

PRIME MINISTER ON TALK-BACK PROGRAMME
RADIO STATION 6VA, ALBANY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Question

For several days now we have been promising you the opportunity of talking directly to the nation's leader, the Rt. Honourable the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. That moment has arrived. Our Prime Minister is with us in the studios right at this moment. Mr. Prime Minister, you may not be aware of it but this is an important occasion for us here at 6VA and our listeners so our welcome to you is a most sincere one. Welcome and it is great to have you here in Albany.

Prime Minister

Thank you very much. It's very good to be here.

Question

Can I ask you first of all, is this the first time you have been to Albany or were you here as a Minister some years ago?

Prime Minister

I was here as a Minister for Education some years ago. I think also once before that. It was quite a long while ago and I have been looking forward to coming back very much.

Question

I think the last time Albany was visited by a Prime Minister was on the occasion of the unveiling of the Desert Mount (inaud) Memorial; the late Sir Robert Menzies was here. Do you recall that visit by Sir Robert?

Prime Minister

I wasn't here, but I think I recall the occasion. There was a good deal of debate where this memorial was to be placed I think, wasn't there, in earlier times?

Question

Yes

Prime Minister

I was in the Parliament at the time of course and in the end I think the memorial was placed in a very fitting place.

Question

That brings us to Anzac Day of course, tomorrow. What are your own personal feelings about Anzac Day. It is the 64th anniversary. Should Australians be remembering or should we be forgetting?

Prime Minister

No, we ought to be remembering. One of the things ANZACS fought for and people in world wars and other wars have fought for I think is -- I wasn't in the War, I was a kid during the last World War -- I think that most people would be saying 'I hope this doesn't have to happen again, I hope my sons won't be involved as I have been involved' and I think that would be the kind of thought in a serviceman's mind. I believe that we ought to remember. We ought to remember the debt that we owe those who have fought for freedom and liberty in Australia - which is really fighting for the right of people to bring up their families in their own way and that is really what it is all about. We ought to remember on this one day a year, what many people did valiantly and I think we ought to try and commit ourselves a bit harder to work to make sure that the same sorts of circumstances and need doesn't arise again.

CALLER

I am Peter Lomas and I am President of the Albany Voluntary Community Group, which has some 32 affiliated groups in the local area of membership and we recently conducted a survey as to the need for a family planning clinic in this town, to service the wide area of the great southern. This survey has shown that there is a real need and demand for such a facility. In fact these figures were 11 to 1 in favour of having one. We have been told by the Perth-based Family Planning Association, who receive a Commonwealth funding for this purpose, that such funds for Albany are simply not available. As such a project is needed here, and as we would be serving such a large geographical area, have you, sir, any suggestions as to where we may get Government help in this matter and if not, could you please explain how this policy fits in with the Government's policy of decentralisation?

Prime Minister

I think there are two or three things there and let me try and deal with it separately. We all know that there has been difficulty in Government expenditure over the last two or three years because whatever we spend we have to take from you and many thousands of others like you, in taxes. Governments haven't got anything of their own, or politicians certainly haven't, when they are making political promises to spend. They are really saying we are going to spend something that we have to take from the people of Albany, the people of Perth, the people of Melbourne and Sydney. There has been a need for restraint in expenditure. There has been a great desire for lower taxes. I think this has also been necessary for the general health of the economy in Australia. Family planning is important and I am interested to know the results of the survey that you've undertaken. What I would like to do is to see how the priorities are set in Western Australia. I will talk to Peter Drummond, who is in the studio with me at the moment, about this and what I would like to do perhaps is to be able to get your name and address - get that written down - so that either I or Peter Drummond can write to you a little later about it.

CALLER

I wish to pass on my congratulations ... in Western Australia. We follow as much as we can what you are doing on the other part of the continent. We know that you have some very difficult situations to get through and we appreciate some of what you are doing. What I have to ask is this: you remember the census that you had in July 1976 on population and housing. Now, I have nothing against you people, but as it happened, because of certain happenings, I refused to answer a single word in the census. Now, sir, according to law anyone that has not completed the census are supposed to be prosecuted and fined. Here is 1979 now and I am still awaiting a summons as to the reason why I have not filled in the paper. As I say, I have nothing against your party but ... (inaudible) in this?

Prime Minister

Can I ask you a question, do you want a summons?

