures. They will be announced by the Minister at 12 o'clock.

Question: (Paul Barber)

So you don't know what the figures are yet?

Prime Minister:

No, not in detail, no.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Not in detail, but you do know...

Prime Minister:

No, I don't. I've been given a rough order of and we'll get the results of that about 12 o'clock.

Question: (Paul Barber)

If they are half a million unemployed, as the papers are suggesting this morning, are you worried about the psychological impact of that. It seems to me that once you get to the stage of half a million unemployed, you are really getting into the big league - there's no doubt about that.

Prime Minister:

I think it will be under that figure, on what I've been told. We knew we would be hitting a seasonal peak at this time and I believe that we need to look at the other side of the ledger. In the last two or three months of 1978 calendar year, over time was up to higher levels than it had been for many years; employment in manufacturing industry, indeed, private civilian employment, increased in a way that it also had not for many years.

Question: (Paul Barber)

But with respect...(tape turned over)

Prime Minister

...Manufacturing employment had been reducing over a long period because it became very uncompetitive as a result of the of a result of (inaudible) of wages increases four or five years ago. I think all the signs in the Australian economy are pointing to that position being changed. Manufacturing industry is starting to look ahead with much greater confidence than it had for a very very long while. Unless that happens we are not going to solve the unemployment problem because it depends upon selling more Australian goods in the Australian market. It depends upon Australian factories being able to get into export markets and being able to sell in export markets and the more they can sell the more Australian people will be employed in the factories making those products.

Question: (Paul Barber)

When these figures are announced today do you intend to ride out the obvious complaints and criticisms that there are going to be or are you going to...

Prime Minister:

You're talking as though there is going to be some great surprise today. The figures today -- you're making statements or asking questions and then not giving an opportunity for the answer and I think we had experiences of that kind once before and it is really much more helpful if you do give an opportunity for the answer.

The sorts of figures that will come out today have been predicted for a long while so there is no surprise about it. There is no sudden change. The point I am making is that the underlying thrust and help for the Australian manufacturing industry today is much better than it has been for a long while. People are looking to the future with a great deal of confidence. The Ford order books and many Australian companies are fuller than they have been for many years and therefore we are moving into a much better situation than we've had. I think it is early days and if you like, the signs are still tentative. Retail sales at the end of last year, coupled with the improvement in overall employment in a number of industries, gives us much greater hope for confidence in 1979 and it is my very firm view that this is coming to be widely recognised outside.

Question: (Paul Barber)

Could you give a figure of -- an unemployment figure by July, six months time?

Prime Minister:

No, I'm not going to give a figure.

Question:

But it will be down?

Prime Minister:

It will be down from February, of course it will.

Question: (caller)

I have a two-prong question so stop me if it's going on too long. Firstly, it's about the prospects of alleviating unemployment. I own a small business in a blue-ribbon Labor held seat and we pass through our doors in the vicinity of 500 and 600 people a day and over the course of a week I get to speak to most of these people -- they are all concerned about their children. Without exception they all say "why doesn't the Government reintroduce National Service?" Also, Mr. Hawke says that we can't ask our people who receive the dole to work, but we've got a responsibility to these young people to give them incentive and ambition and while we are giving them the dole without requiring anything for it, we are taking away their ambition and we have plenty of land owned by the Board of Works, not owned, but controlled by the Board of Works. Could we give these young people an opportunity to produce - wildlife type - give the responsibility of say two days a week for their dole and the responsibility of planning and building wildlife parks along the banks of these rivers that are just lying there as wasteland.

Prime Minister:

I well understand the concerns that you have in this area and many people have put the same sort of view to me. A lot of people are interested in the re-introduction of National Service but if National Service were to be introduced I think that would have to apply for a whole age group and that's about 180,000 or 200,000 young people through the course of the year. That would need a total reorganisation of the defence effort and the defence commitment and I think we would be introducing National Service for a purpose other than for defence, under the present times, and there are difficulties with it, quite apart from the cost. I don't think it would help the defence effort in the short-term where the major requirement is to get more modern equipment into the defence forces. The point you make about young people losing their ambition and incentive through receiving unemployment benefits I think can be a very real one. This is why a large part of the training programmes that we have introduced have been designed quite specifically to create opportunities for people, and especially for young unemployed. Over the course of this year something well over 100,000 Australians, and many of them young Australians, will be helped in the various training programmes. Ian Viner, the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, will be seeking to establish community based support programmes which will give young people not in work the opportunity of doing some community service of the kind that you mentioned. It wouldn't be compulsory. It would be voluntary but I would hope that a significant number of young people would want to participate. We are seeking to meet the concerns that you mentioned through training programmes which have already helped well over 300,000 Australians and about 100,000 over the course of this financial year and then for the development of a community scheme which I hope will meet the kind of things that you have in mind.

Question: (Paul Barber)

You get very annoyed when people interrupt you, why?

Prime Minister:

I don't get annoyed. I just think it's plain politeness to allow a question to be answered.

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