



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW/TALKBACK WITH DOUG AITON, RADIO 3LO,  
10 MARCH 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

AITON: Prime Minister, welcome to 3LO.

PM: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be with you.

AITON: It's very good to see how healthy you're looking. I mean we were talking earlier about how Malcolm Fraser aged in office over the years. You've done the reverse really.

PM: Thanks. Well I must say Doug, I've never felt better than I do now and I've got a lot of things to thank for that. More than anything I've got Hazel to thank for it. She watches my diet and I eat very sensibly. As I've mentioned I do have a capacity, I don't get a hell of a lot of sleep always but when the head hits the pillow I go to sleep. But I think more importantly than anything whether you're Prime Minister or whatever you're doing it's what you put into your body, really that determines what you're going to be like.

AITON: Well you've changed two things of course over the last few years. You gave up the booze, as we all know so well, and I saw a photo of you about ten years ago and you really have slimmed down as a result of no beer intake I would say. Would that be right?

PM: Yes although even when I was drinking a lot of beer - I was lucky I inherited from my dad, I'm a pretty lean sort of frame, but as I say, even when I was drinking a lot of beer it wasn't .... but I'm just very much leaner and stronger now.

AITON: It does show up when you look at photos of ten years ago. And then you went on the, I think, the Pritikin Diet.

PM: Yes well Hazel - I mean to say what's so marvellous about the way she does - she was convinced about it herself and she was on it for some time and you know husbands tend to be a bit sceptical about wives saying "well why ...", she didn't preach it at me but I watched and I thought that's pretty sensible. So I just found it very, very much an improvement. In the job I've got Doug, it's impossible to stay on it 100 percent when you're travelling and so on but when I'm in Canberra I'm basically on it completely and I try to eat as sensibly as I can when I'm moving around.

AITON: Actually that would be very difficult at all the functions wouldn't it?

PM: Yes.

AITON: Do you ever miss the conviviality of booze?

PM: No I don't. In the early days - I mean I gave up in May of 1980 so it's getting on for 9 years now and in the early days it's true to say yes you missed it. But people accept - I mean there's no question - they accept that I'm a non-drinker and so they relax with me and the only thing about it is get out of it early, you don't finish up so silly in the morning, so ill-equipped to take the day.

AITON: Six years now, last Sunday I think was the sixth anniversary of your coming into office as Prime Minister. You don't feel tired?

PM: No I don't. I mean it's silly to say that there aren't days when you're not tired. Of course there are. But in terms of the excitement about the job and the enthusiasm, if anything it's stronger than it was then.

AITON: Well apart from going into current issues such as economic setbacks here, there and everywhere and things that happen from day to day, are you happy with the progress the Hawke administration has made in 6 years?

PM: Yes I am. I wouldn't be honest if I said that we've done everything perfectly. We haven't. Obviously there are some things we could've done better and that's true of any human being or any collection of human beings. But I think Doug, the thing that I am happiest about is this. That I look back at the Australia that we inherited in Government in '83 and I think all your listeners who remember back then will remember what a divided, divisive sort of country it was then when you had Australians set against Australian and the trade unions against employers, city and against country. It was just confrontationalism. Now what I asked of the Australian people was isn't there a better way? Can't we sort of work together better? Not that we have to agree with everyone, with each other on everything. But let's recognise that there's so much talent in the business community, so much talent in the trade unions, so much talent in representative organisations, representing farmers and women and so on, can't we just try and tap into one another's experience and expertise and work better together. Looking back now over the 6 years that's what thrills me most about the 6 years. We do work together better now.

AITON: Yes you had that summit when you first came into office, that everyone and most of all the media were so sceptical about?

PM: Yes they were.

AITON: And understandably, I mean I remember thinking myself that what a grandstanding piece of nothing that's going to be. But it actually worked.

PM: Of course it worked. It worked because Australians are essentially decent people. I mean we were a paradoxical people. We liked - in a sense knocking one another - in a sense we almost liked knocking success in some senses in whatever field, but in the end basically Australians are fair-goers. They believe in the concept of a fair go and I think they understand - and they understood then - that we were in a mess in '83. We had the worst recession we'd had in - and I'm not going to be parading to you or to your listeners Doug, a whole series of statistics. The facts were however that in '83 we had the worst recession we'd ever had. You know the highest level of unemployment, the highest level of inflation together ever. And it wasn't good enough. We were just much better than that and, if I had to be asked what's my feeling now, it's one of gratitude to the Australian people that - and this is not just words - I mean a real gratitude that they did respond to my suggestion that if we did work together the better we could do things. There are a whole lot of statistics but just two that seem to me to prove what I'm saying. The job creation Doug, the last statistics came out just yesterday and we've now - to it -

AITON: Buried in the paper too I noticed.

