



25

PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH RON EDWARDS, RADIO 6PR
24 AUGUST 1990

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EDWARDS: One of the good things in life is talking to a friend of mine and that's the Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke. Bob, welcome to the program.

PM: Thank you very much my dear friend.

EDWARDS: Good to hear you over here in Perth. We had a busy week in Canberra.

PM: Yes, it's been a busy week in Canberra and unfortunately a busy week in the world in some respects.

EDWARDS: Yes, that was one of the questions I wanted to ask you. There must be a great sense of burden on your shoulders with this Iraq situation. Do you really feel that burden very much?

PM: Yes, to be honest I do, because we've got a situation now where so many Australians are there as hostages, is the only word you can use. I agree with my friend George Bush who's used the word. It's what they are. That is an extraordinarily worrying thing. It's taken up many many many hours of time because I seek to be updated continuously almost of developments in the area. So in addition to it being a normally busy time of the year Ron with the Budget, we've had very many more hours involved in that. So a bit tiring but we're smiling.

EDWARDS: Good. Bob could I ask you this question? It must have been very emotionally demanding seeing the families when the warships departed. Did it affect you very much?

PM: Yes it was very touching, and particularly with the kids because they were very emotionally upset at seeing their dads or their brothers going off into what they knew could be a dangerous situation. But the spirit of the families was absolutely magnificent. I was very very proud of them.

EDWARDS: Yes, they're scenes that we seem to have had through our history of Australians going overseas to fight some war. It brings back a lot of memories for a lot of people I guess.

PM: It brings back Perth memories for me because during the Second World War of course I was a student in Perth. 1940 to '41 at West Leederville State School and then from '42 to '46 at Perth Modern School. The scenes of the troops going and coming and of course Fremantle was a staging port as you know. Perth used to be full of not only Australian soldiers and sailors but Americans. And of course the classic battles of the war were fought in many respects in Perth and Fremantle between the United States and New Zealand.

EDWARDS: Yes, yes. We had our own invasion didn't we.

PM: Yes, and some of the meetings between the United States' forces and the New Zealand forces were memorable.

EDWARDS: ... of people in Perth who'd be saying well look, I've got someone in Kuwait or Iraq, what do I do, how do I find out what's going on? What's the best advice we should give them at this stage?

PM: Through our Department of Foreign Affairs. Let me say this. Our diplomatic representatives in Baghdad, that's in Iraq, have been constantly at work. We have no diplomatic representation although our consular representative went down there during this week, in a somewhat dangerous situation I might say, and contacted the overwhelming majority of Australians in Kuwait. So if there's any question, contact our Department of Foreign Affairs and they will tell you what they can. But I've got to be quite direct Ron and say there is not a great deal of information available but they will know who they have been able to contact, for instance in Kuwait. So that's the way to do it.

EDWARDS: Right. Well thank you for telling us that. Because the uncertainty is what gets to people as much as the danger itself.

PM: Yes, I took the opportunity yesterday of ringing the relations of the two Australians that we know have been specifically hostaged in having been removed to exactly where we don't know. But I spoke to them and I must say the spirit of those people here, knowing the great potential danger of their relatives, was quite remarkable.

EDWARDS: It makes us all hope that there can be a peaceful outcome to this rather than any conflict, doesn't it.

PM: Yes indeed. The hope that you must have is that there remains some degree of rationality in Suddam

Hussein because for any reasoning person the conclusion is unavoidable that there is only disaster ahead for the people of Iraq if he keeps on this course. Because there will either be armed conflict emerge which they cannot win and must not win or there is just simply the continued impact of the sanctions which have been agreed by the rest of the world which will mean their economy will be run down to the point of destruction and their capacity to live will be diminished. So the world is not trying to punish the Iraqi people. Australia hasn't got any argument with the people of Iraq. It's only with the leadership that has embarked upon this sort of insanity. So as I say, if there's any rationality there it should lead to the conclusion that all that can happen is the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the release of the foreign nationals.

