

FRIDAY 29 FEBRUARY 1980

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Newton

Mr. Fraser you just made a very successful debut on The Don Lane Show. Have you considered at all perhaps changing roles and going into variety?

Prime Minister

Well if Don will take my job and if he left me with his for a month, we could swap and see what happened.

Newton

Did you enjoy it?

Prime Minister

I enjoyed it very much - yes.

Newton

It must be rather nice to be confronted with somebody who wants to get you to public media but not necessarily talk about politics, not necessarily talk about the government of the day.

Prime Minister

Well it is a change and I think it is a happy one because generally you are talking about, being asked about very serious subjects and to talk about some other happier things is a very pleasant change.

Newton

Just looking around the studios this evening particularly prior to your arrival, it doesn't happen very often in a television station that we have so many security people, and so many people who are here because the Prime Minister of our land is about to join us. Have you ever thought what it's going to be like when you retire from politics, retire as Prime Minister or otherwise - these people aren't going to be around you. Do you think it's going to be a very relaxing feeling for you or do you think you'll miss public life?

Prime Minister

I think it will be very relaxing and it will be fun.

Newton

How soon do you think you'll be able to relax and enjoy some fun?

Prime Minister

Oh I am not contemplating it just at the moment. At the end of last year when I had a couple of weeks enforced down on the farm - I hadn't been there so long in one stretch for years and I found that I really enjoyed it. I really got tempted to send a telegram and say I'm going to stay here mate.

Newton

Tell us about the hose episode whilst you were ill there at the Lodge and is the person still living?

Prime Minister

Tamie was going to have a lunch or something and wanted the Lodge to look nice. So she wanted the windows cleaned. And somebody went around and shut all the windows and I opened my window and I was meant to be in bed, so I got back in bed and the water just came straight through the window. It was a second storey window. So I don't know if they knew whose bed it was reaching. But when I got up and yelled out the window.

Newton

What did you yell out as a matter of interest?

Prime Minister

Well do you want to have your licence taken away?

Newton

You have the power to prevent that Mr. Fraser.

Prime Minister

No I don't think so. We've given it to an independent body - haven't we?

Newton

Oh that's right. I thought you may forgotten that just for a moment.

Prime Minister

You know they would be much tougher than we would.

Newton

You were saying on television tonight with Don that you do enjoy humour. And we've just talked about the fact that it is rather nice to see the Prime Minister of the country in a non confrontation setting. In the last couple of days both yourself and Mr. Hayden have been cast members of most dramatic interviews - in Mr. Hayden's case with John Laws in Sydney - with yourself Richard Carleton on the ABC. Do you believe that public figures and/or interviewers now depend primarily on confrontation?

Prime Minister

Well they shouldn't - no. I think the degree and I said it in the Parliament yesterday - I think that what has happened in the Parliament and the confrontation in the Parliament were vastly serious issues, has not done the Parliament any good. I believe overwhelmingly, Australians would have been ashamed listening in to the debated when they found their legislators arguing about the sort of trivia that was taking the time of the Parliament when there were enormous issues at stake which ultimately and without dramatising it, the independence, the survival, the integrity of nations and people depends. And it ought to be possible as it is

Prime Minister (continued)

in Britain, as it is in the United States and other places to debate this sensibly without personalities - just looking at the issues. And I think it ought to be possible to do it on television or on radio also without debating personalities and motives - just talking about the issues. And for some reason it seems very difficult to do that in Australia.

Newton

Tuesday aside, in most cases both sides of the House are at fault with cat calling and name calling. What do you say to your blokes after an incident such as Tuesday?

Prime Minister

We try and keep them quiet. I think by and large they are not too bad. I do not want to try to lay blame for the sort of things that have gone on. But I would invite anyone who wants to try and make a judgment about what has gone on - what I am going to suggest is very dull, but I would just get them to read Hansard and some of those debates. Then I think they will learn a great deal about some of the speakers who have participated.