PM: Yes, buried in the paper because it wasn't bad news.

AITON: That's right.

PM: We've now created over one million three hundred thousand new jobs. Just the measure of that is that that's four times faster a rate of job creation than under our predecessors, under Howard and Fraser. It's more than twice as fast as the rest of the world. Now that couldn't have happened just because we had good policies, we have. But it couldn't have happened without the cooperation of the people in business and in the trade unions. Now we look at the industrial disputes - 59% less now than in the previous period. So those are the sorts of indications of what I'm talking about - how good the Australian people have been.

AITON: Well what have you been - you said there have been some minor disappointments, I think you said. Can you name any?

PM: Yes. I guess that one area that disappoints me is that we weren't successful - perhaps we could've handled it better I don't know - but we weren't successful in getting

(PM cont): Constitutional change. I think it's just a tragedy that we couldn't have got those things through because they were all manifestly in the interests of the Australian people. That's a disappointment.

AITON: But that wasn't really anything to do with your own administration was it?

PM: No, although you've got to ask yourself Doug, looking back could you have done it better.

AITON: Could you have sold it better?

PM: Could you have handled it better? I suppose we didn't do well in the result. Perhaps we could've handled it better.

AITON: I think it's fair enough for me to say that you're a bloke who likes to be liked.

PM: Sure I do, yes. But I qualify that? I mean obviously I like to be liked. I mean I've got - it might be silly language - but I've just got a love relationship with the Australian people, I just am besotted with this country, I just love it, the Australians in it. I just like it when we respond to one another, which I think we do. But the qualification I wanted to make is that I hope that if you look back over the 6 years, that there's plenty of evidence that if I think that what's required is something that will be unpopular, I'm still prepared to do it.

AITON: Yes, maybe, I'm sure that's so. But I've noticed over the years even before you were Prime Minister that you seem to me to want to be liked to the extent that you get upset when people don't understand what a good bloke you are and what good intentions you have when people criticise you.

PM: What upsets me is not that people get annoyed about something, what upsets me is that a part of the Australian media, and I'm not a media knocker, but there is a tendency in the Australian media to be negative and that involves often either deliberate or careless misrepresentation and you know that's what upsets me. Obviously just about any decision that a Prime Minister or a Government makes, there will be another alternative point of view and I never, never get upset about argument and disputation. It's deliberate or near deliberate misrepresentation of what you're about and of your motives which upsets me.

AITON: I know something else that really gets you angry too. And that is when journalists question you about things that you have carefully worked out, maybe complicated economic matters to do with your Government or your Treasurer or what have you, and journalists question you in a confrontational manner and they haven't done their homework.

PM: Well that's right. I mean that is annoying because after all journalists are in a sense opinion formers, they are people who provide a basis of judgement for the Australian people. It just seems to me there is an enormous obligation upon those people to do their homework and so often they don't. But let me make it clear. I mean I'm not making a blanket condemnation but there are so many very, very good people in the media, very many.

AITON: Yes and there are some very bad ones too.

PM: Yes.

AITON: Journalism can be very sloppy and it can be very good. I'd like your opinion as to whether the performance of the media in 1989 is better or worse than it was say during your ACTU days?

PM: It's a very hard comparison to make Doug, because in those days one had a close and more direct relationship with a smaller band of people and therefore the opportunity for them and in a sense for you to share knowledge so that they really understood things, was greater and you can't do that in this broader sphere. But generally speaking is it better now than before? I don't know. There are some very, very good people and there are some bad ones. But this year we've had the most amazing example of irresponsible, sloppy, almost criminally neglectful journalism in that story about Hawke talking down the dollar. They ran that story. This is the Fairfax group. Ran the story that Hawke talks down the dollar - says it ought to be 78 cents. I didn't even the day before ... I hadn't addressed the issue. But on the basis of them running that story, you know, the dollar went down. And it was wrong ... and they didn't have the decency and the honesty the next day to come out and say "we got it wrong". I think obviously we can all make mistakes, but if newspapers in an organisation like that, you know, one at the centre of financial journalism, they make that blue, well why don't they just say so?

