



PRIME MINISTER

6 May 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN**

E&OE.....

MARTIN:

Prime Minister John Howard joins us now from Parliament House in Canberra. Prime Minister, thanks for your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's a pleasure, Ray.

MARTIN:

Do you think that Australia is more violent today than it was when you and I grew up?

PRIME MINISTER:

I have that impression. I think perhaps the world is more aware of violence. You've always got to separate reality from the communication of reality. If the world had seen the slaughter on the western front in World War I on television, we may not have had World War II so we are more aware of violence because of television. Whether there is more actual violence is a very hard thing to measure.

MARTIN:

But you have made the point for the last week that we must grab this moment, that we may not get this again.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's tragic. It's appalling that it's taken an event like last weekend in Tasmania to focus people's minds not only on guns laws but on a whole range of things. Whether we are seeing too much mind numbing violence on television, whether video games have a deleterious effect.

MARTIN:

You think personally they do?

PRIME MINISTER:

I personally as John Howard - I'm not an expert on the lay man in these things - I find it hard to believe that some of the extreme violence on television doesn't have some effect on people.

MARTIN:

Kim Beazley agrees with you on this.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well he's another lay man in the matter. I mean I'm not an expert. I just find it hard to believe. I think many of the mothers and fathers out there listening to this program tonight will find it hard to believe. Now whether we're right will be a matter of intense debate. I want to look at that. I also want to look at whether some of the attitudes in recent years towards mental illness and the perhaps very heavy emphasis on the institutionalising of people, whether that is necessarily 100% the right thing to do.

MARTIN:

Again, what do you think personally?

PRIME MINISTER:

I mean I get lots of people giving me disturbing stories of people who are not fully in control of themselves unfortunately, because they don't have the regimen of some kind of care, don't take their drugs and that creates a problem. Now I don't rush to judgement, but if we are to seriously examine what we can as a community do to minimise the likelihood of another massacre like Port Arthur then we have an obligation not only to strengthen our gun laws, but to examine things like the two issues I've mentioned.

MARTEN:

Would you like to see violent movies in a more later time frame at night?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think that would help. It's something I would like to discuss with the networks. Every instinct in my body opposes censorship because I am a Liberal, but as a lay man, as a parent, as an Australian citizen, I feel an obligation to look at all of these things and sensibly we can talk to each other about them, not get bowled over by any particular prejudice.

MARTIN:

What's the mood out there? What mood are you getting?

PRIME MINISTER?

I get a mood of profound shock. It's seismic what I sense, and people are willing to look again and ask questions about the kind of society we are.

MARTIN:

How great? I mean how would you compare with other times in your career?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I haven't struck an event in my 22 years in politics which has shaken the country to its core. Not a domestic incident. I mean obviously issues such as involvement in war and so forth, but as an unexpected, horrific individual incident, nothing has quite consumed the society like this has. Now that doesn't mean to say you react in knee jerk fashion, it does put an obligation on the Prime Minister of a country, it puts an obligation on all political leaders to search for some answers and to see if there aren't some things we can do because I think there are a lot of worried parents out there, there are people generally trying to come to terms with what's involved.

MARTIN:

Can I ask you what's the time frame for Senator Alston's committee's report back to you?

PRIME MINISTER:

I would hope in four or six weeks. I want them to look at all of the available material. There seems to be a lot of conflict in the material.

MARTIN:

If they come back and say to you look we can find no link between violent films or videos and violence, will you accept that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'll cross examine them. I'll want to see their empirical evidence for that conclusion.

MARTIN:

What about within cabinet, I know that confidentiality...but was it a heated discussion?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, a very sombre, deliberate discussion. Look everybody's worried, everybody's concerned, people want to do the right thing. There has been an unprecedented level of bipartisanship and I compliment Mr Beazley and I compliment my Labor opposite numbers on this.

MARTIN:

You've talked about a six month amnesty, an opportunity for people to sell their guns back. Who is going to pay for that?

PRIME MINISTER:

It will have to be paid for by the government or the governments of Australia. I mean obviously we'll have to play our part and I would expect there to be a contribution from the states as well and in the end through us it has to be borne by the entire community.

MARTIN:

If there are three million guns out there, as some people allege - the gun lobby alleges - that's a lot of money you're going to have to pay back.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, I'm sceptical of those figures, I really am. I am very skeptical. But you can't have a serious amnesty, and one of the things I'd have to say about our gun measures, we are going to inconvenience tens of thousands of decent law-abiding citizens, and I'm particularly conscious that there may be some inconvenience to Australian farmers; a group of people for whom I have immense respect. And you can't take people's property away, and this is their property, without giving them appropriate compensation. But I'm not sure that some of the figures that have flung around are accurate.

MARTIN:

Fairly quickly, we're almost out of time I know for you. A national band on military weapons?

PRIME MINISTER:

Absolutely.

MARTIN:

A national register of guns?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

MARTIN:

All right. The end of mail order guns?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

MARTIN:

No more private gun sales?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we're examining the practicality of restricting transactions to licensed gun dealers.

MARTIN:

And a control of ammunition sales around Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

MARTIN:

What about if the Western Australian Government and Northern Territory Governments say no, we're not going to go along with you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well at the moment Western Australia has some of the stronger laws in the country. I don't want to start singling out States. I am hopeful that we'll get a very, very positive response from all of the States.

MARTIN:

All right. A final question. Have you recovered personally from the horrors of last week?

PRIME MINISTER:

No I don't. I can only begin to think about the effect on people. I don't think that the nation has recovered and I feel I have an obligation as an Australian and also as Prime Minister to sensibly and seriously do what I can to try and minimise the possibility of something as horrific as that ever happening again.

MARTIN:

Thanks for your time. We wish you well.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks.

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