Newton

It just seems that listening to Parliament now that very seldom do you really have a full House unless it's opening day, fewer members seem to be in the House, at any one time unless there's something of great significance. Does this mean we're moving toward an executive controlling our country and running our country eventually.

Prime Minister

No I don't think so. It has always been like that. Members of Parliament have work to do, correspondence to answer, people to see, departments to approach on behalf of constituents or something they are interested in - and all this goes on while the Parliament is actually sitting. So if a member is not interested in a particular debate, he probably will not be in the House - in the Parliament itself for that debate. He will be in his office or somewhere else talking with people. And it has always gone on like that. When you are a stranger to the place you go in and you see somebody speaking on a subject which is important to the speaker and to other people out in the community - a mere handful in the Parliament - you wonder what it is all about. But there is no change in that and I think it will always be so.

Newton

As a matter of interest who tells you to get in there, if you should be in the Parliament - I mean it's quite easy to understand that Ministers can be suggested by more senior people like yourself. But who suggests to you, you should be in the House if something rises?

Prime Minister

Oh I do.

Newton

You have your ear tuned all the time to what's happening in the House or you have a...

Prime Minister

Somebody - either the Leader of the House for the Government or somebody in my office will say - look something is happening in the House, you ought to be in there, or if I am scheduled to participate in something, they will say you are on in three minutes or you are on in five minutes or you better start moving. I'm nudged. I am put in the right place.

Newton

You're nudged but not pushed?

Prime Minister

Oh it depends how quickly I move.

Newton

And who is nudging.

Prime Minister

That is right - yes.

Newton

OK, given that maybe Tuesday is an exception and given that perhaps the Parliament has not always been filled over the years, I think you'd agree that in latter years particularly since you and Gough Whitlam came head on, firstly as Prime Minister in his case and Leader of the Opposition in your case, the roles were reversed - perhaps because you're both very big men - you're both quite unique men. I would suggest there's not another Gough Whitlam in Australia and there's not another Malcolm Fraser in Australia, either in appearance or in attitudes and delivery - it seemed then that Parliament started to take a different turning and I'm not blaming you and Mr. Whitlam for the violence. I don't know who started it but there was a personal honing in on the other wasn't there?

Prime Minister

I think there might have been a bit. But that also isn't new. I first listened in to the Parliament in the middle 1950s when the Labor Party split and you had first the Labor Party anti communists, with about nine members in the Parliament. And every day, day after day that group of mine would get up and attack them - the rest of the Labor Party. And the rest of the Labor Party would return the fire. And if people really want to know what a bitter debate is all about, go and read some of those debates and it would make what's happened in recent times look like kindergarten. It really would. All I'm saying is that it is not an excuse for it, it's not a new phenomenon. At different stages in the Australian Parliament there has been a great deal of bitterness and even venom. I think it is a tragedy. I think the people in Australia deserve much better than that.

Newton

Is it native to Australia that we seem, unlike America, once an election has been run and won, we don't close ranks - neither the Liberal voter nor the Labor voter closes ranks. They don't get behind their Prime Minister. Is this a good or a bad thing?

Prime Minister

I would hope that it depends on the issue. If there is a major issue and an important issue, I would hope that the nation would be behind the Prime Minister, whoever it might be. I am not just there to govern for liberal supporters or National Party supporters. My job is to govern with all my own team as well as possible as well as I can, for all Australians - Liberal, Labor or whatever. I think a recognition ought to flow through from the policies and attitudes that a Government expresses. It shows quite clearly that it is a Government of all the people, not just of one section or of one group.

Newton

Just one question on Moscow. It would appear that the country is divided - who is to say whether it's 50/50 or 60/40 in either favour, but would you consider a referendum?

