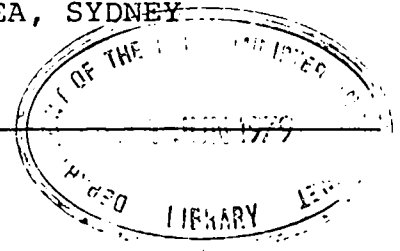


PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED: RADIO STATION 2EA, SYDNEY
(SPECIAL BROADCASTING SERVICE)



Question

I'm sure you realise it is an honour for the Special Broadcasting Service to have the Prime Minister of Australia to interview and of course it is a great pleasure for me personally.

No doubt the world is going through a period of hardship and economic crisis. Each country more and more comes to the point of view that something more is needed - a vision, a philosophy. A country without an ideal is surely stranded. President Roosevelt gave the Americans a New Deal in the Twenties to take them out of their crisis. Kennedy ushered in the New Frontier. What does today's Australia have?

Prime Minister

I think Australia is looking forward to the 1980's now, with a very great deal of confidence. We went through a period where people felt that Governments could do everything; that you only had to ask and Government could provide. I think we now know that that is not really true, because what we have in Australia is what we all - you and I and everyone else - makes of it. Therefore, it is a question of defining what Governments ought to do and what people ought to do for themselves. Quite clearly, for those who are disadvantaged, in special need, Governments have a responsibility, but communities often do too. I think in Australia we have, in a sense, a working out of what Government can do, must do, and then what the community ought to do, what individuals ought to expect to do for themselves. I think this lies behind, in my view, a vision of Australia where people are independent; they go their own way; where we are building a different and a better society as a result of the great migration of the post-war era. Australia can never return to the sort of country it was in the 1930's. I don't think we would want it to, because then it maybe a somewhat narrow, somewhat insular, Anglo-Saxon society. Now we are certainly not that. Our culture has been enormously broadened. Our material well-being has been greatly strengthened by tens, indeed hundreds of thousands, of people who have come to us from Greece and from Italy and nearly every country around the world. I think the vision for Australia is a determination by all of us to make this a good country, a better country to bring up a family, but to make it above all an example to the world of what a free people can achieve.

Question

Australia suffers from the tyranny of the distance. Isolation is a major handicap in everything, from importing new ideas to exporting Australia, whether it is ideas or products. Shouldn't the Government regard air transport as a community service that should be subsidised in some way?

Prime Minister

I don't really think so. We are, of course negotiating, and have been very successfully, to get cheap air fares especially in the off-peak periods between Australia and a number of ports overseas. I think this is especially important, again, for a number of new settlers who have their friends and relatives in countries in Europe. I'm glad to see that the cheap air fare policy is becoming widely accepted. It is certainly attracting a great number of adherents - tens of thousands of people are buying their tickets and I think it will do a very great deal to enable family reunions to take place and for people to meet their old friends. This is really bringing international travel within the reach of all Australians but it is doing it in a way that is still commercial. It's giving us the advantages of cheap air fares but doing it in a way that isn't subsidised. When you say 'shouldn't the Government do something about this' you are not really asking the Government to do it, they asking us to take some funds from all taxpayers to get them to do it, because if we say we are going to fund something we have to take the funds from your taxes and everyone else's taxes. I think we need to use greater discretion in the way Governments spend taxpayer's dollars than sometimes we have in the past.

Question

The same effects of distance and isolation apply internally as well.

Prime Minister

Oh yes, they do.

Question

Fares and costs are going up and isolating Australians from each other and now it's cheaper to fly excursion from Sydney to London than to Perth.