CALLER

The thing is this -- for the sake of population, put it that way -- all the better, as far as I go. But of course, again, there must be others who have failed to fill in their forms and if I am pulled over the coals then the others should also. But I am certainly looking forward, if it comes to that, to ask the reason as to why I deliberately failed to... I have said before, congratulations in what you are doing, but there is a certain, if I may use the word, strategy in the refusal of what I did.

Prime Minister

I would say two things; I would like to thank you very much for what you have said about the Government and what the Government is trying to do. In relation to the census I think there has been a feeling that the Bureau of Statistics has been asking more and more questions, going more and more into matters which some people have regarded as personal and private to them. I think there has been an objection to that. In past censuses the Government has looked at the form and it has ultimately approved it. But what we have determined in relation to the next census is that there should be public communication, public discussion, about the nature of the questions and the sorts of questions so that they can be a community input into the census and therefore maybe a better understanding of the purposes that the census is meant to fulfill. I don't know if that gets to the cause of your particular...

CALLER

Not at all. I heartily agree with the census of population, housing, Australia. I heartily agree with that. As I say, there is a certain reason - I wanted to know why I hadn't been pulled over the coals.

Prime Minister

I'd have to make some enquiries about that so I would need you name and address, again, and I could try and find out why that hasn't happened. Again, either I or Peter Drummond could let you know.

CALLER

I have experience in both parts of the world in various matters...

Birthday calls on programme.

CALLER

First of all Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to Albany and I hope you have a very pleasant stay here. I am a Member of the Samaratin Telephone Service in this area and I also speak on behalf of the Albany Voluntary Community Group. I know your interest in what I am going to have to say. Our work makes us increasingly aware of the very real need for a Government funded and operated accommodation centre, both short and long term, for people with emotional disorders. That ranges through alcoholics, drug addicts, potential suicides, women in need of a refuge and homeless youngsters. Funds have been allocated in the past for any of these project -- have rarely flowed beyond the metropolitan area. Albany is a large community with a wide landward area and we should no longer have to say to a caller 'you must go 250 miles for the accomodation and treatment you need'. Can you make some comments on that or how we can possibly get some action in this area.

Prime Minister

I think -- two things; we do try and get services out into remote areas. Albany is not really a remote area in the sense that many parts of Western Australia are remote, but we do try and get the best possible services available over major decentralised areas throughout Australia. It depends on, I suppose, demand, and again how much money we've got to spend as to how far you can go with that. Again, I would like to do what I indicated in relation to an earlier question. I will discuss this with Peter Drummond who is in the studio with me. We will make some inquiries as to how priorities are set in Western Australia and either Peter or myself will drop you a note about it a little later on. But when I have said this on a couple of occasions, I hope the radio station is taking the names.

Question

It seems that there are a number of people who have items of concern, but I'm wondering just how a man in your position, how aware can you be of the difficulties facing a small town, or a relatively small town such as our. Does it ever come across your table that there are a lot of small towns in this country and the problems that they have.

Prime Minister

It does every day of the week because I represent an electorate, Wannon; it is a country electorate in Western Victoria. I won it from the Labor Party and they had held it for the previous 13 years and through most of its history in Federal life. Whether it is a safe Liberal seat now or not I don't know, but I have held it for the last 24 or 25 years. There are towns there of 200 or 300. Some towns of 20 or 30, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000, 25,000. I still regard my job as a local representative, as in a sense, a first duty in politics. I advertise that I am going to be in Hamilton at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and people with their problems come along and see me, whatever they might be. I have a very large electoral correspondence. In this way, quite apart from other occasions - coming to Albany, Bunbury earlier today - people tell you what their problems are, their concerns are, their fears are. In these ways you do keep in touch. Maybe if that doesn't make you conscious of the concerns of people then the representations of Members like Peter Drummond certainly does because they come along and say "look, my people are worried this, or concerned about that". The image of politicians shut away in Canberra, not knowing what goes on, I don't really think is valid in many cases because we are out and about. A week doesn't pass when I'm not in some part of Australia speaking to some real Australians.

CALLER

Ken Bruce. One query I have. We had this - I forget what you call it - cost of living index rise. This, I presume, accounts for the cost of living in the previous six months.

Prime Minister

Three months. It comes out every quarter.

CALLER

Every quarter, yes. That's right. Well how come, how does it arise that we then get price rises to compensate for the wage increase?