Prime Minister

I don't think you can make important decisions by referendum. I really don't. Ultimately it is going to have to be the Australian Olympic Committee that will have to make up their mind. We are not going to use the methods of the Soviets and withhold passports and this sort of thing - and that would be using their methods. It is not something that we in our society ought to contemplate. So it is a question of persuasion and therefore trying to have as many people as possible understand the consequences and the triumph that they could well give the Soviet Union if Australian and American and British and French and German athletes go to Moscow. They are not going as individuals. They are not going as Bert Newton or John Smith or whatever. They go as representatives of their country. And with the sort of attitude that the Soviets have taken to it, saying as they have that the awarding of the Games is a political success. It is a social event and it is one which shows that all those participating approve our policies and our foreign policies. Against that background it is very hard to - we can't say that politics and sport are separate - they are not. They are so mixed up together. I think this is one of the things that athletes find hard to understand. They would like to keep it separate. But people in other places have already mixed them very much.

Newton

You keep talking about the eventual decision to be made by the Olympic Federation. The Government has the power to prevent the team from going.

Prime Minister

By withholding passports - yes.

Newton

Would you go that far?

Prime Minister

No we have said we would not. We do not believe we should use the methods the Soviets would use. That is a sort of arbitrary thing. I don't think short of war time, short of - sometimes people don't get a passport to go out of the country if you think they are going to bomb somebody or something in some other country. In that category passports can be and have been sometimes withheld. But for a citizen wanting to go about his business it would be unthinkable to withhold an Australian passport. And we are not going to do it.

Newton

This week, just harking back to the interview that Mr. Hayden had with John Laws about which, of course, I wouldn't ask you to comment, but also the interview that you had with Richard Carleton - it would be fair to say that in both cases you would seem to have lost your cool, both gentlemen. Do you think that - how hard is it for you now under the pressure you must be feeling because of the Moscow situation...

Prime Minister

You didn't see that thing with Richard Carleton?

Newton

No I didn't - no.

Prime Minister

I thought it was very quiet and very cool. I really did. I think anyone who saw it did too.

Newton

But there's cool and cool isn't there? Were you as cool as you were with Mike Willesee?

Prime Minister

It depends which interview.

Newton

Yes I saw you interviewed by Mike one evening and he said 'good evening' and you said 'what do you mean by that'.

Prime Minister

Did I?

Newton

Yes you did.

Prime Minister

Well it must have been one of my more acidy moments. No I thought I really was. I didn't get annoyed at Richard Carleton. I didn't feel annoyed because I have been interviewed by him so often. I do a little work before - I didn't do any work because this was almost by surprise and anyway I thought you might have been safe. But with Richard Carleton, if he has spoken on a subject, I read

Prime Minister (continued)

what he has said the night before and the night before that and I had. So I knew exactly the line he was going to take. I had worked out in my own mind that he would not ask me the questions that would enable me to say what I wanted to say. So I was going to say what I wanted to say in any case, in spite of the questions.

Newton

I think I'm with you. What's the standard of political journalism like in Australia today - judging on world standards?

Prime Minister

Well I don't see all that much. What I do see of the British and American journalism is probably the best of it - the articles that come out here - it's not the froth and the bubble. In Australia of course we see it all. There are some journalists who can get beneath it and understand the substance of events that are occurring. There are others that seem more concerned with the froth and the bubble. They won't go to the seriousness of the issue to show the debate - the presence to them is everything, not so much the substance of the issue that is being discussed. I think the way they report it - politicians are principally responsible - but the way they report it helps I think to personalise politics in the Parliament. Because this is the sort of thing that journalists like reporting.

Newton

Do you have your favourites among the journalists?

Prime Minister

Well obviously but I wouldn't want to name them because that would destroy them.

Newton

You just guessed my next question. Mr. Fraser, I thank you very much indeed for your time. I realise that you spent a lot of time with Don on camera. I thank you for coming round and spending this time with me. Just to end up - a question out of the blue. Have you ever voted Labor? Thank you Mr. Fraser.

Prime Minister

You would have been very surprised at the answer.

Newton

OK, I'll turn this tape off now. It's off.

Prime Minister

It's still going.

Newton

On Arthur Caldwell's memory I promise - it's on. Thank you very much indeed Mr. Fraser. Yes it is on.