



PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MIKE WILLISEE - 5 MARCH 1986

WILLISEE: It is three years today since the Labor Party regained power in Canberra and Bob Hawke became Prime Minister. In that time employment opportunities have been increased, inflation has been contained but interest rates have soared. Now however you analyse that the fact is that business community recognises that the Hawke Government has done, at least, a reasonable job of economic management. So much so that the Left Wing of the Labor Party thinks it is not quite the Labor Party they had in mind. Prime Minister Hawke today agreed to this interview.

PM: Thank you very much Mike.

WILLISEE: Where are we at with politics philosophically in Australia today? We used to have you know the bosses versus the workers and all those clear cut lines. I mean is Fraser or Howard or Peacock to the left or right of you?

PM: Well, I am not interested in political geometry. What I am about is effective politics which are concerned with bringing people together. As I said again at the Press Club today I put to the people of Australia in February of 1983, look you have had seven and a half years of this confrontation concept. It has brought you the worst economic recession in 50 years. It has brought you simultaneous double digit unemployment and inflation. I said it has also brought you a country that is deeply divided and bitter and without hope. I said there is a better way and a better way is to start to talking with the trade unions, to talk with business and get them talking together with government. I said it will produce a better result. What's happened? As a result of that approach where I am close to business, I am close to the trade unions. As a result of that we have a position where we have got record employment growth, record economic growth, we are doing better than the rest of the world. Now I simply say you can talk about that being left or right of x, y and z. What it is about is being close in there with the Australian people.

WILLISEE: Even Gough Whitlam, for all the mistakes he made in government, says at least he had a reformist government and he indicates that you don't.

PM: Well, I don't think he has said and I think you would need identify that proposition. Now I simply say, and I am not in the business of trying to compare myself with Gough or any other

Labor government, what I am saying is that we have been true to the traditions of the Labor Party. We have been true to the proposition that what Labor is about is to create jobs, to create equalities of opportunities. That we have done and we have done it by recognising the greatest cause of poverty in this country is unemployment and there are 600,000 people testifying this night to the fact that those policies, those principles, those objectives, those philosophies have worked.

WILLISEE: You face the real prospect of being the first Labor Prime Minister in our history to get a third term. So I think probably it is not right for you to say that you are not in the business of comparing yourself with other Labor Prime Minister's because you must be compared.

PM: Well, you can say that I must be compared. I was not saying what others do, Mike. I can honestly tell you that I don't sit down and compare myself with Gough or anyone else. I have a view, I don't want to sound melodramatic by talking about a vision but you can use the word if you like, I have a view about where this great country ought to go and can go. And where it ought to go and can go is dependent, I think, overwhelmingly on one thing and this is what I said to the people in February of 1983. It basically depends on being prepared to respect one another and to work with one another. Now we have got the runs on the board, that's what we are going to continue to do.

WILLISEE: And you know, of course, you have been criticised for not having a vision but for concentrating on pragmatic economic management, making the country work.

PM: Yes, I know that there are some people who have said it. But all I am simply saying is that if you have your correspondents and your people who say this, well that is fair enough. I mean that is beaut, I like them exercising their freedom of saying what they think. I am much more concerned with the knowledge that ordinary Australians out there now say to me in their thousands, they are saying it all the time, Australia today in 1986 is an infinitely better place. Our kids have an infinitely better opportunity now than they had three years ago before you came to Government. That is my criterion of successful government.

WILLISEE: And what have those three years of government done to Bob Hawke?

PM: Well I can honestly say Mike, that I have never felt better than I do now. I feel

WILLISEE: But is that government or is that stopping drinking?

PM: Well, you have asked me how do I feel. All I can say is that I feel good and I have got many people and things to thank for that. I think more than anything I have got Hazel to thank for getting me on to a good diet which I think is just essential for everyone and a fairly well disciplined approach to my work.

WILLISEE: Do you miss the so-called Hawke larrikin days?

PM: I don't think miss them is right. I remember them with a certain degree of affection at times. Also with a memory of almost horror. That was a part of my life I hope I am mature and adult enough to say, been there, done that, now you have got another job to do.

WILLESEE: And after Hawke?

PM: That in my democratic party will be for my colleagues to decide.

WILLESEE: But you will have a vote in that matter and people are entitled to know what that is?

PM: They will know at the time if I do have a vote. I won't necessarily be in that situation.

WILLESEE: Some people say Paul Keating is the automatic successor.

PM: ~~Paul~~ Paul is obviously entitled to be regarded as a leading candidate, obviously. There are others, I would think, who also have aspirations. And I am not in the business of publicly advancing causes. Paul wouldn't thank me if I did. And certainly others wouldn't.

WILLESEE: You are not jealous of Paul Keating?

PM: No. He is a very good friend and we respect one another, very, very considerable respect we have for one another. We work very closely together and we will continue to do so.

WILLESEE: What about his outburst recently? He seemed a little arrogant and he seemed a little rattled which is not the usual Paul Keating that we see?

PM: No, he is not usually arrogant, that is right.

WILLESEE: Well, what about that outburst?

PM: I don't want really to revive the circumstances. I simply make this observation, Mike, that one of the things particularly that was said about him, which was totally untrue, totally without foundation, went very much to the morality of Paul Keating. And I can understand him being very hurt about that. Particularly, where there was not a skerrick of evidence to support it, where it was totally baseless. It is all very well for people to stand off and say, well he should have been cooler. Perhaps he should have been, I think perhaps he should have been. But I am simply saying he is a human being with a wife, with children, and he is entitled to feel that there are limits to the way in which a dispirited, unprincipled, incompetent Opposition ought to go in its hopelessness.

WILLESEE: An entire Opposition or one person?

PM: More than one. Let there be no suggestion, Mike, that what we saw last week was just the random outbursts and observation of one man on the Opposition.

WILLESEE: For many years I know that John Howard and you have had some mutual respect, has that gone?

PM: I don't want to introduce a personality bitterness between John and myself and I don't intend to. I will deal with John Howard in the Parliament on the questions of policy and principles, what do you stand for; what is the conflict; how do you make compatible the proposition that you will give away all revenue but you will cut no services; how do you start to make any semblance of sense of your voodoo economics. I will attack on the issue of principles and policies. I won't be attacking John Howard on any personality issues.

WILLESEE: Do you still respect him?

PM: I have less respect than I had previously. I must have. But, I respect him for his position. ~~He~~ He is the Leader of the Opposition and he will have all the respect that properly attaches to that position, Mike. I will deal with John Howard in the Parliament and outside on the issues, on the policies, on the principles. You won't find me getting down into the gutter. I have had the opportunity in the past and there are people in politics who can attest to this, and I'll tell you off the program who they are, where I've had material brought to me about the personal lives of my opponents and I have consistently and religiously refused to use that. That's not what politics should be about in my opinion.

WILLESEE: Even though in the past of course it's happened on both sides.

PM: That doesn't justify it and if my colleagues in the past have done it I don't excuse them. Politics ought to be about issues, principles, policies, about personal competences. I mean I'm saying that in politics you don't say that person is incompetent for this and that reason, of course that's part of politics, but you don't get into the sewer, the gutter about people's personal lives. It's wrong and it's counterproductive. I think that and I certainly hope that the decent people in the Opposition to whom this sort of attack that we've been talking about is as much anathema as it is to me, that their will will prevail.

WILLESEE: Prime Minister thanks very much for your time.

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