



PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW ON 7.30 REPORT - 5 MARCH 1986

SINGLETON: Today the Hawke Government turned three years old. It is not surprising perhaps that most Australians are very divided on the Hawke brand of Labor politics. Depending on your point of view, Bob Hawke has either abandoned Labor's tradition roots or he is the most brilliant politician since Robert Menzies. Well Bob Hawke is speaking with Pru Goward in Canberra.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, looking back over the three years Labor started with a commitment to national land rights. It now seems to be settling for anything that the States will accept which gives Aborigines in each of those States some land. Now do you described that as a necessary sacrifice of principle, party principle for the sake of being a pragmatic government?

PM: No I don't describe that way.

GOWARD: How would you describe it?

PM: Well, what I said at the Press Club again today, I think, is the appropriate response. It is the case, that for a range of reasons, Australians seem to have a different attitude now than they had in 1967 when they, by massive votes, gave powers to the Federal Government in this area. Now any government has to operate reasonably within touch of prevailing attitudes. It cannot go away beyond them. Now what we have been able to do through negotiations with the Western Australian Government for instance is to bring about a situation where there will be secure tenure for Aboriginal people over a significant area of land in Western Australian. The Western Australian Government has agreed to that. We in turn will be putting with the Western Australian Government in to providing infrastructure to provide better facilities for Aboriginal people. Now Mr Holding has assured me that in respect of other States the negotiations are moving towards producing a situation which is the objective of the land rights situation, that is secure tenure for Aboriginal people in regard to land with which they have a traditional association.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, there are people on your back bench who are unhappy with anything less than national land rights legislation and there are obviously Ministers of your own who are unhappy with these Budget negotiations. Is that evidence of serious philosophical differences within the party which you will have to really fight to contain this year?

PM: No.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, surely the leaks and counterleaks from Ministers this week over the Budget are some indication of the seriousness of the cuts you are having to contemplate?

PM: Well, I don't think that follows as a matter of logic. As you heard people say at the National Press Club today, leaks have been a feature of political life for a very, very long period. They are certainly not unique to this Government. And as I said at the Press Club I am proud of the fact that my Ministers in the areas of welfare are going to fight as hard as they can to try and protect the people, the interests of people they represent. That is what their job is. I wouldn't respect them if they didn't do it. We will get the right outcome.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, just finally looking at the problems in the bush. What do you think your talks in the United States over the export enhancement program could realistically achieve for Australians?

PM: There are going to be two parts to the talks. One is concerned with the export enhancement program Pru, and I believe on the indications that we have that the President and his administration share completely our view that this program should not operate in a way which would be to the detriment of Australian producers. And so I hope that we will be able together to, and in discussions with correct congressional leaders, to ensure the sort of protection to which our Australian rural producer are entitled. The second part of our talks will be concerned with trying to ensure that, in the summit meeting that is going to be held in Tokyo in the near future of the seven, that President Reagan will take into those talks a strong position in regard to international trade particularly in regard to rural commodities.

GOWARD: But Australian farmers really are pretty small fry compared with the competing interests of the United States and the EEC?

PM: No I don't accept that. The United States attitude towards Australia reflects a number of concerns and not just as a comparative judgment between the position of their own farmers and their fight with the European Community. Their relationship with Australia is important in a whole range of areas including international relations, security considerations. And I don't believe that they want in any way to prejudice the relationship.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, just finally on BHP. Are you confident that a ministerial inquiry will clear the way for BHP to change hands if that is what the market wishes or

PM: No that is not the way it sees it - we will clear the way. I from the beginning have been totally consistent about this. I have never used the word public inquiry by the way. If you just watch

GOWARD: Ministerial inquiry.

PM: No. There is some suggestion that I have changed position. I am simply saying that I have said at all points what needs to be done and that is what is going to be done. That is that the Government is going to monitor and look at those questions which really directly involve the public interest including particularly the viability and integrity of the steel industry. Now I and my Ministers will be talking to both BHP and Mr Holmes-a-Court to secure guarantees and undertakings about these issues of the public interest. If we are satisfied that those interest are protected then, I believe, it is a matter for the market.

GOWARD: And by public interest do you merely mean the bounties and subsidies

PM: I don't merely mean that. I mean a commitment to continued investment in the steel industry, a commitment to the continuation of the steel industry in its existing locations, a commitment to expand the steel industry to take advantage of the opportunities that have been created by our steel industry plan which have transformed the Australian steel industry from one which in 1982 was going to be closed down to one where in which now the productivity of the steel industry has been doubled, where instead of being struggling, perhaps not going to survive, it is export competitive oriented. We are going to ensure that that's maintained.

GOWARD: And you don't think that concern with that sort of public interest might make share markets and international finance markets a bit uneasy?

PM: On the contrary, I would think that any sensible judgment by the markets and by international finance would welcome a determination on the part of the Australian Government to see that there was going to be retained within Australia a strong viable competitive export oriented steel industry.

GOWARD: Mr Hawke, thank you.

PM: Thank you Pru.

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