



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PAOLO TOTARO, AMANDA BUCKLEY  
AND GEORGE NEGUS, FACE THE PRESS, SBS TV  
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TOTARO: Mr Hawke, what's your dream for SBS in the year 2000?

PM: I hope that it will be stronger, even more widely watched than it is now. But I won't be relying on my hopes. I will be delivering on the commitment I made when I outlined the multicultural program agenda for Australia that I would be introducing legislation to guarantee ..., in a statutory form, its independent existence as an independent corporation. That will be introduced next year, that legislation, after further discussions with SBS itself and with the Federation of Ethnic Communities.

TOTARO: Should SBS have additional sources of funding to the Government?

PM: That's a question which is, as you know, not entirely hypothetical because you do now. You are able to have sponsorship and indeed you helped to give the great telecasting of the World Cup with some assistance by way of sponsorship. This is a vexed question. The important thing is that we will ensure that you have substantial funding from the Government. You know I gave the three year guarantee, real terms guarantee in '88 and which means you get \$60 million this year from the Federal Government. So we're not going to let SBS wither because of an absence of Government financing. The question of advertising is something which has got to be discussed with the SBS and with the ethnic communities.

TOTARO: And to you personally, what ways of receiving additional funds for SBS would be acceptable?

PM: There are really these sources. You've got Government funding which you'll continue to get, you've got sponsorship and there's advertising. Now we've got to make sure that this thing is not imposed from Canberra. That there is appropriate discussion with you in SBS and with the ethnic communities so that what emerges is something which is (a) understood; (b) acceptable; and (c) effective.

BUCKLEY: Moving on to political matters, Mr Hawke. Next week you are going up to the Premiers' Conference in

Brisbane and this is, you've said, one of the most important things you'll ever do as Prime Minister, trying to change Commonwealth-State relations. What actual concrete proposals do you expect to get out of it and, I mean, the Opposition is saying it's just a gabfest.

PM: Some of the Opposition is. They really have been repudiated and properly repudiated by other sections of the political parties opposed to us. Let me pay tribute to Nick Greiner, the Liberal Premier of New South Wales. Of course I have some differences with Nick in politics but I pay tribute to the seriousness with which he is approaching this together with his Labor Premier colleagues. This attempt to play petty politics by some sections of the Federal Opposition is anathema to him, I know, as it is to me. We are about a serious piece of work here. Now as to the part of your question as to what we hope to achieve. These things: first of all it will not all be done in one special Premiers' conference. This will be the first of a series of special premiers' conferences. There will be some specific decisions made. For instance, I hope to be able to get signed a heads of agreement in regard to a national rail freight corporation. That's just an example. But essentially what we'll be doing, I think, is to say well here are the areas in which we need now to cooperate, perceive how we can avoid, for instance, unnecessary duplication of services, unnecessary duplication of regulation. We'll establish now ongoing processes so that we won't wait for some uncertain time in the future where the whole thing will be done. Ongoing decisions.

NEGUS: Are we talking here in the long run, Mr Hawke, about less government because it's been almost a conventional thing to be said around the place that this country is grossly over-governed, too many governments.

PM: ... I mean particularly for your viewers who come from other countries. They must be staggered by the level of government. We've got 17 million people in Australia and we've got one House of Parliament virtually for every million of our people. We've got two federal houses of parliament. We've got six states which is 11 state legislatures because it hasn't got an upper house in Queensland. So there's 11 plus two - there's 13; the ACT - 14; and 15 when you come to the Northern Territory. That's just about one House of Parliament for every million of people.

TOTARO: Talking again about -

PM: That's crazy. So the point is that we've got to get more efficient government. We want to say now look if the Federal Government's doing it and the State Government's doing it and Local Government's doing it, is there a way in which we can rationalise that so there's not overlap? That's what it's about.

NEGUS: We're not talking about doing away with any of the tiers though are we?

PM: No. I said back in 1979 in the Boyer Lectures that I don't think there'd be anyone in Australia who would disagree with me. If you were making a decision now as to what form of government you would have for Australia going into the 21st century you wouldn't have what you've got. There's no way. But it's there so the challenge to intelligent leaders is to say alright how do we make the existing system work more efficiently. That's what this Special Premiers' Conference is about.

