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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT - SUNDAY PROGRAM - 28 JULY 1984

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JOURNALIST: It's just two weeks since the Labor Party National Conference ended in Canberra and the Prime Minister returned bathed in glory to the task of drawing up a pre-election Budget. It seems then that the only thing left to do was to chose a date for the early election. This week the Government went off the rails somewhat - the Mick Young affair which at first seemed under control blew up into a major political liability. It's a test of Bob Hawke's leadership now and especially when the inquiry by Mr Black QC reports next month. The Prime Minister joins us in our Canberra studios today. To interview him Richard Farmer, political correspondent of The Bulletin, Paul Kelly of the Sydney Morning Herald and Sunday's Robert Haupt.

HAUPT: Thank you Jim. And thank you for joining us this morning Prime Minister.

P.M.: Thank you Robert.

HAUPT: Well as you know to your ... this is the second time round for Mick Young. Justice Hope found that he'd leaked national security information and left it to the Government to decide what to do. Now if Mr Black finds a Customs breach will Mick Young be allowed to stay on in the Ministry?

P.M.: There are two stages in this and let me be quite clear about them. On the Friday the 20th July when I received the report through the Minister for Customs, or the Minister for Industry and Commerce responsible for Customs, Senator Button - on the basis of that report which expressed complete satisfaction as far as the Comptroller-General of Customs was concerned the Minister reported to me that he was satisfied and I accepted that. So was I. Now the matter as far as we were concerned was closed then. And that included the disclosed action of Mr Young and the treatment of it by the Customs. And let me remind you Robert that when Senator Button had reported this matter to me on the day it occurred, the 5th of July, he had told me that he had instructed the Comptroller-General of Customs that Mr Young was to be treated no differently from anyone else. And I confirmed that that was the case and that it had to be. It was on the basis of no different treatment from anyone else that when the final report came to us on the 20th of July that the decision that no further action should be taken against Mr Young stood. Now that's to that point. Now on the Tuesday the 24th at 7.15 p.m. that evening Senator Button received

P.M. cont.: further information through the Comptroller-General of Customs. He came to see me at 9.30 at The Lodge. On the basis of that information we initiated interviews, brought people to Canberra the next day - Wednesday the 25th - and sent people to Adelaide. And therefore the answer to your question is that as a result of the inquiry that has now been initiated by us into a situation where there is now a conflict of evidence there must be, out of that inquiry into that conflict of evidence, there must be a clear vindication of the actions and the statements of the Minister - a fact which I think that he recognised in his press conference last Friday. There must be a clear vindication of his actions and statements. There can be no room for doubt and associated with that there can be the emergence of no relevant information now which was not conveyed to the Minister, that's Senator Button, or myself.

HAUPT: What you're saying is that the inquiry must exonerate Mick Young. But if there's some sort of an open finding or continued confusion that that simply won't be good enough for Mick Young.

P.M.: Yes there must be a clear exoneration and I believe that Mick in his statement on Friday made that clear. I mean I obviously can't go into all the details that have to be examined by Mr Black. But there already is the case that in regard to one matter that has been canvassed in the press since Thursday, an allegation made, and in respect of that allegation a very explicit repudiation of that - that is in regard to the Customs form, a possible second Customs form - now Mr Young has clearly repudiated to the leadership of the Party that any such thing occurred. Now that's merely an example. But it's not proper for me to canvass those issues. I just give that as an illustration.

FARMER: In that same press conference that Mr Young gave to which you referred he drew attention to what he thought was the position that if you set too high a standard for members of Parliament there wouldn't be any members of Parliament left of if there were any members left they'd all be crooks. I was just wondering what your view of that is.

