



PRIME MINISTER

17 June 1996

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

E&OE.....

MARTIN:

Mr Howard joins us now live from Canberra. Mr Howard, thanks for your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's a pleasure, Ray.

MARTIN:

Can I ask you, have you ever fired a gun?

PRIME MINISTER:

In the school cadets and once when I visited the Lithgow small arms factory as Opposition Leader about eight or ten years ago.

MARTIN:

Do you understand why it is that guns seem to make some people react so extremely?

PRIME MINISTER:

I find it hard but I don't have some kind of sanctimonious opposition to guns. I have come to the conclusion that Australia will be a safer country if we can extract a large

number of semi-automatic and automatic weapons out of society. There are some people who seem to me to have a sick interest in guns but I accept that a large number of people who are opposed to what the Government is doing are law-abiding, decent Australians. I don't brand all sporting shooters as rambos or criminals or anything like that. I am asking them to accept that in the national good a restriction on the sort of firearms they can use should be accepted. I'm not saying they can't remain sporting shooters. I am saying they have to do it with a limited range of weapons.

This thing has got out of perspective. We're not banning sporting shooting. We're not banning all firearms. We are taking out of the community I hope the more dangerous ones, the ones that are potentially of greater destruction in the wrong hands and that's the goal.

MARTIN:

Well I think some people are doing that but you have to understand that that always happens with something like this. I, in going around the country defending what the Government is doing I am trying to do two things. I am trying to explain the simple basis of it and that is to make Australia a safer country and to stop it going down the American path and secondly, to answer the questions people may have about the detail of it. And I suppose thirdly to demonstrate that I am a Prime Minister who will not be desk bound and I intend to go around the country explaining in parks and halls and big community gatherings not only this decision but also other decisions that my Government will take.

MARTIN:

Well Prime Minister, given what you had to wear yesterday, were you frightened yesterday?

PRIME MINISTER:

I wasn't frightened yesterday.

MARTIN:

Someone obviously was.

PRIME MINISTER:

Ray, I have been asked a question about this. I am simply not going to comment on matters of personal security. I want to make it very clear that I have no intention of altering the arrangements I've got to visit other parts of the country to talk about this issue. I have another two or three meetings planned.

MARTIN:

Okay. I was going to ask you that. You walked through that crowd yesterday, despite

the worries that some people had. Was that to prove to people that you weren't going to be intimidated?

PRIME MINISTER:

It was also to indicate that I bear no malice towards fellow Australians who disagree with me on something. Most of the people there yesterday were strongly opposed to what the Government has done. They heckled me and booed me and hissed me but that's happened to me before and it will happen to me again in the future, and if you can't take a bit of that in politics you ought to get out.

MARTIN:

But it's much worse than that Prime Minister. Letter bombs, white feathers with black targets, Nazi salutes. Every editorial today, every commentator today says this is un-Australian.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, radical behaviour, extremist behaviour is un-Australian but I am not going to fall into the trap of branding every person who opposes what I am doing as un-Australian. I mean, that would be un-Australian and intolerant on my part. I don't think they're un-Australian. I think on this occasion they're wrong but they are still, most of them very, very good Australians who just happen to disagree with what I am doing but they should understand my determination to hold the line on this. They should understand that I believe very, very deeply that if we can take a large number of firearms out of the Australian community it will be a safer country, particularly for our women and children.

MARTIN:

But Mr Howard, you clearly have overwhelming Australian support. Every State government supports you. Every major political party and most minor ones. Why are you apologising for taking away some guns?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think it's not so much a question of apologising for taking something away. It's apologising for asking one section of the community, that is those people who enjoy sporting shooting, to carry a greater burden of the decision in the common good than others. Now it's a decision that doesn't affect me because I'm not a sporting shooter. It may not affect you, it may not affect many of your listeners. But for somebody who until now has thought it was quite lawful to be a sporting shooter and you come along and say, as for tomorrow or the next week you can no longer do that, I think they are owed an explanation and I don't think it's inappropriate for me to use the language of explanation and apology but in the next breath to say that I'm absolutely determined to go ahead with it and I do hope incidentally that the State governments will pass the necessary legislation as soon as possible.

MARTIN:

It is almost two months since Port Arthur, isn't it. Just a couple, quickly. Half the Australian population are female yet very few women at these rallies. What does that say?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the support from Australian women for what I am doing is overwhelming, overwhelming.

MARTIN:

Will you guarantee Australians that we will have this legislation even if it means your job?

PRIME MINISTER:

Ray, I don't fear the political consequences of what I am doing. I will use all the authority of my office to persuade the State governments to pass the legislation agreed at the police ministers' conference.

MARTIN:

All right. So what you're saying tonight to State governments is get on with it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Please.

MARTIN:

All right. Prime Minister, thanks for your time

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you.