



PRIME MINISTER

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW ON THE TODAY SHOW - 16 JANUARY 1987

JOURNALIST: We have something like more than 120,000 young people between 15 and 19 years of age out of work. What do you say to them?

PM: Well, you say these things. Firstly, that there has been a significant improvement in the period since we have been in office. Since 1983 we have created something like 700,000 new jobs which is a record in terms of new job creation. I say to them that we are not only getting the economy right so that there will be a basis for stronger growth in the future but we are also undertaking significant changes in the education and training area. There has been an enormous increase in the participation rate. More kids are staying in the education system. When we came in there was only a 36% retention rate. That is up to 46% now. There are more training and retraining programs available for young people. So my message to young people basically is to the extent possible make sure you stay in the education system because this is an increasingly complex and difficult world so get as much education and training as you possibly can. It is going to be better.

JOURNALIST: Can you say you will get a job?

PM: No, because that would be untruthful if I said to every young person you can get a job.

JOURNALIST: Well, what do you think the major problems for Australia will be in 1987?

PM: The basic task will be to ensure that we retain the very significant improvement in our competitiveness that has been provided by the significant devaluation that occurred during the latter part of '85 and '86. That has put Australian industry and Australian services in a more competitive position than they have been in memory. Now we mustn't dissipate that competitiveness by unnecessarily high wage increases. We have got to make sure that we increase Australia's competitiveness in manufactures and services because if we do that we will providing the sound long term basis for our children.

JOURNALIST: The tax proposals put forward by the Opposition ...

PM: Which ones. I mean there are so many of them. It is Mr Sinclair's which says give the taxing powers back to the States which makes the rest of Liberals and a lot of the Nationals horrified. Is it Sir Joh's who is repudiated by some his own National Party. Which Opposition tax proposals do you mean?

JOURNALIST: Any of them seem to be slightly confusing for a member of the public.

PM: They are all confusing.

JOURNALIST: But at the same whether they know or not it does seem to be more attractive to the average person in the street.

PM: On the contrary. The average man in the street is appalled by them because the average man in the street ...

JOURNALIST: Is he though?

PM: The average man in the street is much more intelligent than the commentator give him credit for being because he knows that if you look at Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and he treats the Federal Opposition with contempt and that is fair enough because that's basically how I suppose they should be treated and are by most. And Sir Joh certainly has that attitude. Now his proposal for a 25% flat tax will mean that the average bloke in the street is going to pay more tax. So he is not enamoured of that. We will win the election and one of the reasons why we will win an election is because we are dinkum about tax reform and we are dinkum about ensuring that there is fairness, that the wealthy, privileged minority can't avoid tax and impose a greater burden on your average viewer. It is your average viewer I am concerned about.

JOURNALIST: The New Right. What role will that play in politics this year?

PM: They will be devastating for the formal conservative parties in this country. They are already doing this. Their spokesmen are saying look, that Liberal Member of Parliament, that Liberal Member of Parliament, those Liberal Members of Parliament, we are going to shoot them down. Just saying it quite like that, they are out. Now that is creating consternation and havoc and bitterness, factionalism and hatred in the Opposition parties. They are disintegrating.

JOURNALIST: Are you pleased to see that?

PM: Well, I would be less than honest if I didn't say as leader of the Government that I saw some satisfaction in it if I didn't see satisfaction in what was happening.

JOURNALIST: You are off to the Middle East?

PM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: What is the purpose of that visit?

PM: Well, for a long time now I have had invitations from Jordan, Israel and Egypt to visit. And it hasn't been opportune for me to do it before now. It is important to do that I think not simply because I have got the invitations but for these two reasons. Australia had important bilateral relations with these countries and I want to do what I can to improve them. It is also the case that that is a region which is volatile, which could be a flash point for a wider international conflict. Now I go there not with any assumption or presumption that I am a mediator or console things. But I think it is important that a nation like Australia which is respected by those three nations should have the opportunity of listening to what they have got to say and being as aware as we can directly of the events there.

....

JOURNALIST: You have been in office for four years. Has it been worth it?

PM: Too right. It's been challenging, stimulating, rewarding, exciting and importantly I think objectively it can be said it has been constructive. I feel certain that Australia is a better place now four years later than it was at the beginning of 1983.

JOURNALIST: Has it been four good years for you Mrs Hawke?

MRS HAWKE: Yes, extremely good. I have felt a great deal of pleasure in the fact that this Government has tackled a lot of the hard things. A lot of things in Australia have just grown like topsy and they have looked at some of the hard things and really given them the once over. And I think it is good to observe that sort of thing. This last year, 1986, was a really tough year in that respect of tackling the hard ones but it is fascinating, it is interesting and satisfying. All those things that Bob said.

JOURNALIST: It obviously takes its toll though. What sort of toll does it have on you personally and your family?