P.M.: Well I think on the question of standards Mick will have to live by the standards which he himself set in his speech to the Parliament last year - 1982 I mean - on Mackellar/Moore. Mick set out the standards there and I guess people will say that they are the standards that should apply. But that's in a political sense. I am not at this point concerned with going to that area. This Government has acted impeccably on this issue. We've now referred the new information to Mr Black. You will appreciate that once we received that information on the Tuesday night, and then on the Wednesday got in the results of those interviews, and we were faced with a conflict of evidence, it would not have been fair to anyone to make a judgement then. It would not have been fair to Mr Young. Importantly, it would not have been fair to certain officers of the Commonwealth Public Service, including those in Customs, to make a judgement for or against them. And it wouldn't have been fair to the public. So we had to create the situation where someone else could examine all those

P.M. cont.: facts which we were not capable of doing, and then make that judgement. I would just if I could make this point about the whole affair - it has been said in respect of Mick Young that he has not learnt from his experience during the Combe Ivanov Royal Commission. Now that's to be decided by an inquiry of Mr Black. One thing you don't need an inquiry into to determine where there hasn't been a learning is in respect of the Opposition. You will recall that in the period of the Combe Ivanov Royal Commission Mr Peacock and others around him were going off in the Parliament and outside attacking the Government saying here's a cover-up etc. Now, of course, it was not true then and there was a complete vindication of our actions. Of course in their hopelessness now they are accusing Senator Button and myself and the Government of a cover-up. There has been no cover-up and it's a pity that they wouldn't learn from their own mistakes.

KELLY: Mr Hawke, I wonder if you've learnt from what happened last year. In particular do you believe that you made a mistake bringing Mr Young back to the Cabinet last year after a fairly tough finding against him by Mr Justice Hope. You told us then that Mick Young had learnt his lesson. Do you still say that today?

P.M.: Well obviously the answer to that Paul - I mean it is so obvious I'm surprised you ask it - I have put to you quite clearly in answer to the previous questions that as of Tuesday night new information, including allegations, became available. How can I answer your question when I have appointed an inquiry in the person of Mr Black to investigate those allegations. Now if it is found, and I stress if, if it should be found by Mr Black against Mr Young, then I'd be in a position to answer your question. And it would have to be yes. But that's obviously until we get the report of Mr Black hypothetical.

FARMER: Prime Minister are you satisfied that Senator Button acted thoroughly enough when he was first told by his Comptroller-General of Customs that there was this problem with Mr Young's return. It does seem remarkable that new evidence should have come up. How could that happen if the initial inquiry was ...

P.M.: Well you understand the mechanics of these things. He, as Minister for Industry and Commerce, has Customs under his control. The Comptroller-General who is also the Secretary of his Department has an independent authority as you appreciate as Comptroller-General of Customs. Now Senator Button not only acted properly but he behaved absolutely impeccably throughout this. As soon as he was told on the 5th of July that this problem had arisen his first direction to the Comptroller-General was, as I have said, that Mr Young should have no special treatment. He should be treated as any other citizen. That was what was done. Now the next step as it were was that there were questions to Mr Young conducted, not by Senator Button, but through the Comptroller-General of Customs where it had to be done. There was then the necessary delay until the 11th of July before Mrs Young returned from overseas. And then following that further inquiries. And on the 20th of July the delivery to Senator Button of a report which concluded, the report concluded, that the Comptroller-General regarded the matter as closed. It was

P.M. cont.: not until he got that report from the Comptroller-General that Senator Button made his judgement, conveyed it to me and I concurred in that judgement. Now his behaviour till then was impeccable, absolutely ensuring no preferential treatment. And then on the Tuesday, it was at 7.15, that in a telephone conversation it was conveyed to him by the Comptroller-General that new information had come to the Comptroller-General.

FARMER: That means that the Comptroller-General hadn't been far enough into ...