AITON: There's not much to be lost?

PM: I think people -

AITON: inaudible

PM: When I make mistakes, and I make them, I just think not only is it right to say that you've got it wrong, and if you just look at it, in terms of self interest, people are going to respect you more if you concede it.

AITON: The media is more opinionated than it used to be, even in straight reporting. Say in the Age or the Sydney Morning Herald will be full of comment from those people who the organisations concerned allow to do that.

PM: Yes, there is an enormous amount of editorialising in journalism and in one sense, you know, it's very difficult to say that journalists shouldn't express an opinion in a sense. Why shouldn't they? But it just seems to me Doug that there's a corresponding responsibility. If you are in the media and you're going to offer an opinion, a judgement, then the more you're prepared to do that the greater is the obligation to be fully informed. I think there's a bit of an imbalance at times with some journalists, but I want to get back to the point, I'm not into media knocking. By and large in this country we've got a media which tries to do its job. I think too often as you have said, they try to make themselves the centre of the story particularly in television to say 'look this is what I think' and bang, bang, bang and have a confrontation. But generally speaking we've got a media and thank God it's free.

AITON: You said before that you hope that you've brought Australia together to an extent and that there are good people in business which used to be the traditional enemy of Labor of course. Along with that, with what you've tried to achieve there, have come the criticisms that you've taken the Labor Party across to the Right. How do you feel about that criticism?

PM: Well, it's not correct. I mean, even before I went into Parliament I've said that I've always regarded the exercise of political analysis as rather sterile when it thinks it's done something by simply putting a tag on it saying 'that's Right, that's Left'. It's just so stupid because an intelligent person is going to be on some issues classified as Left, on some issues classified as Right. I mean, there is no intellectually respectable position which flows from being just Right or just Left or just Centre - that's in my judgement anyway. Now, what I've tried to do is to say, what are the sorts of things that we've got to do as a community which are capable of getting basic community support. It's not absolute consensus, you know, a good working sort of position of consensus. That often means that you've got to do some things which are not exactly in some ideal world what you might say is right, but good Government is about leadership but not being that far away from your community that you're not going to be able to make things work. So people who conduct their analysis in terms of the ivory tower, the academic study or the boardroom or something like that and say 'this is what's the correct thing to do' OK it might be a nice academic exercise but that's not what Government's about.

AITON: Have you changed your mind about anything significant during the time that you've been Prime Minister?

PM: Yes, I guess I have. Let me think what those things are.

AITON: Possibly the sort of question you need to have in advance?

PM: Oh no. As you know, I never like questions in advance.

AITON: Yes I do know that.

PM: If I've changed my mind, it's in terms of becoming just much more convinced about some things and I've become even more passionate about some things. The thing that I've become even more convinced of and more passionate about in terms of the future of this country, Doug, is the fundamental importance that all Australians understand that our future, particularly the future of our kids, depends upon us understanding that we are part of this region. The dynamic growth region of the world is going to be in Asia, particularly North Asia. I've always had the view that we should have a close relationship but the more I've been in Government, the more I've understood what's happening in the world, the more worried I get about some elements in Australia which try to fan some sort of anti-Asian feeling because the certainty is that our kids out there now are going to be disadvantaged if we don't do everything we can to become part of the dynamism of this region. You can't have it both ways, you can't say 'look we want to sell all our stuff to you, but we think you're second rate human beings'. It doesn't work. I mean it's morally wrong but it's also intrinsically insane.

AITON: What do you think of Malcolm Fraser in 1989?

PM: Well I think this about Malcolm Fraser. That's why in fact I'm actively trying to get him the job of Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations. I think that Malcolm Fraser has shown, while he was in office, I never questioned him on this and certainly since he's been out of office, a commitment to the concept of racial equality and has worked diligently and very effectively to advance that cause. I think he is worthy of being Secretary General to the Commonwealth because I think, more than anyone that I can think of, he would advance the cause of racial integration in that tragic area of Southern Africa. I would still have disagreements of course with him in areas of domestic policy, quite fundamental ones. I still think he can be, in some senses, a prickly sort of fellow, but I believe he's the best man for that job. I'm working hard to try and get him the job.

AITON: Did you always think about him the way you do now?

PM: I always respected - and it wasn't just a privately held view - I've publicly said that he has an impeccable record on the question of race and colour. Absolutely impeccable. I disagreed fundamentally with the way he was

(PM cont): trying to govern Australia internally. I think there was far too much confrontationism there and a lack of trust in the Australian people.