PM: Oh well, I don't want to overstate the toll. I mean I can honestly say to you Elizabeth, that physically I feel better now than I have ever felt in my life. I feel fit. I am mentally alert and that hasn't happened by accident. While I work very long hours I can turn off when I need to. When I put my head down I go to sleep and do turn off. Hazel has got me on the Pritikin diet and I am eating better than I ever have before. I get a good quota of exercise so when you ask about toll I don't feel a physical toll. There is a deprivation of privacy but I knew that would be the case. So again that is not a toll.

JOURNALIST: Does it take away the ordinary day life for you though Mrs Hawke? Do you find that you have lost touch with those day to day things that you perhaps enjoyed doing before?

MRS HAWKE: Well, it is just different. I do different things. I first I missed, strangely enough the thing I missed most was my garden. But one gets used to just doing ... and life fills up so quickly and easily and interestingly. I am not at all bored. I

don't feel at all deprived. On the contrary, I regard it as a privilege to have this sort of experience for this phase of our lives. It is an interesting one for me and I will put as much into it as I can and I am getting a great deal out of it in many respects.

PM: I mean obviously if you are going to do the job of leading this nation that is not a part time job. It is not a thing you can do eight hours a day or five days a week and I tried hard to get the job. I saw it as something that was a challenge, something I thought I could do well and something I knew I couldn't do well unless I just poured the whole of myself into it.

JOURNALIST: But were you as prepared Mrs Hawke?

MRS HAWKE: Well, I didn't plan for it but it is not a matter of preparation. I mean I suppose you can say life experiences are preparation for what comes next and that is how I regard it and we have had many different experiences and phases during our getting on for forty years together. It is a long haul. And we have adapted in each of the phases and situations that we have either found ourselves in or worked towards putting ourselves in.

JOURNALIST: Why do you think the public has lost confidence to a certain degree in politicians?

PM: Well, it is part of the Australian ethos of knocking tall poppies. I mean that is a thing that has grown up in this country and it is fair game in the sense that we have an enormous number of politicians. We are a country of 16 million people and we have a national Parliament and six State Parliaments and the quasi-Parliament of the Northern Territory. There is an enormous number of them and so I think they are more sort of exposed because there are so many. People are always seeing politicians. But as I say it is also part of the Australian approach of knocking tall poppies and politicians are tall poppies. But again I don't get terribly upset about that. I mean I think it is good not to think that you are too far away from and different from ordinary Australians and I like to think that one of the reasons why I have had a fairly successful public life is that I am close to Australians. So if they are sort of reminding you every now and again now don't think you are too different from us. That is pretty health I reckon. You know we can't really go anywhere in Australia and just be Bob and Hazel, private citizens and not noticed. But there are so many pluses about the job. I mean it is an indescribable honour to be Prime Minister of a country which I think is the greatest country in the world and the people I think are the greatest people in the world. I mean to have that honour of being Prime Minister of this country, you can't describe just what that entails.

JOURNALIST: OK, well how do you relax? How does a Prime Minister and his wife relax from the day to day chores?

MRS HAWKE: Lots of things. Tennis, golf, yoga, music, friends.

PM: No yoga here.

JOURNALIST: Are you not partaking in yoga?

PM: No. You have got to say this for her, she is persistent. No, she is very persistent. You know on the diet, the Pritikin, she talked about and then she went on to it herself but she didn't you know yak, yak, yak and say come on get on the diet, get on the diet but she did it herself and the sort of scepticism that I originally had melted as I saw the good sense of it. Now, it worked that tactic with Pritikin. In a subtle way she is trying the same thing with yoga.

JOURNALIST: Will we see you with your legs tangled up around your head some time in the future do you think?

PM: Well, the only person who might get me tangled up is Hazel and the yoga.

MRS HAWKE: And his daughter is a very keen advocate for yoga too. She is working on him.

JOURNALIST: Golf of course is your biggest pastime and I notice out the back there is a practice net for driving.

MRS HAWKE: That was his Christmas present, a practice net.

PM: Combined Birthday/Christmas present. It has been my fate since I was born to get combined Birthday and Christmas presents.

JOURNALIST: That is a terrible misfortune.

PM: Yes, it is awful.

JOURNALIST: What is your handicap?

PM: Well, I have got it down to 17 now. I have been playing for 12 months and they have got me on 17.

MRS HAWKE: Have you got your card in?

PM: Yes, and I played to it at Royal Sydney a couple of days. I am going to get it down further too.

JOURNALIST: When it is all said and done I understand that television isn't a bad area.

PM: Oh you are talking about the swapping seats. Well, I don't want to overstate this. People have asked me what are the things I would like to do. I have got a whole range of things I would like to do after this stage of my existence. And I have just had the idea that I would like to do a series of television interviews with people that I have had the opportunity of meeting in Australia and internationally. I would certainly find it interesting but more importantly I think a lot of other people would.

JOURNALIST: Not keen on George Negus' role at all are you? Take a seat on the Today Show?

PM: No. With all due respect my dear beloved George I was thinking of something in rather greater depth.

JOURNALIST: I didn't hear you say that.

PM: Didn't you? Oh I see. George will recognise and love my observation and the spirit in which it is said.

ENDS