EDWARDS: It's an interesting point you make about not having a war with the people of Iraq. Someone said to me at the airport this morning if they take two Australians hostage we should take two Iraqi people in Australia hostage. And I said well the fight is really on with Hussein rather than with the Iraqi people. The other thing is I think even if someone in some part of the world were to take some Iraqis hostage and threaten to kill them I don't think Hussein would really care. It seems to me that he's beyond that sort of -

PM: Well there's the two points to make and you've got them. The first is that we and countries like ourselves are prepared to go to the lengths that we have because we believe in certain principles. We believe in the principle that there should be the inviolability of the borders of one nation from another, that armed aggression cannot be tolerated. We believe in the sanctity of individuals and their right to their freedom when travelling in other countries. We don't fight for those principles by denying them ourselves. The second point, even if you didn't have that moral view which is what we're fighting for, the second thing is as a matter of practice, you're absolutely right that the tragedy is that the sanctity of human life is not high on the agenda of the leadership of Iraq. Indeed in recent years we've seen a preparedness by that leadership to turn poison gas on his own people.

EDWARDS: It's appalling isn't it.

PM: It is indeed.

EDWARDS: Can I ask you, seven and a half years in the job with constant pressure, great demands. Are you getting tired in the job?

PM: No I'm not. There are times when I get tired. I mean for instance one night this week I only had a couple of hours sleep because I was up on these matters that we've been talking about. So obviously through yesterday

I was very very very tired. There was not much sleep last night. Now I'm not complaining about that because that's part of what makes the job the great job it is. So there's a difference between at times in a particular day feeling very very tired, but, and overall, ... what your condition is. I can say overall I've never felt better than I do now.

EDWARDS: I was talking to Ian Brayshaw one day. He said he once bowled you in one of these media versus the politicians' cricket matches. He said that you're one of the most competitive blokes he's ever bowled to.

PM: I've always been like that. I mean, whether it's in sport or studies or whatever, I've always tried to do my best, I've tried to win. I think it's a double insult if you don't. I think it's an insult to yourself not to try to win and I think it's an insult to those with whom you're involved, your competitors. I mean if you're not giving of your best it's an insult to them.

EDWARDS: You must have done pretty well against Margaret Thatcher to get her to give back the Australian Constitution.

PM: That was a hard fight.

EDWARDS: I reckon it would be. It was a great day yesterday.

PM: It was marvellous because as I said, that's the birth certificate of the Australian nation. For Australians who are proud of their country I guess nothing can be fundamentally more important than that. But I must give credit to Margaret in the sense that while, when I first raised it, it was a firm no, an explanation, that she did respond to persistent representation, not only from myself but from others who were working on our behalf, not least of whom was our good friend Alf Morris, the Labor MP in the House of Commons who is a great friend of Australia. And the combined forces of reason prevailed.

EDWARDS: I'm running out of time Bob and I want to ask you just a couple of sporting questions. But can I say what would be the most emotionally demanding thing you've had to deal with since you've been in office? What's the thing that's really drawn you out and left you feeling, gee, you know, that was a tough one. Can you identify ... I mean obviously the Iraqi thing is -

PM: That's most recently, as I've said, the most serious decision. The single decision on which I've had to concentrate most thought and satisfy myself just through hours of thinking, putting all the arguments and weighing things up, is of course the commitment of Australian naval forces to the region. Because as one who all his life has tried to fight for reason and the processes of

conciliation and peaceful resolution of disputes, when you come to the point where you've got to make a decision about committing your country's armed forces, you just must agonise about that in the sense of just thinking and going through every argument and balancing. The paradox, as I've said, is while it was the most serious decision I've had to take as Prime Minister, in the end it was a simple decision because once you'd gone through the process of thinking through all the arguments, sifting all the facts and considerations, it was overwhelmingly clear what the right decision was.

EDWARDS: Well Bob, 6PR's a racing and sport station -

PM: It's appropriate that I'm on it.

