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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH MARIE MILLS, RADIO 6WF, 29 NOVEMBER 1990

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MILLS: Good morning Mr Hawke and thanks very much for your time on WF.

PM: My pleasure, Marie.

MILLS: Now we've collected these questions from listeners and I don't think we should go past, first of all, the results in the polls. How much notice do you take of the polls?

PM: Every political leader and politician worth his salt looks at them, is interested in them, I am. I recognise that we're down at the moment but we've just come through our fourth victory and we've got a long time to go to the next one. The economy's going to be recovering, I think, strongly next year and we've now got in place a significant lowering of the inflation rate and employment will pick up next year. I think that the economic and political cycle will come together well when it matters.

MILLS: Well it's not just the Labor Party who's lower. You personally have a particularly low rating at the moment. Are you going to be Prime Minister as the Labor Party moves into the next election?

PM: Yes.

MILLS: Are you going to anoint anyone as the next in line?

PM: You've heard what I've had to say ... about that. I don't anoint, the Caucus appoints. I don't think there's any doubt that when I call it a day that they will appoint Paul. I've always thought that and I still think that.

MILLS: Another critical issue of course for Australia at the moment, as it is for every nation in the world, is the Middle East crisis. Secondly, there still seems to be a great deal of concern amongst community members that we're just on America's coat-tails and the decision as to whether or not there is to be a war comes closer, that seems to grow larger.

PM: I haven't any evidence to sustain that proposition or evidence - polling that's been done shows that the clear majority of the Australian people support the position the Government's taken.

MILLS: Well certainly at least one of our listeners is concerned that this is going to be another Vietnam, that it may reach the stage of conscription and if it reaches the stage of war, will it reach the stage of conscription?

PM: No.

MILLS: Categorically?

PM: Well I think that sounded pretty categoric.

MILLS: It did indeed. Let's look beyond the Middle East crisis. A number of people want to know what sort of a long term vision you have for Australia, whether it reaches past the next election, past the next crisis for the Labor Party?

PM: Well that was made quite clear before and during the last election when I spelt out the long term goals of this Government. In a sense I didn't really need to do that because I'd done it since 1983. We've made clear what those goals are, they are fairly clear. They are firstly, that we develop a more diversified, strong economy which is going to reduce Australia's exposure to wildly fluctuating prices for our commodities. Secondly, that it become, as part of the first goal it becomes the clever country which has a highly skilled workforce capable of undertaking the tasks that are necessary to achieve the more competitive economy. Thirdly, that it be a country which is increasingly enmeshed with this region, with this dynamic region. Fourth, that it be a country which plays an important part in international affairs and we've shown that we are doing that in a number of ways. Firstly, it is Australia who's provided the basis of the peace plan for Cambodia. Secondly, it is Australia, particularly myself, that's established the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council which is bringing together the countries of the Pacific Rim. We've taken the lead now in becoming increasingly effective in saving the Antarctic from mining. We are increasingly a nation who is taken note of in the international councils of the world for our capacity to make a relevant and constructive contribution to important issues. These are the goals. It's not the goals that we conjure up today for tomorrow. It's something that we've been working on consistently since we've been in Government.

MILLS: When you talk about saving the Antarctic from mining, we've had a couple of listeners who have been very concerned about your commitment to the environment. Can you clarify that?

PM: Clarify what? My commitment to the environment?

MILLS: Yes indeed.

PM: Well how long have you got? Saved the Franklin, saved Kakadu, saved Daintree, saved Tasmania's forests, have now got a situation where the International Union for Conservation has said this; that no country has done more than Australia to advance the causes of the world environment movement. I mean how's that for starters?

MILLS: Well how about not allowing Japanese ships which are heading down to catch whales into Australian ports? That's a request from one of our listeners.

PM: We've taken a leading role in regard to getting an international convention in regard to whaling and our position on that is well known, well established.

MILLS: Will our ports be open to those Japanese ships which need to refuel or want to refuel in our ports?

PM: Not if they are operating contrary to the international convention.

MILLS: Certainly one listener will be pleased to hear that. Now another question. Why do we keep our migration levels, our immigration levels at that which they are when, according to one listener, we're already full to the brim, that Australia is heading towards a situation where we're going to have more than enough people?

PM: Well of course if people would listen to that sort of argument which has been going on since the end of the last war we wouldn't have a significant population. We had seven million people at the end of the war and there were people who were crying out and said no, no, no we musn't have more migrants. If we listened to that sort of argument we'd be back in the backwoods. We've got to keep the migration program, be prepared to adjust it in terms of an assessment of our economic circumstances, as indeed we have at this time. Immigration in the whole of the post war period has made Australia a very, very much stronger, richer, more diversified country than it otherwise would've been. We'll continue to do that.

MILLS: Economically have we hit the bottom? Are we going to use that 'r' word?

PM: I find it rather boring, this 'r' word. I mean I haven't avoided the 'r' word. I've simply said what is the truth and that is that according to the economists their technical definition of a recession is two successive quarters of negative economic growth. That hasn't occurred yet, it may occur tomorrow when the figures come out. But I haven't worried about the word.

If people want to use the word that's perfectly OK by me because what we have done is to slow down the economy. We deliberately did that because we couldn't sustain the level of imports that we were having in the country and we're now getting the results. Sure, there's been pain and that's unfortunate. But the thing is that we had to slow the activity down. We've now got continuing lowering imports which is necessary. Our exports are growing. Our inflation rate is coming down and our balance of payments situation is improving. Those things had to be done and the economy will certainly go into significant recovery next year.

MILLS: So we've hit the bottom, we're on the turn?

PM: Well you can't ever point to the exact week or month and it would obviously be wise to wait to see what the figures are for the national accounts.

MILLS: A specific question now regarding seamen. We had a question from one listener asking why seamen don't receive the same sort of repatriation rights and pensions and so on that regular soldiers, regular navy personnel get?

PM: You're talking about merchant seamen during the previous conflicts. They do get benefits but they haven't always got exactly the same benefits as members of the armed forces. That's the position. As it is now it's been one which has been recognised by successive governments.

MILLS: It's been a very brief visit to Western Australia. I wonder if you've had time to consider our Royal Commission here, the terms of reference and perhaps whether you think Carmen Lawrence has gone down the right track, making that Royal Commission stretching back ten years? The Royal Commissioner at this stage looks like it's going to a West Australian. Is that the way she should've gone?

PM: These matters are decisions for State Governments. We don't try and tell State Governments how to run their affairs. I tend to think she's made the right decision to appoint a Royal Commission. It was for her and the Government to make that decision. I guess no-one should be worried about how far it goes back.

MILLS: John Dawkins it seems would like to tell the State Government here how to run their affairs. He's asked them to re-think the decision which means they are giving a gift of \$7M worth of land to a Catholic university here.

PM: I've had no opportunity other than to see the headlines in the West Australian newspaper. I wouldn't be making any comment until I was more informed on this both from the Premier of Western Australia and from my

Minister. When I've had the chance of listening to them both I will be able to perhaps say something that's useful. Until I've done that I can't.

MILLS: There's been a call to bring Brian Burke back from Ireland. What do you think of that?

PM: I don't think anything of it. I mean when the Royal Commission is set up, if the Royal Commission makes a decision that they want him, that's for them to decide. If they make that decision obviously he'd come back.

MILLS: Mr Hawke, thanks for your time. It's good to have you on WF.

PM: Thanks.

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