



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PAUL MURPHY, TONIGHT, SBS TV, 26 JULY 1989

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MURPHY: Can I begin by asking you what does the agenda which you've outlined today mean for ethnic communities in Broadmeadows, Cabramatta, Whyalla, Darwin, wherever they happen to live in this country?

PM: It means these things. Firstly, a recognition now, I think, not just from the Government, but forcefully in front of the whole Australian people about the fact that every person in this country, irrespective of race, colour, creed, religion is entitled to a fair go, to access to the services of Government and to develop their particular talents. That's up there now in the boldest of letters. It is a Government commitment. It will become an Australian reality. Secondly, it means in practical terms the expenditure of a considerable amount of money in these areas which will be of importance to those people - firstly, to greatly enhance the recognition of qualifications that these people have brought to Australia, whether they be trades qualifications or professional qualifications. There's been a laxness in the past, over a very long period of time, in recognising those qualifications and so people haven't been able to get the sort of employment, which would both give them the greater satisfaction and which would make the greatest economic contribution to this country. Secondly, in terms of the teaching of the English language, a very, very significant enhancement of expenditures there - some \$30 million - which will mean that there is going to be a greater opportunity for those people to acquire the English language which will mean that they will be better placed in their working environment as well as in their general social environment. In terms of the SBS, there's going to be an extension of the SBS to very large parts of Australia where there is meeting a criteria of large populations of at least 100,000 and some significant ethnic contribution. In the area of courts, for instance, if they have any troubles where directly or indirectly they are involved we're going to be looking at the question of ensuring that there is a better provision of interpreters in the courts. So, in these quite practical ways, in their workplace, in their language, in their rights, their access to the services of Government will mean a great improvement for them all.

MURPHY: So, very much an economic skew and particularly, as you say, in the workplace. I mean, people needn't fear any longer that lack of, say, English as a second language will discriminate against them in employment terms.

PM: We will do everything we can in cooperation with the States, with employers, our own expenditures to see that they are given every opportunity to accelerate the acquisition of English as their language. But while you say yes, it does have an economic thrust, and in that sense there's a benefit to every single Australian, every Australian irrespective of their background, is going to be better off if all Australians have the maximum chance of using their talents. But it's not just an economic thrust. I mean, very much social justice as well. We're going to ensure that the programs of Government and the services of Government are conducted in a way and made available in a way that no person will feel ill at ease or unable to take advantage of them because of their cultural or racial background.

MURPHY: Prime Minister, as you know there are always cynics and critics. The extension of the service of SBS television. It's been suggested this morning that that favours Labor marginal seats. Is that valid?

PM: Well, I expect and intend to do very well at the next election, winning seats from the Opposition, but even in my wildest dreams I don't expect to take out Darling Downs centred on Toowoomba. I mean, that's even a bit beyond me, but it's getting an SBS extension.

MURPHY: In terms of timing, there was the environment statement last week, now this multicultural agenda. Does that give us any indication of election timing?

PM: None at all. I mean, the fact is, as was indicated today, that I initiated these processes before the last election - in April of 1987 when I had the first meeting of the Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs. I said 'what I want to see for this country', nothing to do with election timing...., 'what I want to see for this country is a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. Get to work on it and produce for me the work which will enable us to get that going by the middle of 1989'. So that was the timetable back then and they have done magnificent work. I thank them for it.

MURPHY: In '86, of course, you were forced to make - they were tough economic times as we are going through now - you had to make cuts in certain multicultural areas, English as a second language. But does this represent now, this agenda, really a volte face on that?

PM: Not a volte face. I mean, I think that our friends, our fellow Australians, who have come to us from overseas in the ethnic communities, they would have been disadvantaged, I believe, if there had been a perception that in the tough times when we had to cut back on a whole lot of things, that if they hadn't had to have some share of that restraint and they overwhelmingly understood that. But now we've restored that before this agenda statement today. The agenda statement today represents a very significant increase in the expenditure of funds in that area because it's very important. It's not only, as I say, important for those who need to acquire English in an accelerated way, it's important for them, but the whole community, every single Australian benefits if our economy is going to be operating more efficiently because people are able to operate within it more efficiently. The estimate is that it's costing us hundreds, literally hundreds of millions of dollars per annum because of the absence of English proficiency in a fair part of the workforce.

MURPHY: Is Cabinet totally behind this agenda?

PM: Yes, yes.

MURPHY: There have been reports that some of your drier, more harder-headed Ministers think 'why throw money at a particular segment of the community during tough economic times'?

