



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MIKE SWINSON, BRUCE MONTGOMERY  
AND ANDREW FISHER, 7.30 REPORT, HOBART, 23 FEBRUARY 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Can we deal firstly with that issue of child poverty and I ask you how can you deliver on your very public commitment made in 1987 when you said that no Australian child will live in poverty by 1990, given the results of the Burdekin inquiry?

PM: Well as I made it clear at the time and I made clear subsequently, what was obviously being conveyed by me then was the point that as a result of the financial and very considerable financial incentives and outlays that we would make there would be no financial need. I never contemplated that by government fiat you could intervene in the interactions of families which will mean there are decisions by children to leave, decisions by parents to throw kids out. The statement was quite clear and the action which followed it has been munificent.

JOURNALIST: But that action has been, has it not, directed towards families that are together rather than kids who are out on the street?

PM: But let me make it clear that no action by government as such is going to stop the cases of kids being away from their families, either by the decision of the parents or the decision of the kids. Now what we've done - I mean you link the two - now I'm entitled and I will respond to the two sides of it. You talked about what I said in the election speech in 1987. It was seriously said and it has been seriously followed up and it is important tonight that Commissioner Burdekin himself has said since the release of his report that it was an appropriate and very useful thing that I've said and that we're doing. There will be an outlay of hundreds, there is now an outlay of hundreds of millions of additional dollars by this Government to give effect to that promise and it will mean that by 1990 there will be no financial need for any child in this country to live in poverty. Now in regard to the area of actual refugees again look at the record of the Government. In the period since we've been in office an increase from \$14M to \$85M in outlays on refugees.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke you seem to have qualified your statement that no child will live in poverty in 1990 to that there will be no financial need for them to be in poverty in 1990, but the two aren't the same are they? It's a qualification?

PM: It's not something I'm saying on your program now. I made it immediately clear from that point on because it's quite clear that no government, whether it's mine or any other, will be able to create a situation where the money having been made available into a family, that it's necessarily going to be spent. I have made it quite clear that as a result of what we do there will be no financial need for a child to live in poverty because of the outlay of the additional hundreds of millions of dollars through the family assistance supplement.

JOURNALIST: But what can you tell the kids then who will be in the streets in 1990 what should they be doing?

PM: ... the first point that we've got to make which Commissioner Burdekin made. Don't say it is a matter for government alone. My Government or the state government or local government. It's a matter for all levels of government and it's a matter for community organisations and it's a matter for families. So I mean your question is ill founded according to Commissioner Burdekin himself. If you're saying what do we say should be done. What we've got to face up to is that this is a problem and a tragedy for the whole Australian nation. And let me say in respect to John Howard his response I welcome. What he said (was that) this is not an issue for political point scoring and I welcome that and I respect him for it and I hope that that's the attitude that will be adopted by all state governments -

(break in transmission)

JOURNALIST: I just return briefly to that child poverty issue for a moment. Is there anything that your Government is going to do now as a result of that Burdekin report to help those kids who are on the street?

PM: Yes well we're going to continue what we have been doing and of course in the light of the report that will be now examined very closely Mike by the relevant committee here and when we've studied it I'll then of course want to talk with the State Premiers and I trust and I believe that we'll get a co-operative approach from them because as I said before this is a tragedy that transcends politics and parties and governments. I trust that once we've analysed the report we'll do it expeditiously, that we'll get the sort of co-operation from all levels of government and from the community that the dimension of the problem deserves. I would remind you that last October I made an offer of an extra \$40M to the States for additional funding for people who are homeless and in crisis and that's an indication I think Mike of the commitment that we have and no-one can play politics on a thing like this.

JOURNALIST: Well Mr Hawke given that and that aside was your promise at the Opera House in 1987 based on impressions and filling in the details later?

PM: No of course it wasn't Barry. With respect that is quite an absurd observation. It was based upon the proposition of a considerable search that we'd done. That it was open to government if the government was sufficiently minded to undertake a massive increase in financial outlays of more than a half a billion dollars under the family allowance supplement. And that was intended as I said then to create the situation that as far as was within the financial capacity of government we would remove the financial need for poverty and by 1990 we will have done that. Now the Burdekin report is dealing with a situation of an interaction of a whole range of social factors, family breakups and so on, which are not within the power of any level of government to deal with at that level. We've got the results of that interaction of factors at the family level. What we've all as a community got to do is to see in the longer term whether there are issues that we can address which is going to minimise the breakup of families but in the meantime to ensure as Commissioner Burdekin says that the services which are provided predominantly by States are delivered more effectively and we do all that we can to co-operate in that respect.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke I wonder whether we could turn to Wesley Vale now. What is your Government going to do now that the environmental parameters if you like are clear for the operation of the Mill?