BUCKLEY: John Hewson says that the way he would do it would be to abolish Commonwealth departments. Now is it your plan to make the National Capital more central or to hand back more powers to the States?

PM: John Hewson frankly doesn't know what he's talking about. He is an embarrassment to the Liberal Party and to his state colleagues. He simply doesn't know what he's talking about. This nonsense that we've had that you'd abolish the Department of Social Security. I mean it is laughable. It's repudiated by all the welfare organisations in Australia. It's repudiated by anyone who knows something about the real social needs of Australian people. Of course, Dr Hewson, the multi-millionaire, doesn't understand the .... Coming to the specifics of your question -

BUCKLEY: Mr Hawke -

PM: There are some areas, Amanda, in which I believe it would make sense for the Commonwealth to say I think probably in that area the States and or Local Government can do that better. Certainly parts of program delivery. There are other areas of human affairs in Australia where it would probably make sense for the Commonwealth to do it. So it won't be a one way traffic. I think there will be some session of obligations from the Commonwealth to the States in some areas. There could be a session from the States to the Commonwealth. There should only be one criterion. Not what I want or what a State premier wants, but we should all be saying what is it that's best for the Australian citizen.

NEGUS: Is that the way you'd like to go out, on that sort of note? Bob Hawke, the man who put his stamp on a new form of government in this country because -

PM: I don't look for monuments. I hope that I'll be remembered for a number of good things. That's for history to decide. But I have a long established concern about how we govern ourselves. I've addressed it not only in the Boyer Lectures. I've addressed it at a number of academic dissertations and speeches. Because the real thing is this. We have got, I think, the greatest country in the world. One of our greatneses, as I say to your viewers, is the fact that we're made up of people from so many different countries - 140 different nations. We've got natural resources. We've got the paradox of a heterogeneous population coming from 140 different nations but homogeneous in our commitment to the democratic parliamentary processes.

Now the great challenge to us is that we should use our resources in the most efficient way. We shouldn't denigrate ourselves and dissipate our capacities by a duplication and a lack of integration between those governing processes. If I can do something to make that better, well I'll be very pleased.

TOTARO: This is of course what multiculturalism would mean to you.

PM: Multiculturalism means many things to me, but it means these things. It means releasing or having the capacity to release all the talents of the individual, irrespective of their race, colour or creed, background, origin. It means social justice and it means economic efficiency. So what I'm talking about here in this Special Premiers' Conference is relevant to multiculturalism, yes.

TOTARO: So you'll go beyond the simple question of ... You see multiculturalism as real cultural pluralism and ... of cultures. Is that -

PM: What to me politics is about is very very simple. You don't need, as I said once recently, you don't need great volumes ... by political scientists. Politics is about the creation of human happiness. Maximising the opportunity for happiness. Maximising the opportunities for individuals to release and use all the talents within each individual. And multiculturalism is an aspect of that. We have great opportunities for strengthening and enriching Australia because we have people coming from 140 different places, so we have to be intelligent as a community and say what are the ways in which we maximise the opportunities for every individual irrespective of their background to achieve happiness. That's what multiculturalism is about.

TOTARO: Is there still bipartisanship in multiculturalism?

PM: Well let me say this. There have been times when our political opponents I think have been, when you get into an election situation, a little bit opportunistic about this and have attacked multiculturalism and have been a bit dicey on the question of immigration. I pay tribute to the basic thrust of our political opponents basically, although they succumb a bit to temptation when they think it might help them. Basically I think they do have a commitment to our multicultural Australia.

BUCKLEY: On your own population and immigration policy, do you expect by the end of this term of Parliament to have a population target, keeping in mind environmental concerns as well as the Liberals' worries about immigration ...?

PM: There's no - in November of this year we're going to be having this Outlook conference and that will come out of the work of the Bureau of Immigration Research which I have established recently. Now I hope that, if I may talk to your viewers is that you will see this conference that we're setting up is not just something which is going to be for

politicians and officials but I hope that people generally will take an interest in this. If they've got thoughts, let's have them, get their views to us. Now that will help us as a Government have a better idea about levels. But I don't think it makes sense to say that you're just going to have a level come what may. To have a cohesive society you've got to have a community which accepts, broadly speaking, the level of immigration that you're pursuing. And it won't necessarily be the case that you can say now what is the level which will satisfy that criteria perhaps in two years time. Having said all that, by inclination I tend to be a higher immigration level rather than a lower one. We're a country of only 17 million people in a world of five and a half billion and I think that it's in the interests of this generation and future generations of Australians that we build that population up as much as we can.