Prime Minister

I don't know about the excursion rates, but that wouldn't apply for other rates. I took out some comparisons of fares across the United States the other day, and say, from London to Moscow, and the internal fares have all been much higher - not just in Australia also in other places - than the international fares. Part of this is the responsibility on domestic airlines to service country towns, small centres, places where you don't get much traffic but where the service is terribly important. I think to an extent therefore, that the airlines probably equalise out-- the general charges--but they do recognise a very real responsibility not just to service Melbourne and Sydney and Sydney and Perth, but also to service the country areas. I think your question recognises the importance of that. It is expensive, but on the other hand I think people are now travelling around Australia more than they ever have. Only this morning I had 30 children to breakfast at the Lodge and they came from Ingham, from Townsville, from Perth and Darwin, from Alice Springs,

Prime Minister (continued)

Tasmania, Sydney, Kirribilli, they came from all over. 20 years ago I don't think anyone -- this was something as part of the International Year of the Child -- but 20 years ago people would have just said 'it's too difficult, travel takes too much time, air transport is too unreliable' and it wouldn't have happened. Now people are moving around, I think much much more than they ever have, and I think it is a good thing that they do.

Question

The recent mini-budget abolished the 40 percent Commonwealth subsidy for medical charges and increased hospital charges. Do you agree with the general opinion that the new system inevitably hits people on the lower income scales, particularly migrants?

Prime Minister

No, I don't think so, not at all, because the average hospital charge in State hospitals now is about \$150 a day and the charge is going to be much less than that. It's - in many cases won't be over half the actual cost, again, to the taxpayer. It's a question therefore how much of the health charge should come out of your own pocket or from insurance and how much should come from taxpayer's funds generally. Now, it ought to be noted I think that pensioners are protected through bulk-billing arrangements and disadvantaged people are also protected through bulk-billing arrangements that have been specially made with the medical profession. If it wasn't for those two protections I would have agreed with you that lower income people would be hit, but those two things protect lower income people. As for the rest, we've basically said in relation to the taking 40 percent off, people can pay the smaller bills themselves or insure. It's their choice, your choice and mine, but for the large bills, the calamitous bills that could destroy the financial capacity of a person or of a family, there is the complete protection there - for each procedure - no charge will be more than \$20 because anything above that, whether it \$1,000 or whatever, the Government will pay. One of the things - I think it is around about 70 percent of everyone is insured in one sense. I would like - once before in earlier times the percentage insured was over 90 percent. I hope that what we've done will encourage more people to insure because I think when you do this it helps people to be aware of what the cost of services are and in some parts of the medical profession - in pathology and hospital - not in the treatment given patients so much but in the way the hospitals are run - there has been enormous extravagance and waste. There are many hospitals in Australia that have only got a 60 percent or 70 percent bed occupancy but they are manned for 100 percent. Again, we've got to make sure that everyone has the best health care which we can devise but I think we've also got a responsibility to do it in a way which protects the revenue and which is economical. People also want lower taxes. I've heard a bit about that over the last few days. We certainly aren't going to

Prime Minister (continued)

be able to meet that sort of wish for lower taxes unless the Government funds we spend, whether it is on education or hospitals, is spent efficiently and economically. I think that is what we are after.

Question

It has been repeatedly claimed that the present method of selecting migrants stresses three main factors: ability to speak English, the possession of professional qualifications recognised in Australia and the need to have capital. In other words, a new concept of immigration that discriminates against traditional immigration, the policy of open door for poor people, unwanted, oppressed and so on. What is your view on this?

Prime Minister

I don't think the new policy is designed to do this. Certainly, of course, we place very high priority on family reunion, which wasn't really mentioned amongst the three criteria and personally I would place a higher priority on that because I think it is ... almost than anything else. I think it is very difficult if people have got their families partly here and partly half way 'round the world. But at the moment, as you know, we do face employment problems and it would be difficult to sustain the kind of open door policy we might have had in the 1950s and '60s without achieving a better employment position in Australia. If we tried to have an open door policy now, with a significant number of people in Australia unemployed, I think that we would get a lot of opposition from the trade union movement and basically the thrust of Australia's immigration policy has had support from all political parties. I want to make sure it stays that way. We are trying to increase the number coming in a bit and we want to go on doing that. I think one of the tragedies was winding down the migration programme when other things were running down, and that tended to make people contract and I think it contributed to the recession. But, building it up slowly, maintaining support, giving high priority to family reunion, then I think those other areas are given weight at the moment largely because of the economic circumstances in Australia. Nothing will suit me more when we get back to the position in which there can be a freer flow of migration to this country once again.