Prime Minister

This is the old chicken and the egg argument. What comes first. If wages go up too much prices plainly have to go up. Raw material prices can go up. Over the last year beef prices have plainly gone up. That affects the price of meat in the supermarkets. It does affect a lot of manufactured products, food processed products. The price of oil has gone up because we had to move to a world parity pricing for oil and that flows through into a number of areas in different industries. - transport and power industries in some areas. What we have is a Prices Justification Tribunal that does watch prices in that area and makes recommendations. There are some amendments to the Act which I think will make the Tribunal more effective and more flexible and it will be getting a reference to cover all those areas affected or that have an impact on the Consumer

Prime Minister (continued)

Price Index. In other words, that are important to people in their daily living. In many senses the Prices Tribunal is the umpire for the areas which it has under reference, just as the Arbitration Commission is the umpire in the wages area. These things need to be kept in balance. I am just as much opposed to companies putting up prices too much as I am opposed to trade unionists who sometimes demand too much in a wage increase, because both are damaging to the economy.

CALLER

I am inclined to agree with that, but it seems as though if we put up the wages sort of thing to compensate for the previous price rise in materials, etc. and then as soon as the wages go up again they turn around and put them up again to compensate for the wages, which doesn't seem...

Prime Minister

This is where it all ought to stop, and if we could go for a year with no wage increases...

CALLER

And no price increases

Prime Minister

And to the maximum extent possible no price increases, we would knock the biggest hole in inflation that there ever was. But you can't impose I think by some statute or some law. The Federal Parliament hasn't the power anyway. But countries where the Governments do have the constitutional power to do that it hasn't really worked. They might have held things down for a while but it's a bit like a kettle on a gas ring. You can keep the lid on it for a while but if it is boiling away the pressure builds up and at the end of the time countries that have tried that sort of statutory price control have found that it has been impossible to maintain and after the controls were off the price increases were very great. One of the things that is most important in this for all of us is restraint by all of us. Somebody said that if we all got paid according to our own judgement of what we are worth, we would send the country bankrupt. So we all have to take a bit less than maybe we think we ought to get.

CALLER

I rang to say I am very proud to see that you are here and that if a lot of people in the Albany areas were to have so much confidence in you and Mr. Drummond, Mr. Knight and our local representative, I think that this world would be a lot better to deal with.

Prime Minister

I am delighted that you rang. So often people ring up and they throw some bricks, or whatever, or try to, it's very nice for

Prime Minister (continued)

somebody who has some kind thoughts to express to ring up.

CALLER

Mr. Prime Minister, if they throw bricks at you I would be your bodyguard sir.

Prime Minister

Sometimes I catch them and throw them back.

CALLER

...Mr. Knight and the rest of our representatives. It is great to have you here, sir and I hope that everybody will listen to you and try to get us where you are trying to head.

Prime Minister

The thing I like most about what you said is the respect you obviously have for your local State representatives and also for Peter Drummond, who does a very great job in Canberra, because in one sense even if you don't think much of me so long as you think a lot of Peter Drummond as a local representative that is really the important thing. He is the guy that I hope people are going to go on voting for.

CALLER

I think Mr. Drummond would know me. I'm very very proud to know him, you sir, and our local representative.

Question

I don't know. Talking about some people throwing stones, I suppose, and I am surprised that somebody hasn't already thrown this stone regarding the whaling issue. I guess it's up to me, Mr. Prime Minister, to ask you for your own personal appraisal of what the cessation of whaling in Australia has done for the nation. Has it been worth the price that Albany has paid.

Prime Minister

The Government's decision in relation to the Frost Inquiry was in one sense made easier by the earlier economic decision of Cheynes Beach Whaling to shut down. I know the companies tried to say that the very fact that an inquiry was being held made it difficult for it to market its product. I find that a little difficult to accept. I don't think that's valid. If it was the Inquiry I think they would have kept going and waited until the inquiry had reported and maybe waited until the Government was making a decision about it. But because the company had just down, as we believe for economic reasons, not related to the inquiry, when we came to make decisions on the Frost Report itself. It was in fact a much easier decision than it would otherwise have been, simply because the activity had ceased so far as Australia is concerned.

Question

Have you had that feedback internationally, from other countries.