AITON: We'll go to listeners' calls in a moment. The switchboard's filling up on 678 9044. What about Gough Whitlam? Have you got any thoughts about him?

PM: Yes, Gough and I have always had a good relationship. That hasn't meant that we haven't had our arguments and disagreements. But Gough did some great things both for the Labor Party and for this country. The thing he did for the Labor Party was modernise its platform, get it up towards current realities and future challenges and its organisation improved enormously. Of course, in the area of Government, the most important thing he did, the single most important thing he did, was with China - the establishment of a relationship with China.

AITON: Who should the Liberals put up as leader if they're going to knock you off?

PM: Well, I hope this doesn't sound complacent, but there's no-one there that really has the qualities of leadership. The important thing is they know that themselves. They are totally dissatisfied with the incumbent and he would have been out by now, but there's no-one they've got to turn to.

AITON: Not Fred Chaney? I know he's in the Senate of course.

PM: No I think Fred's passed his zenith. I've said in conversations with him, I've meant it sincerely, I think they've been criminally neglectful over the years in their preselection methods. I mean they've put very ordinary calibre people in their safe seats. I mean they should have got better people in and I wish they had.

AITON: Do you?

PM: Honestly I do because I think Governments are better with better Oppositions. I honestly believe that.

AITON: And what do you want to be remembered for? I won't ask you how long you are going to stay in office because I know you've been evading the question for a long time, but as Prime Minister yourself I mean, but what would you like to be remembered for?

PM: I'm going back to what I said before. If I can be remembered for being a bloke who had a capacity to get on the wavelength of ordinary Australians and persuade them that there was a better way of conducting their affairs than one of antagonism and confrontationalism and of trying to work together more, then that's the main thing I'd like to be remembered for.



AITON: Mr Hawke, I've heard, just today there's been some, within the ALP, there's been some factional rumblings in Canberra, that's the only way I can put it and I can't put my finger on it, I don't know what's going on. Is this any indication that we might be gearing up for an election this year?

PM: No, that's .... to do with the State Parliament preselection in New South Wales. There was some shenanigans going on which didn't reflect much credit on people involved and it was before the National Executive this morning which I was present for an hour or so before I came down to Melbourne. I think that will be sorted out.

AITON: Do you want to say anything about the forthcoming election?

PM: No, the election is a long way away.

AITON: This year?

PM: In no sense necessarily. As I've said, it's the latter part of this year at the earliest, you know, it could be well into next year.

AITON: Ok, let's go to some calls. Roger, good afternoon.

CALLER: Good afternoon. Mr Hawke, having just left the Australian defence forces I would like to know from you, given that we've got a pretty high turnover rate in the defence forces - about 30% over the last three years - when are you going to face up to the fact that the defence force's pay is pretty low and do something about upgrading it?

PM: Let me say this, that what we did was to establish an independent tribunal to consider the levels of remuneration and that's something that had been asked for by the defence force. We've done it and we abide by the tribunal. One of the problems of course that we've got, and let me make it quite clear I'm not trying to avoid the fact that there are high separation rates which create some problems, but I can assure you that I keep in touch not only with the Minister for Defence but with Defence chiefs. They assure us, certainly with one area of exception that I'll come to in a moment, that the issue is manageable. But one of the problems we've got just flows from what I was saying to Doug before. We have lifted the level of economic activity and created so many jobs in this country that the people of quality - and we've got as you know, because you've been in it - we've got so many people of quality in our armed forces that they are able to get very very much more attractive positions often outside the forces than in it. Of course, as I think you would know, the area where our greatest problem has been, and it's not unique to Australia, is with our pilots.

CALLER: But the pilots aren't everything Mr Hawke.

PM: No, I accept that and I would've thought you would've understood from what I'm saying that I wasn't saying it's just pilots. People who are in the armed forces get well trained within the armed forces and there are so many areas where the training, whether it be in technical terms or professional terms, the quality of training provided in the Australian armed forces is very very high by world standards. In the event people in the armed forces get very well qualified and in an expanding economy which is growing twice as fast in terms of employment as the rest of the world there are so many attractive alternatives. Now you can't pitch the rates of pay and the conditions in the armed forces at the level of the competition outside. Just take the area of pilots. If we paid pilots what they're being offered by Qantas and these other shows you would just blow the defence budget out of the water. We wouldn't be able to do what we are doing and having a massive re-equipment of our defence forces.