TOTARO: You seem interested ... your own grandchildren.

PM: Yes. Yes I do.

NEGUS: Mr Hawke, I don't think anybody would argue at the sort of aspirations that you're expressing for the country. It would be a pretty nasty cynic who'd do that. But at the moment we're looking at those things in the context of a pretty awful economic climate. I mean you're talking now about us being possibly in technical recession. What does that mean? Does that mean that people are technically having a hard time, technically out of work?

PM: No, no, no. Don't be the cynic yourself.

NEGUS: I'm not.

PM: Well -

NEGUS: (inaudible)

PM: It means, very simply, that economists define a recession as two successive quarters of negative economic growth. And as yet we're not in that point. That's all I've been saying. I haven't ... done anything ... That's what the economists' definition of a recession is. We're not yet at that point. But I've said quite clearly, as you've heard me say to the Parliament Amanda, I don't deny that there are economic problems out there for a lot of people. The simple point is this, and I'm not going to push statistics at your viewers, but there's one overridingly simple statistic. Last year we had an eight per cent growth in expenditure and a four per cent growth in our production. We financed that four per cent gap by just calling on the savings of overseas people. You can't go on doing that. If we hadn't brought down the level of activity and the level of imports, if we hadn't done that ourselves, with the pain that's been involved, the world would have imposed a much harsher, more draconian remedy upon us.

BUCKLEY: I think Mr Hawke that you get your message across pretty well. I think, as you've said yourself many times you've educated the community on economic matters and they do understand -

PM: It's a two-way process.

BUCKLEY: A two-way process. But I think there are mixed messages coming from the Government about the future. I know you're always more optimistic in many of the things you say and yet Paul Keating often talks about the Argentinian road, as many economists do. What exact message are you trying to tell us about what will occur -

PM: Let me say two things. To be fair to Paul, Paul is not and hasn't been preaching the message of doom. He has the optimism that I have. But he has seen it as his responsibility as Treasurer to warn about the dangers that if we are not prepared to exercise the discipline that we have, then we could be as a country in a much worse situation, in his Argentinian reference. Now that's what the responsibility of government is about. Let me say to your viewers, the beautiful thing as a politician would be to just do nice things, say oh yes, well yes we'll have interest rates not at 18% or more that they got up to, we'll have them at 10 or five. That will make you all feel nice about it. But what would've happened if we'd done that is the place would have exploded. We just would've gone like that, sucking in imports and the world would've suddenly said bang, that's the end to you. They would've wiped us out. Now what the message therefore is, in answer to your question Amanda, the message is simple. We've got enormous natural capacities and opportunities. Not only because of our people and our resources but of our geographical proximity to the fastest growing region in the world. But it's a hard, tough, competitive world and we've got to conduct ourselves in a way which enables us to compete in that world. So we can't consume essentially, whether it's in terms of private consumer goods or investment goods, we can't consume more than we produce.

NEGUS: The horrible fact of life though for you politically is that whether people believe what you're saying about the economy or not the polls are looking pretty dreadful ... wiped you off the map if you went to the polls this week.

PM: You go back and look up your files, and Amanda knows this. You look at your files -

BUCKLEY: Fourteen points though. Fourteen points.

PM: Well you go back to your polls and look what they were saying to us before the 1987 - you look at the beginning of 1987.

NEGUS: They've never been this low before.

PM: Ok, we haven't had a Victorian situation before. Have we? Now, if I'd listened to all the panic merchants back

there in '87 and before the '90 election I would have gone and shot myself or something like that. But I didn't. You know, I said well -

NEGUS: (inaudible)

PM: No, I'll leave that to you George. But I've said all along that I have confidence in the intelligence of the Australian electorate. You've heard me say it. When everyone was down most of my colleagues said we had no chance of winning last time. A lot of them thought it in '87. But I have a faith in the Australian people. If I go to them and say look, we're not perfect, of course we've made mistakes. You can't be in government for seven and a half years and not make mistakes. But we haven't been mistaken in 1) our trust in the Australian people; 2) the capacity of them to respond. And remember this when you talk about the gloom, just remember this statistic. We have created, in our period of government, 1.6 million new jobs, 90% of them in the private sector. And remember this, that rate of job creation is five times faster than in the seven years of the conservative government and it's twice as fast as the rest of the world. So we have done things in terms of the most important requirement of the Australian population. That is job creation. We've done more than has been done before. We're doing much better than the rest of the world. We'll continue to do it.

