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PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW -- THE MIDDAY SHOW WITH RAY MARTIN

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MARTIN: The Prime Minister, Mr Bob Hawke has for the past two days been involved in close discussion with all the parties, and he has joined up in our Parliament House studio with us now, so welcome to the show Mr Hawke.

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks Ray.

MARTIN: I know that you have spent the last couple of hours, the last hour or so with the Federal President of the AMA and with Mr Mulock, the NSW Minister, do you have good news for us?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, talks are continuing Ray, I don't want to at this stage say anything by way of public comment to prejudice those discussions, but I have some optimism.

MARTIN: Well, that's good. We'll leave it at that then.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you.

MARTIN: I don't want to be too melodramatic about it, but quite clearly we have reached the twelfth hour, there is the prospect that someone will die in a NSW hospital soon.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I have a great sense ^{of} desperation, in one way about the position that has been reached and I have a great feeling of compassion for those people who have suffered so far and may suffer more. I don't think however, that by me engaging at this stage in blame attribution and criticism that I am going to help things. As I say there are some discussions going on, and I hope that as a result of the dedicated efforts of both the Government here and Premier Wran and his Ministers and our opportunity to talk to those people who do really want to get the matter resolved that we will be able to do that. I certainly am prepared to bend all our best efforts to that end. I think we will get there, and I hope soon.

MARTIN: The fact that you are putting so many hours into this is indicative of your concern, that you do see it as a major crisis.

PRIME MINISTER: It is a very, very serious crisis. A lot of crises that face the nation and so on, can be seen in general economic terms, they don't have an immediate personal dimension, but this does. It is innocent kids and mothers, old people who are suffering and we want an end brought to that.

MARTIN: Again, I hesitate to ask you this question. It may be too soon because of the discussions you are talking about - is it a case of Dr Blewett having to go or Medicare having to go.

PRIME MINISTER: No certainly Dr Blewett doesn't have to go and will not go. Unfortunately there has been a section of the profession in NSW who I believe have wanted to use this dispute as a method of trying to smash Medicare. Now, the situation is that the people of Australia have endorsed that and that scheme is here and it is here to stay. But it was no intention of the Government in giving effect to the will of the people in regard to a universal and fair system of medical and health insurance. It was no part of our intention to inflict income losses, serious income losses on Doctors, who conduct part of their practice in public hospitals. We don't want them to carry the burden and we therefore are open to discussions about how we can meet some problems that have emerged in that area. And it is in this, I believe responsible way of negotiation and discussion with them that we can get a resolution of the problem.

MARTIN: Now, Lindsay Thompson is the Federal President of the AMA, but does he speak for the surgeons.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, we have to concede Ray, that there is some medical politics going on, there's some demarcation disputes, if I can use the language of the trade union movement. And that has increased the difficulties. We have tried ourselves not to make worse that conflict within the medical profession and therefore we have been prepared to speak as well as to the AMA, to representatives of the procedural specialists. Now, I spoke on two nights in succession with the procedural specialists and their representatives here in Canberra. We weren't able to get anywhere because they seemed to be more concerned with the idea of smashing Medicare, and so we are now in discussions with Lindsay Thompson and I believe we, as I say we've got the chance of getting somewhere.

MARTIN: There seemed to be of course, good arguments on both sides, but I guess ordinary Australians are saying, look we don't want your excuses we just want those doctors back.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, of course the people want the doctors back and of course My Government and Mr Wran's Government wants the doctors back. We want the public hospital system working and working well and producing the good and efficient service to the people of NSW that it has so markedly done in the past. And in so far as there are real problems concerning the impact upon doctors of the transition to Medicare which has affected adversely their income, they are entitled to be heard and we are discussing

PRIME MINISTER cont: those matters with them. What cannot happen though is there cannot be a use of this particular dispute to try and smash the whole system of Medicare. Now, I think we have reached the point where we are sorting out those two issues, separating them as they must be done, and I repeat Ray it is a little bit difficult I can't go into more details at the moment, but there are serious discussions going on with Dr Thompson and his colleagues. I think there is a chance of success there.