CALLER: I agree Mr Hawke but the majority of the people in the defence forces aren't pilots, they're all corporals and sergeants and a corporal's base rate of pay is \$18,054. Now that by your own figures is \$7000 below the average income.

PM: I've got to go back to what I said before, that we established an independent tribunal at which you're able to go in and argue your case and we accept the findings of that independent tribunal. If you say that the findings of the tribunal are wrong well it's like saying that we don't accept the umpire's decision.

AITON: We'll have to move on I think. John, hi.

CALLER: Mr Hawke, in the Hawke Government at the moment, in the Parliament, there are quite a number of your Ministry and Members of Parliament who hold dual nationality, which is firstly against the Constitutional right, first of all that is an illegal thing for them to have that under the Constitution. Secondly, and more importantly, you keep preaching the fact of citizenship being important. I would've thought that a Prime Minister of our country would regard it not only as illegal but as immoral for some of them to have these dual nationalities, particularly one who is very prominent who has accepted an Israeli citizenship as well. But apart from that, when are you going to speak out

PM: Just so that we're not being elliptical, who is this prominent one who has accepted Israeli nationality?

CALLER: Well, one of them is the Prime Minister of Australia.

PM: Look John, just let me get it straight. I love talkback radio but I was saying to Doug that one of the things - and I hope you won't be too offended - you get ratbags on it and you come straight into that category. You're wrong, I haven't got Israeli citizenship, so don't take up the valuable time of Doug, myself and the listeners by coming on and telling lies.

AITON: We'll go on to the next questioner. Hello Ian.

CALLER: G'day Doug and g'day Mr Hawke.

CALLER: I don't think either of us are ratbags Mr Hawke. I'd like firstly to congratulate you on the first six years. I think that you and the Labor Party have got nine to go to make something substantial of the country. My work is in, and the concern that I have which is some degree of a qualification I guess, is in the fields of employment, and particularly people in poverty or in disadvantage. I'd like to put to you a proposal that we as a nation need to take on a full employment objective. I know employment is decreasing and that substantial jobs have been created, but as an objective, the concept of full employment, something that we seem to have in the back of our minds as an ideal, but it's on the backburner. Just a suggestion with regard to the J curve and import substitution, those sorts of

Caller (cont): issues, it seems to me that there's possibilities for national incentives towards employment generation programs and opportunities in those areas that we seem to be missing out on but we've got a terrific opportunity to aim for over the next ten years.

PM: Let me say this to you that we haven't put the concept of full employment on the backburner. Could I just point this out to you, we've got the unemployment rate down now to 6.7% from the double digit figure that we inherited. You would've heard I think Ian what I said earlier that we have created jobs now four times faster than under the previous people and importantly in the current situation we're creating jobs in our period of six years more than twice as fast as the OECD average. So -

CALLER: That's the important figure isn't it? The OECD one's important isn't it? The 1.3 million figure does take into account things like CEP programs that were non-repetitive -

PM: This is now jobs that have been created and may I say that 85% of those jobs have been created in the private sector. That doesn't mean we sit back and say well done good and faithful servant, you haven't got anything more to do. But I just ask you to understand this statistic. That's also been achieved where we now have the highest participation rate for more than 20 years. If we had the same participation rate, that is people who could potentially be in the workforce actually saying we want to work, if we had the same participation rate as when we came into office the unemployment rate would be just about 3%, just over 3%. In other words that's so close to full employment that it doesn't matter. We are going to do more in the areas of trying to get our companies in this country to undertake more research and development work so that they'll open up more opportunities. There's still more to be done Ian but I think we're very very much closer towards the concept than this country has been for very many years.

AITON: We'll move on. Hello John.

CALLER: I'd like to speak to Robert Hawke please.

PM: Yes John.

CALLER: Robert. I live down in your old ... down in Sandringham way mate. I've followed your career with great interest, I've been a trade unionist since I was 15.

PM: Which union are you in mate?

CALLER: The Eletrical Trade Union.

PM: ETU, yes.

CALLER: I've followed your career with great interest and I've been a Labor voter ever since I started to vote. I was in the army for five years and I have a family of two daughters and a wife who have been staunch Labor voters, having been educated by myself.

PM: What's the question John?

CALLER: The question is what's the strength of the tertiary fees? I'm so boiled up about these tertiary fees. I have a daughter going to Melbourne University and she's going to be saddled with a bloody great debt when she finishes. I'm a pensioner and God knows how she's going to pay for it.