Question

The Galbally Report recommended that the Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications should also investigate and advise on the sub-professional and technical qualifications. This is an area that applies to thousands of old migrants. Has the Galbally recommendation been implemented?

Prime Minister

We've been doing a good deal of work through, in, the industrial relations arena because this gets into the question of trade union acceptance of overseas qualifications quite apart from the fact of whether the training is adequate, because if the trade

Prime Minister (continued)

and training arrangements that have been introduced overseas the Government can accept them - but if the trade union doesn't then there is going to be industrial trouble all around the place. There has been a great deal of patient work going on, not only since Galbally, but on a continuous basis, and Tony Street's Department has been very much involved in this and Employment and Youth Affairs is also involved. We are trying to get to a situation where there can be greater acceptance of overseas qualifications. But it is not just a question of a Government decision, it is not just a question of coming to a decision by Government that a particular trade qualification is adequate, it is also a question of bringing the trade union movement along with us. Therefore, we have been working through tripartite groups involving employers, employees and Government. I think the process and the progress in these areas is often much too slow, but I think that also appreciating the number of these areas where particular trade groups have a position which has been built up over the years, they are concerned that it is not going to be too much or too rapidly broken down. They feel an obligation to preserve the position of their existing members, people who have gained their skills in Australia. That attitude has to be broken down. I think progress is being made but again, not as much as the Government would like.

Question

It's a general situation.

Prime Minister

It is a question of bringing people along in agreement because if we brought in people who have skilled trades from Europe and then we find that the local trade union movement won't accept those skills, or for that matter the employers won't accept, then they won't be able to apply their skills in Australia or if they try to, it could lead to significant industrial dispute. So that is not really the way to go about it.

Question

Another recommendation on the Galbally Report is the one to give all migrants equal voting rights. What action has the Fraser Government taken so far in this regard?

Prime Minister

The Government is looking at this now, and I know the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs has given a great deal of attention to it. It is a difficult and a sensitive issue because, as you would understand, even though Australia has changed very greatly the earlier links with the United Kingdom are obviously much closer than links with other countries. That was so for many Australians and that is a fact of life. The question really is as to whether any residual element of that ought to remain in the recognition in relation to voting rights, whether all people should be put on an equal footing. It is possible, because of Australia's historic development, to have a legitimate argument both ways I think,

Prime Minister (continued)

but the Minister for Immigration has been giving a lot of attention to it and the matter will be before the Government fairly shortly.

Question

Normally we say that we can vote for local Governments because we are taxpayers. Shouldn't the same principle apply at State and Federal level, being a taxpayer?

Prime Minister

I think a good deal can be said for people being citizens in the full sense. Being an Australian citizen and being able to vote in State and Federal elections -- I don't know that it comes merely as a right because somebody lives in Australia. I think if a person does want to live here and if they want to participate in our own democratic processes, if they really want to contribute to Australia, then it is fair enough to take out Australian citizenship and to become an Australian in the full sense of the term and really embrace this country. So I am not really in favour of something which just gives a person the vote just because they happen to be in Australia. I think a demonstration is needed on the part of the citizen that they are taking their living in Australia seriously, that this is really where they want to live. You could take an absurd position with somebody who is a traveller around the world and if you did it really on residence, and let's say there was a residential qualification of 12 months or something, he could one election be voting in Australia, another election voting in Canada, another election voting in Europe, but having no real home anywhere. That just demonstrates part of the difficulty I have with residential qualifications.

Question

Do you think the refugees flow should be totally absorbed by the few traditional countries of immigration which are obviously underpopulated and richer in terms of economic resources, like Australia, or should the whole Western world accept the responsibility?