EDWARDS: It is. Look, you've given me some great tips over the years. I remember one year you tipped the quinella in the Melbourne Cup in Caucus. Not everyone took it up. There were doubters in the ranks. Have you got anything that the punters could get their money on tomorrow?

PM: I have to preface my answer by saying that my study of the form is always on Friday night. On Friday night or early Saturday morning I get the Sportsman out and I spend a couple of hours going through it in detailed form. So having said that and saying that I haven't been able to study it closely yet, I did, knowing that you were ringing up, I got the sporting section out of the Daily Telegraph and my eye lighted on the fact that in the fifth race in Sydney a horse called Peacock was running. It's an outsider, but it's scratched. I've just found out ... So I would've loved to have Hawke tipping Peacock. Now I can't do that but I noticed in the eighth race in Sydney, and this is in Budget week, there is a horse called Raise a Million. Now it ran a very very good race last time in. It's got Shane Dye riding it who is arguably the real in-form jockey in Australia of recent times and he's a very astute man. I know young Shane. He's a very very bright young boy and he's got a magnificent future. Barrier draw quite good, barrier three. So I would think that the listeners should get a good run out of Raise a Million.

EDWARDS: Raise a Million, Race 8, in Sydney.

PM: Race 8, horse 3.

EDWARDS: It will come home as well as Wayne Grady came home?

PM: Mate I talked to him afterwards. I rang him up. Because I've played golf with him, pressed him very hard in a couple of holes too I might say, but with the use of a handicap. He's a lovely guy. I mean he's the sort of fellow that Australians would just say my God, isn't it

beaut to have an Aussie ambassador like that ... He's a lovely man.

EDWARDS: Totally unaffected isn't he.

PM: Yes, he's a beauty. He really is.

EDWARDS: What are you playing off in golf at the moment?

PM: 17.

EDWARDS: 17. All the blokes out there on Sundays would want to know that.

PM: I get a bit rusty ... This time of the year you don't get much time to play. But when I get a chance to get a few games in I can play pretty close to it.

EDWARDS: Right. We better close with a very serious question. How do you think the West Coast Eagles are going to go in Melbourne in the finals?

PM: Let me say first that I've been thrilled to see the way they've come through. I mean there's been a lot of cynicism amongst a lot of the Victorians about the outsiders, if I can say - the West Coast Eagles, the Brisbane Bears and the Sydney Swans. I'm just thrilled that they're up there. I don't know now whether I now proceed to lose a great hunk of the West Australian vote. I don't think that they'll win the flag this year but I wish them well. But I really share the sense of joy that most West Australians must feel that they've done as well as they have.

EDWARDS: And who do you think the flag's out of then Bob? What, Hawthorn, Essendon or Collingwood?

PM: Anyone who saw Hawthorn last week could only have gone away in awe. That display against Collingwood, that was Hawthorn flag-type football. I know a close friend of mine who actually works with me and who is a Collingwood fanatic who simply said well Collingwood's got a chance provided someone knocks Hawthorn off on the way through to the final. I mean they've got to be very close. But then Essendon is also playing very well at times. They had a let-down after the Collingwood game. I guess the three that I think it lies between are Essendon, Hawthorn and Collingwood. Liking a bit of a price, relatively speaking, I would like to have got onto Hawthorn just a couple of weeks ago.

EDWARDS: Yes, it would've been the time wouldn't it.

PM: Yes.

EDWARDS: Bob, it's been great to talk to you. We're talking to a very special friend of yours later in fact. We're talking to Hazel.

PM: Is that right. Give her my love will you.

EDWARDS: I will indeed. I will indeed. She looked well when I saw her yesterday with you. So we'll have a talk to her later and it's terrific to talk to you. I'm sure all my listeners have been interested. They'll get their money on Race 8 in Sydney.

PM: I hope that works. As I say, next time you have to talk to me on a Saturday morning. I might be then talking to you with more total confidence. But I think they'll get a good run for their money on that. Thanks mate.

EDWARDS: Thanks a lot Bob.

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