PM: Well the answer to that John is quite straight forward. They are not tertiary fees, they are a requirement that not when she graduates, not while she's doing her degree, but at a point when she reaches a reasonably high level of earnings that there will be a repayment of what constitutes about a fifth of the cost of the education. See, what we had was a position where still in this country there is a ... if you like in the ratio of people who go to the university against the population proper. In other words there are many many more people who go to university from the very high income sections of the community out of proportion to what they represent in the community as a whole. Which means that generally speaking it's the ordinary lower to middle income people who've been paying proportionately much more for the education of the well-off. That simply just isn't fair. So what we're saying is not that we're going to impose burdens upon lower income people or lower income kids, we've done more to increase the Austudy payments and so on than has ever been done before. We're saying you don't have to pay while you're there, you don't have to pay when you graduate, but when you have reached a relatively high level of earnings afterwards then you will pay a very small proportion of that so that you'll pay then when you can afford it approximately a fifth of the cost of the education. The point is John, there is no such thing as free education. It's a myth, the phrase is a nonsense.

CALLER: I understand that.

PM: And John, it's a question of who is going to pay for the education.

CALLER: Could I say this. I think you blokes have jumped on the wrong tram. I think what you should have done is hit the people that drop out of university. You've got people who go to university who go for one year just for fun and they get all that for free, they drop out. Now they're the people you should be whacking. You should say ok, you pay for ... I've been in that category of supporting university students all my life because I've paid tax and I've got one daughter who goes to university. I've been working since I was 14 and I'm 68 years old.

PM: But John, you know what the situation is if you look at Australia as a whole. What was happening was that the Johns of this world like yourself and others, the majority of whom didn't have kids going to university, were through paying your tax, you were paying to put the kids and the wives of millionaires through university.

CALLER: I know that.

PM: And that's crazy.

CALLER: I know that.

AITON: But your daughter will be paying later on, it won't be hitting you at all.

CALLER: She's terribly concerned.

PM: But John, she's not paying until such time as she is earning a level of income whereby she will be able to pay, not for the whole of her education, but for about a fifth of it, but not until she reaches a level of income where she can afford to do it.

AITON: We'll have to move on. I must say, I don't know if you sold that one wrongly or the publicity was bad or something, but so many people don't seem to understand that one. You only pay later on at such time as you are earning a decent salary.

PM: That's right. Exactly right.

AITON: But people don't seem to absolutely grasp that point.

PM: Let me say this, that from the feedback I'm getting and I've talked to a lot of students myself, they do. Most of them are understanding. But it is true that some people don't want to understand it.

AITON: Hello Bill.

CALLER: Hell Doug. I have a question here for Bob.

PM: Yes Bill.

CALLER: Let's lead into it first. Look, I'm a veteran pensioner Bob and I took strong exception when I was means tested I might say, but never mind. In early 1940s when I was serving overseas I think the Labor Government here, sort of following on from New Zealand I believe, brought in the Social Security Act which guaranteed every citizen a sufficient and indexed retirement pension plus full medical care and all that sort of thing. For that we had to pay in one and six in the pound in those days. That worked out at 17.5% of total income and went on for the whole of my 40 years of working life. I paid in 17.5% of my total income,

PM (cont): the same as everybody is today, and now I find that because of this Medicare scheme I have to join private schemes if I really don't want to join long queues, and have to pay for it. I'm means tested when I believe that every citizen who paid in, and that is every working citizen, was entitled to a pension without means testing. Damn it all, we paid in 17.5%, now what's gone wrong?

PM: Nothing's gone wrong. Let's make it quite clear that this is one issue on which there is unanimity between the Opposition and Government. That is that you can't just be paying benefits to everyone in the community irrespective of income and assets. I simply want to say to you that you have a situation in this community where, particularly with increased ageing of the community Bill, that we've got to make sure that the limited resources of the community go to those who relatively need it most. This is one point for instance where John Elliott and I are absolutely at one. He said he regards it as an obscenity, this is John ..., that his parents should be receiving benefits from ... because they simply don't need it.

AITON: John Elliott or John -

PM: John Elliott. I'm making the point that in a community, if you don't want high taxes, if you want taxes coming down and we of course have brought them down significantly and very soon we'll bring them down further, you've got to then say does it make sense to pay pensions to millionaires? The answer is it doesn't.