Prime Minister

I think for a major refugee problem, the whole world has got a responsibility. We've been trying to internationalise the refugee problem from South East Asia. It is very difficult because apart from America, Canada, Australia, and France, maybe one or two others, there are very few countries that are showing any interest at all. They are saying 'look, this is a problem remote from us, we are not really involved in it so we are not going to contribute to its solution'. Now, that makes it difficult because Vietnam has been actively promoting the export of its own citizens. There are some signs that on a Government basis they are again moving forward to encourage people to leave, to pay the Vietnamese Government for the privilege and therefore the

Prime Minister (continued)

numbers could be very large. Generally in a refugee situation governments have tried to prevent people leaving. We know the great exodus from Eastern Europe to the West and across to Berlin and the construction of the Berlin wall. Four million people or more (inaudible) to get out of Eastern Europe. But there people - East European countries - Soviet Union was trying to prevent the exodus. Vietnam has adopted a different approach and if people don't like their regime well "go as quickly as you can fellow". That carries the possibility of very very large numbers being involved, which would obviously cause great difficulty for Indonesia and South East Asia and for Australia. We are very grateful for the assistance and help and the attitude being taken by South East Asian countries. I think Indonesia in particular has helped stop people landing unheralded and unannounced the way the boat people on the northern coast. They don't stop all the boats but they stop some of them, I think most. So in our own region we have a good deal of cooperation but we don't have the international concern which I believe the size of the problem demands.

Question

According to official figures in Australia, there are about 50,000 illegal migrants. It is practically impossible to deport all of them I suppose. Wouldn't it be better to let them legalise their position, after all they would become 50,000 taxpayers as well?

Prime Minister

For all I know, they might already be paying taxes. I hope some of them are. But, there are two problems with this. It is not a simple question. We had one amnesty and people could have come forward. Quite a large number did; not as many as we had hoped. If you are going to have another amnesty people will say "oh well, there will be another amnesty and another and another" and in a sense therefore illegal migration would be encouraged. Now, secondly, if illegal migrants are going to be enabled to stay in Australia by one means or another, that in my view acts against the interests of those who seek to migrate in the normal way; who put their name down and within the system. They go on a waiting list because they recognise we can't have everyone at once. I think we've got to protect the rights of those who want to do it the normal way, because if you are going to accept all the illegal migrants it will greatly reduce the number who could come in and who do wait and go through the normal processes. When people come here on a visitor's visa wanting to try and stay and they do it because "we can get to Australia quickly on a visitor's visa" -- I know quite well that you get some difficult cases, in a sense heartbreak cases by applying a policy rigidly but I think a Government is in a dilemma. There is a policy. Those who are from other countries who are sticking to the policy and wait their turn to come here need to be protected. Their interests won't be if we make it too easy for those who come here illegally. Again, a lot of the problem I think gets back to economic circumstances. If we had greater employment prospects well then we would be

Prime Minister (continued)

delighted for more people to come. The waiting lists would be less and I suppose there wouldn't be the pressure on illegal immigration.

Question

A specific question on Radio Station 2EA. With the present set-up, the 41 different language groups we are covering for have not enough broadcasting time and not everyone enjoys prime listening time. The Federal Government has already made money available for a new and more powerful transmitter which will start operating as from July, the next. Also in July 2EA will have a different frequency. Our problems could be solved, I suppose, retaining the present frequency and transmitter together with the new one. It has been estimated that the extra cost would be almost irrelevant. Could we have some comment on this?

Prime Minister

I'm not sure that the Treasurer would say that the extra cost would be irrelevant, but what you are really saying since there is going to be a new and more powerful transmitter, can't you keep the old one so you will have two transmitters, and there will be two ethnic radios.

Question

No actually. Just two frequencies which will give us more time to distribute, to allocate, to these language groups we have, particularly prime time, because some of them are suffering from the sort of...

Prime Minister

I would be happy to take that up with the Minister for Post and Telecommunications. There are already inquiries launched about that because I was asked that same question at an ethnic press conference that I had in Sydney a little while ago, but I will make sure that I get an answer as quickly as possible.

Question

Don't you find it is ironic that despite the fact that most migrants come from Europe, Australia is having problems entering into trade with the European Economic market?