MARTIN: Alright let's go further north of the border Mr Prime Minister. Sir Joh has asked you for help - strange bed-fellows I would have thought with the - I am thinking of the electrical workers strike in Queensland, are you going to help him out?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course I am not going to help out in those terms. Now let's be quite clear about this position, - earlier this week Sir Joh got in touch with me and he was talking about wanting to bring in people from overseas, and what would be the position in regard to visas. Now, I said well you send me something in writing about it and we'll look at that. Now, I have had my Minister, Mr Ralph Willis across this issue and in the event yesterday I issued a statement calling upon all parties - that was not just the unions, but the employers and the Government there to respect the decision of the independent umpire. Now, let's have this quite clear, so everyone has the facts clearly in their mind - the State Industrial Commission is the arbitral tribunal in Queensland, not appointed by any Labor Government. All the appointments under the term and time of Government of Sir Joh, so it is his appointed tribunal. Now that tribunal, on two occasions on the 7th and 13th February, I think are the dates, are the latest decisions - the tribunal said to all parties - here are our recommendations our instructions to you - return to work on these terms. Now it is very interesting that the workers and the unions and the employers both said yes, we accept that. In other words the unions employed in the SEQEB said yes, we accept that. The SEQEB which is the South Eastern Queensland Electricity Board - that's the direct employer said yes, we accept that. So in the classic industrial relations dispute situation you had the unions and the employer saying yes we accept the decision and the recommendation of the independent umpire. Now in any other state of Australia or in the Commonwealth jurisdiction that would be the end of the matter, because when you have the employer and unions saying yes, we accept to go back, but what happened here - the Premier intervened and said no. So despite the fact that you had agreement between the employer and the unions, yes this will settle it - the Premier stopped it. Now in those circumstances, it is quite clear Ray, that no responsible Prime Minister or Commonwealth Government can intervene and try and override the independent tribunal and the agreement of the employer and the unions.

MARTIN: Put it in shorthand for us then Mr Hawke, I mean you've said that some surgeons are trying to break, bust Medicare, is Sir Joh trying to bust the unions in Queensland?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I am a reasonably ambitious person in terms of -and am reasonably confident in terms of my capacity to understand things. I think I am reasonably intelligent, but it justifies my ambition and imagination to understand precisely what is in the mind of Sir Joh. Certainly many of his own Cabinet colleagues can't understand what he is about, they are in dispute with him, and increasingly so are employers in Queensland. Now, since I have been Prime Minister I haven't tried to pick fights with Sir Joh. I have tried as far as I can to be co-operative because my concern is the interest of the people of Queensland and of Australia. But I am not going to get into a position where I am going to be aligned with Sir Joh in trying to smash the arbitration system, because that's what's involved. He may have in mind trying to smash some trade unions, but much more fundamentally than that as far as the people of Queensland are concerned he is trying to smash the arbitration system and that's not on. I mean the BLF are about that too I suppose you could say. Some strange bed-fellows in these attacks upon the arbitration system and I reject the attempts of the BLF to smash the system. I reject the attempts of Sir Joh to smash it.

MARTIN: Did it tickle your sense of humour though that he should say to you, come on Bob give us a hand.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I have witnessed Joh in action now, for a couple of years from the vantage point of Prime Ministership. I think really I've reached the point where nothing amazes me about Sir Joh.

MARTIN: Alright Mr Hawke, just between you and me.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, and a couple of million other people, yes.

MARTIN: Are you having fun in this job?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I enjoy it. I worked hard I guess to get here, and I've enjoyed it. Basically if I can very quickly say why I enjoy it is that you are in a position where you can with a great deal of assistance, from a great range of decent people - I mean not only in Parliament, but in the business community organisations of Australians, trade unions, a whole range of people - there has been a great deal of co-operation to try and get this country going again. I think we have turned it around. We had inherited a very, very severe recession. We are creating more jobs, we have brought inflation down, we are creating more opportunities for young people - and that, I mean it is very hard to explain Ray, what an enormous sense of satisfaction and I think legitimate pride that can give to you. And I repeat it is not something you do yourself, but I feel I have been able to generate an enormous amount of co-operation and co-operative spirit amongst the people in the organisation of Australia, and that is very satisfying.

MARTIN: We had an old mate of yours on earlier in the program, George Negus.

PRIME MINISTER: Old George, yes how is he going?