CALLER: Haven't they paid in their 17.5% the same as I have? In this way aren't they entitled to the same service as I'm entitled to?

PM: No, this is where I differ with you, and as I say, John Elliott agrees with me and so does the Liberal Party.

CALLER: They may agree but they've paid in just the same haven't they?

PM: And they've had a greater capacity. Do you want your taxes to be higher or lower? If you want your taxes to come down then we can't be paying out your taxes to people who don't need the assistance of the community.

AITON: How would you feel about John Elliott being your opponent in the House? ... election?

PM: I'd be quite happy to have John as my partner. It'd be a pretty lively contest I think.

AITON: It would, but do you think he might get closer to knocking you off than anyone else we've seen in the Liberal Party?

PM: I doubt it but I'd like to try it.

AITON: Hello, you're calling from Tasmania?

CALLER: Hello Mr Hawke.

PM: How are you?

CALLER: Fine thanks.

PM: We've got to think about Tasmania next week with that mill.

CALLER: That's what I wanted to speak to you about. I live on the north west coast and I would really like to appeal to you on behalf of the majority of the Tasmanian people to take the objective, logical, long term view of this mill and prevent it going ahead and polluting the Bass Strait, the fisheries, the farmlands, affecting our children detrimentally. I've got a child who goes to school very close to Wesley Vale. The children themselves are concerned, in fact my nine year old daughter wanted to ring you, she wanted to speak to you but they said there wouldn't be time for children to ask questions -

PM: She could've spoken.

CALLER: But I'm really appealing on behalf of her and all of her friends.

PM: Could I just say a couple of things just quickly about it. I think you'd agree that on our record in six years we've got a pretty good environmental record, and particularly in the area of Tasmania.

CALLER: That's right, that's why I ... appeal to you.

PM: I think you can take it for granted that we will be looking at this extremely closely. Let me put it to you, there are two sets of arguments. One is that with Australia's external account problems that we need to substitute imports and provide our own stuff and also export.

CALLER: I realise that. It's very important but surely, surely -

PM: Let me finish. There's that argument but I recognise there is the environmental argument that you're putting. I have instructed my Ministers that they are to come to Cabinet with as full a submission as they can, including from the CSIRO and any relevant sources all the information that is relevant to those concerns that you've got - the pollutant effect in the atmosphere and the ocean. So you can be sure that all those issues will be before us and if the evidence is that that sort of environmental impact is of unacceptable levels then we will not accept it on its present proposals. The venturers would have to come up with something better if on what they're proposing now it's environmentally unacceptable. So there's no easy ride on this one.



AITON: Sorry, I cut you off without meaning to, I thought we were going to the next questioner. How do you like it when the media refers to you as the silver bodgie?

PM: I don't mind. At least I've got my hair.

AITON: I think you're going to keep it forever too. Hello Gwen.

CALLER: Hello.

PM: Hi Gwen.

CALLER: Hello Mr Hawke. Now we're 70 year old pensioners with our own homes, we've always been in the low income bracket but we own our own home. We manage quite well on the pension thank you very much and we've never been better off in our lives. But I resent some of these greypower leaders who live on Sydney harbour with Swiss bank accounts or a few other rollover schemes and they whinge all the ruddy time. God, they talk about the Pommy whingers, I think Australians are getting just as bad. Who pays for the pension? We know very well that the people who are paying for us are young people with mortgages, with kids to educate and I really think that we're better off than they are.

PM: Well Gwen, I must say how grateful I am to hear what you've got to say. There are amongst some people who are now recently trying to set themselves up as spokespersons for the elderly some reasonably unsavoury characters as you would've seen. I must say that just this week I've had meetings with the representatives of the Pensioners Federation and they are very concerned. They have been representing your interests now for very very many years, they are decent people who've got a long continuous history of concern and involvement in the issues concerning the old. They are very worried about these Johnny-come-latelys -

CALLER: That's right, and they give us a bad reputation. We're not whingers and we are happy with the pension.

PM: I'm glad you are but we still think that there's some more things that can be done and we're in the process of consultations with your legitimate representatives and I can assure you -

CALLER: I hope you take notice of them and not these bloody money hungry so and sos.

PM: Thanks Gwen.

CALLER: Anyway, I wouldn't have your job for double your salary. I think you're doing a damn good job.

PM: Thanks Gwen.

AITON: I wouldn't either as a matter of fact. You're turning 60 this year too. How do you feel about that Prime Minister?