PM: No, they're totally behind the concept. Always when you're formulating policy and allocating amounts of money and if you have a collection of Ministers, some mightn't do it in terms of the actual amounts in precisely the same way. I think the amounts are right.

MURPHY: One part of the agenda is that you may have a multiculturalism act. There may be legislation -

PM: Yes.

MURPHY: You're examining that?

PM: Yes.

MURPHY: Of course we know the survey recently put out of the distressing reality of racial discrimination which is still in this community. Can you actually legislate against such a thing?

PM: Well, let me just make these points about it. What I've said is that I think the concept of an act makes sense, but I want to have a great deal of consultation in the community about it. If we can develop not an absolute consensus, but a wide degree of understanding of the benefits of this, it'll make sense. You can't legislate

(PM cont): away prejudice. That's a long educative process and that's why we're going to be having this three year program, a community program, to try and eliminate or drastically reduce those things. The idea in an act would be to define both the ambit and the limits of multiculturalism, probably to include within it the fact of English as a national language. Maybe also of provisions against racial vilification. Now those things are significant.

MURPHY: You could be looking at those things?

PM: Yes, I believe so but I want the community come along and understand that these things will make for a better community.

MURPHY: Yes. On that matter of prejudice, do you think there is the threat of the backlash amongst, if you like, old Australians? Do you think the whole concept of multiculturalism still sadly is just not understood by the majority of this population?

PM: No, I think the majority understand it. But it is true, it would be just stupid, Paul, to ignore the fact that there is prejudice out there and ignorance. But I was so thrilled, for instance, today to hear a man like Sir William Keys, widely respected ex-President, National President of the RSL, taking that issue head on saying the attitudes of the past, founded in a different society when 90 percent were of Anglo-Celtic background, now less than 50 percent. He said the world is different, Australia is different, the region is different, the world is different. We've got to face up to those facts. The worst thing, I mean, I say this to any of your listeners, your viewers, who have some of that prejudice if you want to do the worst possible thing for your kids, it is to refuse to recognise the fact that we are a multicultural society, that we are part of a region which is going to determine our future economic welfare. If we act in a way both internally and in our relations with others in a way which assumes that one colour is better than another or we are superior to someone else because of the hue of our skin, then that's the worst thing you can do for your kids because you'll condemn them to a significantly lesser economic future.

MURPHY: Prime Minister, you've already said that you're extending SBS. Would you like to see ads on SBS?

PM: Well I don't think it's a question of what I'd like to see. What we're going to do is to a) provide legislation to give a distinct, unique legislative background and identity and justification for SBS. Secondly, we're going to provide a charter. Now, I'm not going to lay down that charter, we're going to have community consultation. Now if out of

(PM cont): those processes they want to be more definite about sponsorship possibilities, then that's up to them. I'm not going to try and impose it. It is the fact of course that now, as you know, SBS can have some sponsorship and I understand in that way they're going to get the world cup.

MURPHY: Indeed.

PM: So, the concept of sponsorship is there. It's how people may want to develop it.

MURPHY: Will it always stay it's own entity or could it be amalgamated in the future with the ABC?

PM: No, we've been there, had that discussion and the point of the legislation to give it's distinctive legislation its own charter is to put that fear to rest.

MURPHY: Alright Prime Minister. Before I let you go I'd be delinquent if I didn't ask you about the CPI figures. Up by 2.4 to 7.6 so far, well above the Treasurer's prediction. Have you misjudged just how strong this economy is?

PM: But remember, the Treasurer's prediction for what the annual rate was made before the floods. I mean, every commentator expected and understood that the June quarter figure would be affected by the impact of the floods on food prices. So, I mean, there are lots of things that I can, with Paul Keating, that we can control and regulate, but really that's a bit difficult.

MURPHY: Beyond you.

PM: Yes.

MURPHY: But, well, is it a good result? I mean, are you heartened by this -

PM: Well, you can never be heartened by it but knowing that the explanation of it, then I can understand it. Obviously I wish we hadn't had the floods, both for the adverse impact it had on people at the time and the impact it's had on prices. But my belief is that we've got the essential settings right. I mean we've got a wages policy, a wages-tax trade-off which will mean that the underlying rate of inflation will be coming down.

MURPHY: It doesn't indicate, does it that consumer demand is even stronger than you and your colleagues thought?

PM: No, no. It doesn't indicate that at all.

MURPHY: OK, Prime Minister, many thanks indeed for speaking to us.

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