P.M.: Well it doesn't necessarily mean that. I mean as a matter of logic, please Richard, understand that. I mean if the Comptroller-General had done the best he could to follow it up and then for some reason which the Comptroller-General would not be aware of some officer then makes another statement, then as soon as he became aware of these new statements the Comptroller-General immediately contacted Senator Button. Now the Senator when he was contacted at 7.15 p.m. Tuesday night, he contacted me and came to The Lodge at 9.35. And together we immediately initiated the action to get the people to Canberra and to send people to Adelaide so that the investigations could be undertaken. Now that was starting at 9.30 at The Lodge on the Tuesday night. The enquiries and the interviews were taking place then on Wednesday, the 25th, and it was by the end of the 25th that I was then able to have the four Leaders together, which obviously included Senator Button - who is also one of the Leaders as well as being the Minister - and we were then proceeding to deal with it. We'd made a prima facie conclusion as to the necessity for an inquiry and standing Mr Young aside. We talked with him the following morning and that was the course of action that was pursued. Now the action of Senator Button at all points has been impeccable.

HAUPT: At that point, Mr Prime Minister, when you made the decision to appoint Mr Black to a special inquiry, you were treating Mr Young in way that an ordinary citizen would not have been treated. An ordinary citizen would have had this new evidence assessed either by the Customs Bureau or Customs investigators or by the Federal Police.

P.M.: Well in respect of the ordinary treatment of Mr Young vis a vis another citizen, that was done in regard to the information up until the 20th - he paid his penalty. Now what you had at this point, after the Tuesday evening, were two sets of considerations and I'm sorry Robert but if you think it through, and you've got a good logical mind, you'll see that what you're spinning around on is not accurate. There are two things that have to be dealt with and they are being dealt with absolute propriety. The first is that Mr Young was a Minister and there needed to be an inquiry in regard to what had happened to him. So he had to be stood aside. He couldn't stay as a Minister while that inquiry was going on. So he was stood aside. Now in regard to anything that may involve or require action against Mr Young or anyone else as a result of those enquiries that will be done in respect of Mr Young or any other person in exactly the same way as it would be in regard to any other citizen.

HAUPT: But what you're assessing here is the propriety of Mr Young continuing in the Ministry ...

P.M.: Now wait a minute - you are partly right but there is more than that. The question of his propriety and the properness of him staying on as a Minister is in issue. And so he stands aside while the inquiry is going on. But there is also the question involved in the allegations and the evidence that has been put forward not only as to whether Mr Young has done something improper but there's also the questions that arise as to whether other people might have done something improper. It's not just Mr Young. And so out of this inquiry there might have to be recommendations for action against a number of people. Now this is the perfectly proper and normal way of going about this.

KELLY: Mr Hawke I wonder if we could just quickly look at two other areas of policies. First of all aboriginal land rights.

P.M.: Yes.

KELLY: You said during the election campaign that you were committed to uniform land rights bill. Do you still stand by that. And secondly, would you reaffirm your commitment which was endorsed by the recent Labor Party National Conference to phase out funds for wealthy private schools.

P.M.: The first question is quite clear and the Minister has been pursuing since we've been in Government the process which he promised the Australian people he would do. That is we were not going to be a Government which was going to rush in and impose our will without consultation with all the interests involved. And those interests involved include the aboriginal people themselves, that includes the mine owners, it includes the rural interests and it includes the States. And my Minister, Mr Holding, has in fact been painstakingly engaged in those processes. We're not going to rush into it but we retain an absolute commitment. And as distinct from the Opposition we won't be walking away from principle. It's going to be very interesting I may say to see whether Mr Malcolm Fraser is going to disown his successor on this abandonment of principle. We won't be walking away from ours. Now in regard to the question of funds for education - we have been engaged in detailed discussions with representatives of all interests in the education system. That is the Government schools, the teachers, the Catholic systemic school area and the non-Catholic private school area. And I'm saying to you that I believe that the decisions that will be announced in the very near future by Senator Susan Ryan will meet the proper requirements of all Australians in regard to education. And that is that irrespective of the creed or the income positions of their parents every Australian child should have the right to the development of his or her talent. That will be achieved.

HAUPT: Mr Prime Minister thank you very much for joining us this morning.

P.M.: Thank you very much.

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