



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT SMITH, RADIO 5AA,
9 JULY 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

VS: Good morning PM.

PM: Good day Vincent.

VS: How are you.

PM: I'm well mate. Most importantly how are you feeling yourself?

VS: I'm feeling terrific thank you.

PM: I'm glad to hear that and all our thoughts are with you here. And when I say that I mean not only mine but the people in my press office and anyone who knows you, all our thoughts are with you mate.

VS: It's great to ^{be} back and thank you very much for that letter you wrote, you were one of the first letters that arrived at the hospital when I first fell ill.

PM: Always had a soft spot for you mate.

VS: It was very kind of you. Hey, how are things going, you're stirring things up a bit aren't you?

PM: Oh, well I was born with not a spoon in my mouth but a spade in my hand, you know, for stirring.

VS: Yeah, well you've certainly done it. I mean coming up tomorrow will be .. today equals, tomorrow you will have broken Malcolm Fraser's record as the second longest serving PM in Aust.

PM: Yes I'm .. and may I take this opportunity of thanking that part of the Aust population that listens to you, and it's fairly substantial, for the support I've had over the years; if not always their vote, I've always felt that I've got a fair go from the Australian people which has made this period very challenging and enjoyable.

VS: You've sort of marked it by putting privatisation back on the agenda though.

PM: I haven't used that ugly word. But I've simply said to the party that they have to face up to a simple question. There are not unlimited resources available to govt and there are certain things that only govt can and will do; that's in the area of education, health, welfare for the needy. The private sector never will and never can be expected to do those things, govt has got to do those, and yet we have this tendency to believe that we can waste our resources by doing things that can be just as well done by the private sector, like running airlines. So as I say, I'm not trying to drygulch the party, I operate within the processes of the party, but I'm really saying that we've got to face up to these things. I mean it's a little bit strange I think that Aust is just about the last place where a political party believes that there is some particular virtue in the govt owning and running particular enterprises. There is a case, Vincent, for the govt running things where it can't be done in the interests of the people by the private sector but airlines I think is not one of them.

VS: Although there is an argument from your opponents on this view that it would be actually cheaper for the govt to run the airlines in net terms.

PM: That's a nonsense in my opinion. But I don't want to run the argument publicly. I mean I'm simply saying to my friends and colleagues in the party that the thing, that within the party, we've got to sit down and talk through with one another. I don't want to really conduct the debate in any detail in the public arena, I am simply putting on notice that we've got to talk it through pretty astringently.

VS: I noticed in the last 2,000 odd days you thought that perhaps the lowest point was your statement on no child living in poverty, what do you think was the highest point.

PM: On that .. what I was saying there, why it was a low point for me was that one of the great achievements of the period has been the delivery of the govt's promise on what we were specifically saying, and that is that we would make the finance available to low income families so that there would be no financial need within families for kids to live in poverty and of course all the welfare organisations have said that we've delivered on that promise of - which means in this last year we've paid out over two billion dollars in assistance, more than ever been done before and welfare organisations are saying not matched anywhere else. What upset me is that the magnitude of that achievement has tended to be clouded and lost by the fact that in the shorthand version of the speech that that wasn't spelt out in the detail it was in the accompanying document.

VS: Do you think Brian Burdekin was being unfair at the end of last week when he said that the States really haven't done enough towards looking after homeless children after his RC's report.

PM: Well there's always more that can be done, there's no doubt about that. We made a very large sum of money available after the Burdekin report to the States to assist in the provision of more facilities for homeless children. But what we've got to do now is, having made the financial steps that we've taken and which the welfare community recognises as having met the financial targets that I set, what we've got to do now in combination with the state govts and the welfare organisations is to ensure that services are actually delivered in the most efficient way and that's where part of the problem is.

VS: Okay, can I come back to that last question very quickly because I know you've got to go, the high point of the last 2,000 odd days?

PM: Well it is very hard to pick one high point, some of them are public, some of them are private. If I can take the private one, a very touching letter I got the other day in regard to this child poverty thing, when a lady wrote to me and said that she was annoyed by all this nonsense that was being talked about not having met the promise. She said that in her case what we'd done had just transformed their lives, they were a very low income family and with a number of kids, and that what we had done in delivering on what I'd said, had changed their life completely and changed the life of their children. Those sorts of things are high points for you, they come in private correspondence from people who have been helped by your decisions. Publicly, I don't know, I guess in a way, I've got to go back almost to the beginning and say something that happened there has been a continuing part of the great satisfaction of this period in govt, and that was summit in April of 1983 when I just can't describe to you the pleasure in seeing captains of industry and trade union leaders talking with one another and coming up to me and saying, from both sides you know, we never really talked before, we never really understood one another's point of view, but we've now got a better idea of what the other's about. That was a high point then but it really has continued to be in the sense that I think now at the end of this period I can look back and say that we've got a more co-operative Australia than the one I inherited in 1983 and that in a sense makes me feel happier than anything else; that while we still have arguments, of course there will always be in a democracy some differences, we've enormously cut down on the number of industrial disputes, a sixty per cent reduction in industrial disputes, and we're changing now in industry, work practices and management practices, so that there's a greater degree of co-operation. That sort of thing coming from the summit of '83 and continuing right through till now is probably what gives me the greatest satisfaction. I think Australians, if I can put it simply, Vincent, I think Australians like one another more now than they did when I became PM.

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VS: Well that was a keynote of your campaign in '83 and even before you entered Parliament in fact. And Malcolm Fraser recognised that yesterday too.

PM: Yes, he and others were very generous in their comments, I thank them for it.

VS: PM wonderful to talk to you, thank you very much for your kind thoughts -

PM: Vincent, can I just say to you, fight the good fight and know that you've got all the best wishes of people all around Australia with you mate.

VS: Thank you very much PM, good to talk with you.