Prime Minister

We've had a feedback from a large number of people around the world. I was speaking with Sir Peter Scott, who is - I don't know if you know of the World Wildlife Fund but it is probably the most responsible conservation body worldwide. It doesn't politicise. It doesn't get out and play politics with environmental issues. It is now established in Australia and has been operating here over the last, or seeking to get established, over the last two years. It's got a very eminent group of people in charge of it. Peter Scott comes out from time to time from Britain to keep in touch, because it is a worldwide organisation. I know, in that environment, there is a very great respect and hope for the decision that Australia has in fact taken. We haven't had any objections on economic grounds from other countries, from those that are continuing to operate in whaling. Indeed, I would believe that they are already starting to make moves towards the general worldwide phasing out of whaling and in the international environment Australia's voice will now be directed to that end. These things are very difficult when there is an economic activity that has been important to a country community. We would have been faced with very difficult decisions if the whaling company had still be operating. But it hadn't and on our judgement of the facts it has stopped for genuine economic reasons, quite unrelated to the inquiry itself.

Question

Can I ask how well-informed you were at the time that the inquiry was sitting in Albany. Were you personally aware of the situation as it was developing day by day?

Prime Minister

No, not in front of the inquiry. You have to get people to do a job, then you look at their report. I am afraid that with all the things that have to come over my desk, I can't keep in daily touch with the actual conduct of a particular inquiry, although if there are major or significant problems with the way a particular tribunal inquiry is operating, that gets reported and you soon hear about that.

Question

I should have asked you this question right at the beginning because I think a lot of people in the town and the area generally are feeling that perhaps when the Prime Minister comes to Albany he might have some glad tidings for us, some good news. Do you have any such good news for us sir?

Prime Minister

I think there is good news, but it is not in the form of I have come here like Father Christmas. Australia is looking up, the future is looking much brighter. The rural community is happier I think than it has been for a long while. Beef and sheep and wheat have all had a good year. From a look at the countryside flying in it has rained so there has been an autumn break around here. I really do believe that with inflation down and costs much more under control, with the way we have worked over the last three years to develop and protect markets for beef and rural products in the United States and Japan, and I think we will even have some limited success into Europe, I think the future is much more assured. In 1974 when beef prices really crashed, down to disaster levels and they stayed very low since except for the last year, we built up to 100,000 tonnes into Japan and then they suddenly said no beef this year. Obviously that was disaster news for Australian producers in large parts of Australia. With the trade negotiations and the trade agreements that we will have I think our markets are going to be secured in a way that they haven't ever been for Australia's agricultural exports. I am not going to say that farmers have never had it so good, because somebody else said that once and it wasn't really so. But I do think it is looking up. I think we have a right to expect, provided the seasons are reasonably kind, that the next year or so are going to enable farmers to re-build their reserves and assets a bit. That's not just farmers you are talking about when you are saying that, because it obviously has an impact on country towns, farmers are buying more equipment, they are repairing their properties, they are buying new machinery. So it has impact on country towns and on the industries that service the rural community. If I am bringing any sort of a message to Albany, it's one of confidence; confidence in this part of a very very great State and enormous confidence in the 1980s and in what Australia can achieve.

CALLER

I have a question for the Prime Minister. I was going to ask whether he has any thoughts about youth unemployment. The high level of the young people leaving (inaudible) lack of jobs.

Prime Minister

Yes I have. This is a difficult problem for a number of young people. I think we need to understand that it is not the whole group that is in difficulty, it is maybe 10% or 12% of a particular age group, people that perhaps haven't done so well at school, might be a bit diffident, might be a bit uncertain of themselves. The training programmes that we have developed are designed to try and assist such people, to give them an opportunity to get into work. Something over 400,000 people, many of them young people, have been helped by the Government's training programmes over the last two to three years. I also believe that for that section of each age group that does find it difficult to get work that schools can pay more attention

Prime Minister (continued)

in their own training because so often schools pay a lot of attention to those that are academically bright, that are going to go on to universities and colleges and this is good for the schools reputation - we've got such a percentage of our kids going to university or college and they are all doing well, but what about the ones that don't go to university or college that want a different kind of future, that want to go into an apprenticeship or a trade or something else. I am not at all sure that in recent times our school system hasn't concentrated too much on the academic qualifications and hasn't sought to draw out and build a confidence in kids that mightn't be so bright academically but might have many other talents which are quite as valuable but they are different talents. What I am saying is there is a problem. I think many people can contribute to trying to solve it, but the better economic future which we are now facing is also of course going to make sure that more jobs are available. The problems aren't all going to disappear overnight. I don't want to suggest that because there are so many that are tending to disappear. You used to have people look after petrol bowsers. Now they tend to be automatic or self-serve. So a job disappears. That I think just means that we've got to pay more attention at school and after school and to the transition into work to try and help people that are finding it a bit difficult.

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