MARTIN: Old George suggested you were more fun when you were drinking.

PRIME MINISTER: It may have been more fun for him and it may at times have been more fun for me, but I think I am a more efficient Australian since I have stopped.

MARTIN: What about your hide Mr Hawke, is the hide thicker now, do you handle - I mean we have got a cartoon for example from this week's Bulletin you must have seen. "Look I am not Jesus Christ".-"That's another broken promise."

PRIME MINISTER: I hope that's not revealing a state secret.

MARTIN: But I mean is the hide thick now, do you handle those headlines that say, Hawke does a back-flip, - MX missile stuff. When you see the headlines that you vehemently disagree with, can you handle that now?

PRIME MINISTER: Sure, I have always been able to handle that. I mean I was a fairly public figure before I went into Parliament. I had ten years as President of the ACTU. I mean there was no absence of cartoons then Ray. I can handle it and let me say I appreciate the cartoonists art. I think it is a great feature of Australian life, I enjoy them.

MARTIN: Alright well did you enjoy the gallop polls. The latest gallop poll in fact has you way down from that 75%.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I expected that the events of the last week would cause a slump for me and the Government and so I was not surprised. We'll come back, you mentioned the MX, could I just take a couple of moments briefly to make a point - you talk about a back-flip. The situation there Ray, that is that in good faith, three Ministers - myself, Gordon Scholes, who was then the Defence Minister and Bill Hayden. We made a decision that we thought in all the circumstances was in the best interests, not just of the Government, but of the country. I was then faced when I got to Brussels with a situation where with the release of that proposal - it was not only in my party, it wasn't just the 'left-wing', it was right across my party, but it was much broader than that. There was a concern, and what I could see was that two important things were in danger, one was the central importance which I attach and will always continue to attach to the alliance relationship with the United States which involves the bases here, ship visits, - that's central and I wasn't going to allow something to develop which would endanger that continuing central issue, which I regard as fundamental to Australia's external position but something which was transient. And secondly, and very important I think for all the people of Australia, my Government is about seriously in the relevant international forums trying to see what we can responsibly do gradually to reduce the level of nuclear armaments in the world. And I was coming to the view with all the reaction to that first decision that our integrity and capacity to work hard internationally, to advance the causes of disarmament may also be impaired. So, for those two reasons I changed the decision and I don't think it should be taken as a sign of weakness, the original decision was taken in good faith. I think it was the correct thing to do in the circumstances, but then I was faced with a new circumstance and I believed then, and when I got to Brussels that Australia's best interest in those circumstances in regard to those two things - the centrality of keeping the United States alliance, the ANZUS intact, with all

PRIME MINISTER cont: it entails, and secondly, our capacity to pursue disarmament proposals in the realm of international quarters- those were overwhelmingly important. They were more important and the United States Government understood that they were more important than adhering to the first decision. So I want to say, if I can through you to the people of Australia, I don't believe that the change in the decision was a sign of weakness. It was the rightful thing to do, and I believe that as time goes on that will be accepted.

MARTIN: A yes or no answer, do you think that it affected your popularity, your poll, that is in this week's Bulletin.

PRIME MINISTER: No, my change of decision didn't, but what did affect the Party adversely was the public squabbling and airing of different views. That certainly hurt it.

MARTIN: Is that going to stop?

PM: Yes.

MARTIN: We heard from Mr Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister, early this week. He announced on the program - broke the news that in fact he is coming to Australia. Are you looking forward to a game of tennis with him?

PM: Yes, as I said, I think I might be a bit quicker on my feet than David, but

MARTIN: I'm not sure. He is pretty good. And I understand as well that you are playing cricket again this coming weekend.

PM: Yes, there is a re-match of the game against the press in which there was a certain incident back there a couple of months ago.

MARTIN: Is it true that you are in fact wearing one of the Ned Kelly helmets?

PM: Not Ned Kelly, but I have had a couple of cricket helmets sent to me, Ray, and amongst other people Hazel suggested that it would be appropriate that I should wear it, so I usually do what she tells me.

MARTIN: That's good to hear and it's good to have you home, Mr Hawke.

PM: It's good to be here, thank you. And may I say to you, Ray, all the best for your new program.

MARTIN: Thank you.