PM: Well you can't say that they are clear yet. Let me say that what we'll do is abide by the agreement, the long standing agreement Bruce that we have with Premier Gray. And that long standing agreement is that once the Tasmanian Parliament has made its decision then we will deal with the matter expeditiously and as soon as the Tasmanian Parliament's done that we will deal with it.

JOURNALIST: Well Mr Hawke you've probably been briefed on the latest developments and you've probably been briefed today on the State Labor Party in Tasmania, the State Opposition saying that they'll oppose the deal in the State Parliament next week. Do you believe that Robin Gray has watered down those toughest guidelines in the world that he announced in January?

PM: On the evidence it seems to me that he has.

JOURNALIST: So what will you do Prime Minister?

PM: I've just told you what I'll do. I'll adhere to my agreement as I always do and that agreement is that when the Tasmanian Parliament has made its decision, and neither you nor I can pre-empt that decision, they've got to meet and make their decision. When we are presented with that decision we will deal with it expeditiously.

JOURNALIST: Why do you think he's watered down the guidelines? What is there to demonstrate that?

PM: Well there is some evidence in regard on what I know and I've got to say this prima facie because we don't know yet what the Parliament will decide down there but in regard to the level of dioxins there seems to be some, it is suggested, change in the interpreted ... document that has now been agreed between Mr Gray and the joint venturers and what was said before. Now if that's what emerges from the decision of the Parliament that's something that we'll have to look at at deal with.

JOURNALIST: Well given that then if Senator Richardson recommends to you and to Cabinet tougher measures designed to make the Mill safe will you go along with that?

PM: Well it's a valiant attempt but you must you know be very green if I may say so if you think that I'm going to answer a hypothetical question, a hypothesis on a hypothesis. We've got to first of all get the decision of the Tasmanian Parliament then on the basis of whatever that decision may be. I've got to have recommendations, it's not only Bob Hawke but the Cabinet has to have recommendations before it for my relevant Ministers on the basis of what comes out of Tasmania. Now I'm not going to pre-empt either what the Tasmanian Parliament does or says or what my Ministers recommend to me. I will make my mind up with my colleagues when I have (a) the decision of the Parliament and (b) the submissions put before me by my relevant Ministers and that will be done in the Cabinet processes. It won't be done on any television program as much as you'd like me to do it there.

JOURNALIST: But Sir, with respect, all I asked was -

PM: I'm an intelligent bloke, I know what you said and you don't have to repeat it. You said if Senator Richardson makes certain recommendations -

JOURNALIST: Designed to make the mill safe.

PM: Yes, exactly. Now you ought to know if you've watched me in politics I don't answer hypothetical questions.

JOURNALIST: But I think we all want a safe mill, do we not?

PM: I'm sure we all want a safe mill. Look, let me make it clear in terms of the principles that will be in my mind when I consider it, and I think you're perfectly entitled to have that. I'm not trying to dodge behind this question and saying I'm not going to answer hypothetical questions. I'm happy to tell you and all my friends in Tasmania the principle that's in my mind. It's this, quite clear. Firstly, that this and future generations in Australia have a fundamental balance of payments problem and if we can have a situation where enterprise can produce outcomes which is

(PM cont) going to significantly improve that balance of payments situation then we have to seriously examine the project. So the project that has been put before us is going to be seriously examined. But as this Government has demonstrated in six years now, Barry, we don't support development at any price, at any cost and I can assure you, speaking for Bob Hawke and I'm sure it will be the position of all my colleagues, we will examine very very closely indeed all the evidence available as to what are suggested as the harmful effects of the proposal. We will come down with what is the right balance in our judgement between Australia's desire to improve its external accounts position and the obligation that is upon all levels of government to ensure that development doesn't proceed at a price which is legitimately unacceptable for this and future generations. Now I can't, having said that Barry, answer the hypothetical question you put until I know precisely from the decision of the Tasmanian parliament what it is that we're dealing with and then what recommendations I'm dealing with with my ministers.

JOURNALIST: Money comes into it does it?

PM: Of course money comes into it. Money comes into every decision that every individual -

JOURNALIST: \$300 million worth ...

PM: There may be an -

JOURNALIST: ...?

PM: No, no, that's what is suggested by the venturers. Now I don't necessarily accept that that's the accurate figure.

JOURNALIST: But your press statement of the 17th of October quotes you as saying it will mean up to \$300 million net annual addition ...

PM: And as you quote, "up to" is right, because one uses the phrase "up to" because these are the figures that are put. Now I don't necessarily accept every figure that is put. I didn't say it will mean that and the figures are part of the close examination that will have to be undertaken by the ministers who make the recommendations to us. In other words, part of the analysis will have to be what's the best decision you can make as to the likely effect on Australia's current account situation over a projected period of 20 years or so to try and get that figure as accurately as you can. And against that you'll have to try and assess as clearly as you can what is the harm that on the best evidence may be done environmentally, on land and in the ocean.

JOURNALIST: Can I just move on to the issue of Salman Rushdie shortly for a moment. Why haven't you taken strong diplomatic action to make sure that Tehran realises that what they're on about isn't accepted?