PM: I think it's inevitable and I must say I feel, as I said before, I feel fitter and happier than I think I ever have.

AITON: You've never been very age conscious really have you?

PM: No, never. People who worry about their age, it seems very silly to me. There are certain things in life that you can do nothing about and I don't know if this sounds too philosophical but I've always thought it's an enormously stupid waste of one's time to worry about things about which you can do nothing. You should conserve your energies and ... worry about those things about which you can do something.

AITON: I think I fall into the stupid category. Hello Megan.

CALLER: Hello. Hi Mr Hawke. I'd like to - it's a beef really. I really wanted to say that the way that you speak to each other as normal human beings I find quite offensive. ... manner in which Parliamentarians address each other, sometimes in Parliament and on radio. It may be games of power between you but as a member of the public trying to understand the issues, I often have to turn off the radio rather than to listen to the condescending manner in which you converse with each other. Do you think this behaviour can be addressed?

PM: Megan I think it's a fair point you make. Let me say in fairness, not just to myself, that doesn't matter so much, but to the generality of people in politics, and I'm talking about both sides, not only mine. I think you're a little bit too sweeping in your condemnation but I do accept that at times our behaviour in the Parliament leaves a lot to be desired. I don't retract from that and I as well as others have been guilty of behaviour which is less than perfect. So I accept that, I don't argue it. So that's a sincere statement I'm making and if you heard in the earlier part of the program, I think one of the problems - it doesn't excuse some of the things we do and say at times - but I think one of the problems is the sort of confrontationalist atmosphere that is created by the media to some extent and we respond to it. We ought to do better and I hope we will.

CALLER: It's just communication really.

PM: Sure, sure.

AITON: I think we'll have time for only one more call. By the way, do you ever find any time as Prime Minister to be a grandfather?

PM: Now you'll really get me going. I'm just about to get my sixth grandchild - it might be an Easter baby. This is the great joy of my life. I'm lucky in having two of my grandsons who live very close to me in Canberra and I see them very very regularly and they are beautiful kids. My daughter in Sydney has got my one granddaughter who is the most beautiful little girl in Australia - as I suppose all grandparents say. She's got me wrapped round her little finger and she's about to get a baby brother or baby sister. They are really just the joy of my life.

AITON: Noel, you're the lucky last.

CALLER: Thanks Doug. Good afternoon Prime Minister. It's good to have access to you through Doug's program.

PM: Thank you.

CALLER: My concern is about naturalisation and I would love to see the two million or so non-Australian residents in Australia become naturalised.

PM: It's only one million Noel.

CALLER: One million, ok, sorry about that. I'd love to see them all become Australian citizens because I'm a loyal Australian myself. I'm just concerned Prime Minister about the way you're going about it. ... squirm when I see these ads that say all you have to do is swear. Now apart from your own personal record in that field I really feel that ... really trivialise the whole issue. ... almost a bargain sort of approach. I'm concerned Prime Minister, what about belief in Australia, what about pride in Australia?

PM: Those are the things I've tried to stress. I take your point Noel that you might think that that's a cheap way. All I can say is that those sort of making the decisions in the communication areas seem to think it was a way of striking a chord. I take your point that there might be some who are offended by it but certainly please accept my word it wasn't in any sense intended to be offensive. But I think if you read Noel all the things that I've said, particularly during the Bicentennial year, I said the one thing that makes an Australian is not your colour, your creed, your country of origin. There is one thing and one thing alone, and that is commitment to Australia. I think you and I are at one on that and I think you may be interested to know that as a result of the campaign we're undertaking there's been a massive increase in the applications for citizenship and I hope that we will make a significant inroad to this million.

CALLER: ... I'm a counsellor, I attend many nationalisation ceremonies, but I really feel that a lot of people that I have spoken to are really ... off by this whole approach of all you have to do is swear, ... whole triviality of the issue. Prime Minister, I would like to ask if you would ask your people to look at that and see what the effect is and see whether perhaps -

PM: Ok, we'll have a look at that Noel. Thank you.

AITON: Thanks Noel. And I think that's about as far as we can go. Thank you very much indeed Prime Minister for coming in today. I know it's not often that you can find the time to go on radio programs these days.

PM: It's been my pleasure and can I say thank you to you Doug and to your listeners because I must say it's been a very very positive, constructive sort of hour and I've appreciated it very much.

AITON: Thanks again.

ends