NEGUS: So why are the polls so bad for you then if that's the case?

PM: The polls are bad for these reasons. People don't like being hurt, as we've had to hurt them over recent times with high interest rates. They don't like it. They don't say oh beauty Bob, beauty or ... you up. And secondly, we've had the disaster of Victoria. Victoria is a very very big hunk of Australia.

BUCKLEY: We're becoming two nations here in Australia aren't we?

PM: No, no, we're not becoming two nations. But it is the case that a federal government will be hurt if you're seen as one of your big state components as having gone bad. Similarly, because we're not travelling terribly well at the moment some of our state colleagues will be hurt. That's the nature of things. But how many times have you heard me say Amanda, you've got to get your time scales right. When I see the journalists saying gone, gone, -

NEGUS: You can definitely turn it round?

BUCKLEY: You've been pretty tough on John Hewson -

TOTARO: Just want to change that for a moment.

PM: Yes sure.

TOTARO: Immigration. Is the Government a little bit out of step with public feelings about immigration numbers?

PM: Well, I don't know. I mean there is some part of public feeling which says it should be higher, there's some which says we shouldn't have any. But you know in the end what leadership is about? It's about leading. You don't get elected to go like that and say what's the ... opinion, like that. Leadership is about leading.

TOTARO: When you have the growing level of unemployment, people say why should we bring migrants in.

PM: Then we wouldn't have 17 million people that we've got now if governments had just responded to that view. Whenever there was any sort of recession -

NEGUS: (inaudible)

PM: - and this country now would've denied itself millions of great citizens.

TOTARO: What's in your view -

PM: You've got to get your time scales right. If you say, look things are a bit tough now so we'll cut off the immigration tap, then that's not something you'd just do then. That's a loss forever.

TOTARO: When your grandchildren are grown up, what do you think should be the level of population they should have?

PM: It's impossible to say.

TOTARO: Should be 25 million, 30 million?

PM: It's impossible to say now. But I answered the question before by saying I am a higher immigration man rather than a lower immigration man. But, I repeat, the real criterion has got to be, well there are two essentially, and they are related. It's got to be economically responsible. I mean you've got to say now I believe that with that level of immigration we're going to be able to essentially integrate them into our economic growth and our employment growth and secondly, while I say you don't go like that and say well what are people wanting, in a broad sense however you've got to be able to persuade the Australian population that the sort of immigration program you're having is one which they understand and accept. Not to which there will not be some objection. But basically the Australian people have got to be going along with what you're doing. I think essentially on immigration and multiculturalism they are.

NEGUS: Mr Hawke, you've said to Amanda and others that, you've made it very plain lately, that you intend hanging around for a while longer, at least until the next election. Why?



PM: Because I'm a good Prime Minister.

NEGUS: Or because you think the alternatives couldn't win?

PM: Well I don't know whether they could or they couldn't. All I know is that I've been Prime Minister for seven and a half years and I'm a much better Prime Minister now than I was. I've never felt fitter physically and mentally. I still believe I've got a significant contribution to make to this country as Prime Minister.

NEGUS: But do you think that you could win more easily than Paul Keating or Kim Beazley?

PM: Well at the moment the polls would when they - you look at alternatives, who do they prefer? Well that is the case. But that's maybe good for your ego in one sense but it's also in a sense unfair to others. I'm there, I've had the opportunities. So people can maybe tend to identify with you a bit. But even when they don't agree with you on everything, they say well you know, we know Hawkey and they tend to say yes we prefer him. But I don't think that's the point. I mean I'm a very healthy 60 George, and 60 is not very old.

NEGUS: But it might be the point for the Party. Without you, no longer Government.

PM: You know, the Party will make up its mind. All I can say, as far as the Party is concerned, they are 100% behind me.