PM: Well, we have taken strong action. We have conveyed in the very clearest words that the action Mike of the Ayatollah and those around him offends all sensible and decent principles of international relationships. That is our position.

JOURNALIST: It's not a very strong reproach though is it when you compare it to European nations and to Canada where they've actually withdrawn heads of delegations.

PM: They have withdrawn heads of delegations, I accept that, but I could not have conveyed, it could not have been conveyed more clearly to the authorities what our position is. Now quite frankly I'm not trying to do dodge this issue. We will and are looking at whether it is appropriate to take further action and indeed I've had some discussions this afternoon with Gareth Evans, my foreign minister, and it may be that we will take further action. But at this stage what was necessary we thought was to leave the authorities in Iran in no doubt at all, no doubt at all, that this sort of tactic of threatening to execute someone who has had the temerity to express a point of view with which you disagree, that that's not on, it's not acceptable. Now it may be as I say that it's appropriate having done that to take further measures.

JOURNALIST: Would you withdraw your Ambassador from Tehran if Salman Rushdie lived in Australia?

PM: You're a very good bloke at hypothetical questions. I suppose that if the person involved was an Australian citizen you would have a more compelling set of imperatives operating on you Barry. But I'm not ruling out, let me make it clear, I'm not ruling out the possibility of something more than we've done, but I think in the conduct of relations between countries there is an argument for not necessarily playing all your cards at once, provided that as a matter of principle you've made it clear to the government with which you're dealing that an act which is unacceptable is understood by them as being such in your judgement. Now that we've done, and it is legitimate now, quite legitimate to ask the question in the light of further developments whether more should be done. We are considering that.

JOURNALIST: So does that mean that the principle waters down, depends on the distance -

PM: No it doesn't. It may be a clever way which satisfies your sense of drama of putting it. It's not. I'm simply saying quite honestly that we immediately made the position clear and we will consider if more needs to be done. I honestly ..., if it was an Australian citizen whose life was being threatened it is in the nature of events true of every nation that every nation gets more concerned, more involved, indeed has a greater direct responsibility in regard to its own citizens. There's nothing strange about that, of course each national government around the world has the greatest

(PM cont) responsibility for its own citizens. But we live in an international, interrelated world and so we did express a view on international principles if you like.

JOURNALIST: Do you have any fears about our trade imbalance with Iran if in fact we do go the whole hog and decide to withdraw our head of delegation? As I understand it we have exports of about \$400 million a year to Iran ...?

PM: Sure, sure. I can best answer that question by getting out of that field of hypothesis and getting down to what we've been prepared to do. When the Gulf conflict was on between Iran and Iraq there was a request made to me, to the Government, for the provision of Australian personnel who would be expert in mine detection and it was said to me, part of the advice that came to me was no we shouldn't do that because if we were to do that that would have an adverse impact in the areas that you're talking about, adversely impact on our trade. Now I said well yes it may have that but I believe that in the circumstances that existed at that time it was appropriate that Australia should make that contribution, we couldn't be just leaving it to others. So we indicated that we were prepared and did make available those personnel. So I can show to you on the historical record that I won't allow considerations of trade to stand in the way of what I believe is the appropriate decision as I've demonstrated there. In this case obviously I won't allow trading considerations to stand in the way if in fact as I look at it with my colleague the foreign minister and others it seems to me that we need to take the next step. But it seems that Australia's interests and Australians generally would, say, approve of an approach where government has said we've told the government of Iran that sort of conduct is simply not acceptable and then to know that the government is keeping the situation under review and that if it's appropriate will go further.

JOURNALIST: Can I leave that issue now and go back to Tasmanian issues and the first point is forestry. Conservationists in the southern forests are back into direct action again today suggesting that the forest accord between Tasmania and the Federal Government has been broken. Does it take action by them, this is the Federal Government, to wake up to responsibilities you've got on that accord?

PM: I regard the question as offensive but I'm not going to get upset about it. It's deliberately offensively put. We have an agreement with the Tasmanian government and we will honour that agreement. I don't accept that it's not being honoured despite, for your own purposes, how offensively you want to put a question.

JOURNALIST: Just back on Wesley Vale, are you concerned or disturbed - and you remember the Franklin Dam and the works that the hydroelectric commission continued until the High Court stopped the dam and you paid out \$50 million for that work. Are you concerned that the Wesley Vale pulp mill developers have already started work on Wesley Vale on the pulp mill?

PM: What they have done, as I understand it, they've started to put some road on the basis of a road in there. Let me make it quite clear, in a situation like this they do that in a sense at their own risk because they know what the situation is.

JOURNALIST: I'm sorry, we've run out of time, we're right at 8 o'clock, we'll have to leave it there. I'm sorry for the hiccoughs and thank you for joining us.

PM: It's been my pleasure, thank you very much indeed.

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