Prime Minister

I think it find it very odd indeed. If there are any ways in which migrants can bring some pressure to bear on their home governments within the European Economic Community I would be delighted, because we have had a very difficult time. But a few days ago we did initial an agreement with the European Community on trade matters which doesn't give Australia great access but it does open the door a little bit. We get better provision for a number of commodities and a more secure provision. Also, I believe, the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy is

Prime Minister (continued)

going to break the European Community. It's almost unbelievable that now they spend \$25 billion a year on either export subsidies or wage subsidies supporting particular industries. That's almost an inconceivable amount in Australia's terms. We've been arguing very vigorously for better access, as you know, over the last three years. We do this because we were a traditional supplier to Europe. It is a very large trading group. We do have many economic and social links with Europe. It is a very wealthy group of 200 million to 300 million people. The markets are important to us. But we have made progress. There is an initialled agreement. But at the same time, through your own contacts with various European countries, I hope the point will be made that some of the policies have not been very reasonable.

Question

How can we argue our case for access to the Common Market when our own levels of protection are so high.

Prime Minister

But they are not really you know. We've measured protection in tariff terms or in qualitative restrictions and if you take all protective devices in, I think Australia stands up pretty well. But it is really the level of access into a market that determines whether it is protective or whether it isn't - what people ultimately end up by selling. Let's take the motor vehicle industry. We reserve 20 percent of the local market for imports. If you take France, they will allow imports in to about 7% or 8% at the most; Britain, 12% or 13%; Italy 0.1%; Germany is more open door and one or two of the other countries are more open door, but in spite of the European Community individual countries have their own protective devices in the motor industry. If you take employment sensitive areas like textiles, apparel and footwear, Australia imports much more per capita than any other developed country. If the ASEAN countries to our north had the same access to Europe and North America and Japan as they did to Australia they would be exporting an extra \$1,000 million worth of goods a year. Their exports to us have been growing at between 30% and 40% a year. I know there is a common view that Australia is a highly protected country, but our tariffs are marginally higher than Europe's - only marginally. We don't have all the levies and protective devices, the new techniques of protection which Europe has developed. We don't have the wage subsidies. We don't have the export subsidies. We can spend a lifetime developing a market in South East Asia; flour as we had in Sri Lanka, and then Europe came along and said we would like that flour market in Sri Lanka, how much subsidy would we need to push the Australians out of the market. That's just the question they ask; how much subsidy? We don't enter into that kind of competition. 14 million people cannot subsidise their exports against 260 million people in Europe.

Prime Minister (continued)

While there is protection in Australia very obviously, and again during depressed economic circumstances you can't alter that radically and Australian industry needs a certain level of protection which we have indicated and made plain we will give it -- by and large, I think Australia's reputation is much better than a number of journals would indicate. We've got some free trade newspapers in this country. They write editorials on saying how protectionist we are, and they get quoted overseas and then it gets picked up. I think when that happens that we are arguing against Australia's own interests because on any objective judgement there are many countries around the world infinitely more protectionist than Australia.

Question

The last question is for our younger listeners. We have a special weekly programme in the English language for children. Would you like to send them a special message.

Prime Minister

Yes, I especially welcome that opportunity, because this is the International Year of the Child and the future of any country is very much dependent upon children. It's not your future and mine, it is the children's future which is going to count and really determine what sort of country this is going to be. I would like to wish you all the very best of good fortune wherever you may be. I hope you work hard at school and I hope you enjoy it a bit because you've got to go through the process anyway and it is much happier if you can do it and enjoy it at the same time. It is very important because how well you do at school and afterwards depends what you do when you leave; what sort of job you can get. I would just like to wish you all the best for whatever you want to do and to make the point that whether it is going to be bricklaying or labouring or a lawyer or an accountant or a doctor or a schoolteacher, it is important to pick something that you are going to enjoy doing. A job should be more than just work and a means of getting a livelihood. I think it is terribly important to at least be able to enjoy a fair part of what you are doing and then it is much easier to put the effort into it which is required if you are going to do it well. Nothing is worth doing unless you do put some effort into it. Good luck to you all, and especially for those who are leaving school at the end of this year.