TOTARO: I must interrupt because this after all is the tenth birthday of SBS. Our viewers often cannot see SBS simply because it doesn't reach them, or because it is ... What's the Government going to do?

PM: Well you know what we've done. We've -

TOTARO: But what are you going to do?

PM: Well we've made provision for the extension of services. We've made money available for the extension of the services and as it's possible through time to extend it, we will.

TOTARO: Do you think that Channel 10 could be handed over to ...?

PM: Now don't jump too many hurdles in advance. I think your viewers know that Bob Hawke's very firmly established his commitment to SBS. We'll do what we can to see -

TOTARO: Do you believe that the new 1991 Aussat satellite could be used by SBS to increase its coverage?

PM: It's conceivable, but let me say this. In conjunction with my excellent Minister for Communications, Kim Beazley,

we will see that we do all we can to create the environment within which SBS can prosper.

TOTARO: You can't give us any more assurance?

PM: I don't regard programs like this, as enjoyable and as important as they are, as the places in which you make policy announcements.

BUCKLEY: We'll give you an opportunity to speak on another matter in that case. You had a pretty spectacular flare-up with Archbishop Hollingworth last week. What are your relations with him and why do you let him get under your skin? Why do you let these people get under your skin?

PM: He doesn't get under my skin. I don't care whether it's Amanda Buckley, Archbishop Hollingworth, George Negus. If people say something which I think is not right, then I will say so. It's no reflection upon Peter Hollingworth as an individual, none.

NEGUS: (inaudible)

PM: I respect him in many ways. He's been a man who's dedicated his life to the things in which he believes. In the Brotherhood of St Laurence he's done some very important things. But where I think Peter, or George or anyone says something publicly which I think isn't right, then I'll say so. But that doesn't affect my judgement about them. May I say in regard to Peter Hollingworth that fortunately he tends to have reciprocated to myself.

NEGUS: Sure, but you said he was talking nonsense and all he was really saying was that people were hurting which is a fact.

PM: Well why don't you get your facts straight? It's not what he said, that I objected to ... What he said that I objected to, and as a professional journalist there is an obligation upon you to get your facts right, and you've got them wrong. What he said, and what I objected to was that I and the Government had used the single instrument of monetary policy. He was wrong and I objected to that. Because we'd had the tightest fiscal policy in history and the tightest wages policy. That's what I referred to as the unholy trinity of fiscal policy, wages policy and monetary policy. The Archbishop was wrong in saying we'd only used the one and I objected to that.

TOTARO: We have only a very short time.

PM: Ok, don't let these people overrule you. You assert your authority mate.

TOTARO: Yes, yes, absolutely.

PM: Good on you mate.

TOTARO: I copy you. On the 10th birthday of SBS, what's the Australia you'd like to bequeath to your children? In which way is Australia different from what your father left you?

PM: I want it to be a more tolerant society. I can remember the first year I went to university was 1947. An exciting period to be a young university student. What caused me to join the Labor Party then was the great immigration program that they'd introduced which was bringing hundreds of thousands of people to this country.

TOTARO: After the White Australia Policy?

PM: Yes. Yours truly was the one who with others worked to see that that was abolished. I saw then and I was hurt by the prejudice that my fellow Australians ... Then it was the dagos and the wops which was the language. Yes, that's the language that was used by my fellow Australians against you people who've come to help us be such a much better country than we were. I dedicated myself from that time to try and make Australia a more tolerant society. Because if there is one obscenity that I can't stand it is the obscenity which says that one human being, one child is less worthy than another because it has a different coloured skin, or different shaped eyes or a different accent. So what I want to see in this country as compared to those earlier days is a more tolerant society, one which understands the great truth of this planet, that all people, all people, irrespective of the colour of their skin, shape of their eyes, their religion, all people are intrinsically equal in terms not of their endowments - some people will be born with more intelligence than others - but they are all equal in terms of their right to have their talents developed and their opportunities for a free and independent life. And if Australia accepts that more readily at the end of my time than it did before, then I'll be happy.

TOTARO: And you think that SBS has helped to create this new climate?

PM: There's no doubt that SBS has helped. That's why I'm a great supporter of SBS.

TOTARO: Thank you very much Mr Hawke. I'm afraid we have to leave it here. Thank you very much for coming, and best wishes.

PM: Thank you very much.

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