



19 February 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP  
INTERVIEW WITH ALAN JONES, RADIO 2UE**

**E & OE**.....

**JONES:**

There is absolute amazement in the community today and from people ringing my programme here about what happened at the Prime Minister's electorate office at Gladesville yesterday. These people taped an effigy of Mr Howard over the portrait of the Queen. They scrawled beneath it, Her Majesty, Queen John Howard. They ordered pizzas, drank beer, made phone calls, climbed in through the roof of his office and crawled under a glass petition. These are Greenies, protesting at a Government decision. The Government decision is irrelevant. It wouldn't matter what it was about. They spent three hours chaining themselves to desks and chairs, calls were made to New Zealand in an attempt to contact Mr Howard by these hooligans and louts but Mr Howard was already back in Canberra. Someone shouted out, does anyone have friends in Africa, presumably because, we can make a free call if we want, and what we can't understand as a public is that the police eventually got there at 2 o'clock but the reports today suggest that Mr Howard's senior staff told the police to do nothing and allowed the protesters to occupy the office until closing time.

Prime Minister Howard is on the line. Prime Minister, good morning.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

How are you Alan?

**JONES:**

Not too badly. What do you make of all this?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Congratulations on your ratings performance.

**JONES:**

Thank you. What do you make of all this, Prime Minister?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I didn't know much about it, quite frankly. I was told that the office had been occupied. I was tied up at a Cabinet meeting all day and I was given only the scantiest details of it. I obviously will have a chat to my staff about it. My only, my immediate concern yesterday when I was told about it was as to whether my electoral staff who are very working and conscientious, whether they were okay and I was assured by my people in Canberra that they were and that the matter was being discussed with the police. I didn't know how many or when the police had arrived and as I think my staff may have indicated to your staff this morning, my own personal knowledge of the details of it but it simply didn't go beyond that. As you understand I was tied up in a Cabinet meeting all day and..

**JONES:**

Let me tell you about the public concerns?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Just a moment, Alan. Things like this have happened before, not perhaps as well publicised, as widely publicised as this but from time to time people do sort of move into electorate offices. It's happened to the former Government. I think it happened once to Mr Keating's office in Bankstown. I guess the point I'd like to make is that I think it gives the broader conservation movement in Australia a poor name because most people who are worried about Australia's environment and want to conserve things in this country do so in a totally sort of lawful and democratic fashion and I just make the further point that the decision against which they were protesting and I think it is important that this be made, the decision against which these people were protesting was a decision of the Government which has been upheld by the Federal Court of Australia. It was not only a politically correct decision in the proper sense of that term but also a legally valid and a legally justified decision and one that balanced the interests of the environment with a desire on the part of the Government to see some jobs created in small business in North Queensland, and I don't think the environmental movement gets a particularly good name from something like this.

**JONES:**

Well it sure as hell get's an appalling name but I just come back to the point, and you seem very relaxed about it..

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, well I never believe in sort of over reacting or indeed underreacting to things like this and..

**JONES:**

No. Well might I suggest you might be under reacting because let me tell you what many people are saying today. A call was made to you in New Zealand, so these people obviously didn't know where you were. They've got that much wrong. You could well have been in the electorate office. Forget they were environmental people. They've come in through the roof. They've crawled under a glass petition. I mean, if they are going to come at that, go to those lengths, what's to say that the Prime Minister of Australia, forget it's John Howard, is not at risk. What is the level of security in relation to the Prime Minister that his electorate office can be invaded through the roof by an indiscriminate mob?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well can I say, Alan, that whether anybody regards it as an underreaction or whatever, I never feel insecure in Australia. Now you may think I'm foolish. I have a security detail but I never feel insecure.

**JONES:**

No, one of your greatest assets is you want to be part of the people, yes.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I mean, you know, some people may regard that as a foolhardy expression of opinion but I have, I don't feel insecure. From time to time there are demos at meetings I address. That's part of the process and it goes with the territory and bear in mind..

**JONES:**

But you don't come through the roof, do you?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No but I mean the fact is I wasn't there. Look, Alan,

**JONES:**

Should your staff have told the police to do nothing?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look I'm not even going to try and answer that because I haven't spoken at length to my staff about the incident. That's not because I'm disinterested. It's because I had an eight hour Cabinet meeting yesterday and I had an engagement last night and my senior staff in Canberra, in whom I have total confidence, briefed me about the incident. I inquired about the safety and well being of my own staff in the electorate office. And I will get a further report about the matter today. But I'm simply not

going to hypothesise about what should or shouldn't have been done. I will get a report about it and I will ask, I will then assess what I've been told.

**JONES:**

If I could just ask you one finally thing in a total relaxed mood in which you'd never, ever feel threatened - would you be at all worried that someone could get in through the roof of your house or your electoral office or the Lodge or anywhere, get in through the roof?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Alan, those things don't really enter my head. I think if you go into this business and you start worrying about those things...I mean, I worry...I mean the only people I worry about in this game is...I mean, I have an interest obviously in the comfort of my family and the comfort of my staff. But I mean I'm a realist but I also take the view that the Australian people, even those that can't stand me politically - and you know there are...

**JONES:**

Just a couple.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, there are probably more than a couple, but I mean that's the nature of...

**JONES:**

Rumour has it you don't have to go onto the second hand Prime Minister.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't know about that. I wouldn't quite...you've got to keep in touch. But look, I am not somebody who gets worked up about securities. I have a security detail. It is sensible and they are with me and they do a very good job. And I always get a bit concerned if the people around me, sort of get the backwash.

**JONES:**

But you would want this behaviour to be prosecuted. As a leader this can't happen to other people, can it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I mean, I have a very strong view that the question of prosecutions and so forth is a matter for the police even when it involves my office and my staff and so forth. That is a matter for the law enforcement authorities. I have pretty traditional views about the role of police. I respect their role. You know, they cop a lot of criticism and I'm

never in to making gratuitous comments about the police, whether the State police or the Federal police. I think it's a pretty difficult job in our society and I have a lot of sympathy...look, all I can say is the law in this should take its course. There should be no special case made of this. Equally it should not be treated any more, you know, be treated less seriously than any other case. But it's not for me. In relation to this I'm a citizen and it's for the police to take decisions about this matter. And I don't intend to use my office and my position to bring about any particular result. I will find out what happened. I'll just say again that the environmental movement should not be judged by the behaviour of these people. There are a lot of very decent, dedicated environmentalists in Australia even though they disagree with some of our policies, they accept and respect the lawful process of Australia.

**JONES:**

I don't want to be nitpicking here, I'm just concerned, I suppose, for the many people out there in suburban Australia who worry that the notion of invasion and interference with other peoples property is becoming much more pressing in their lives than has been in the past.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That in a sense is a different matter.

**JONES:**

Well I've just to ask you this question, you see, and you may not answer it but...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

...concern. I mean, I can understand people who aren't involved in public life. I mean, you've got to accept that there is a certain interruption in privacy which doesn't occur if people aren't in public life and...

**JONES:**

But it's public property. It's someone else's property. I would have thought...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look Alan, I'm trying to sort of get the balance right in this...

**JONES:**

Well, I just want - I'm not arguing with you either - I just want to raise one question and I'll let you go. The one question is this, if someone out there enters someone else's property which is not there's, illegally, you call for the police and you expect the police to do their job. My concern when I heard about this was that your staff told them to do nothing until it was closing time. Do you think - and you may not want to

answer this, but I'm just saying if you could get an answer - that the law may have been stopped from doing its job by your staff?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Oh look, I'm not even going to try and answer that Alan. I mean, I don't know whether that report is accurate in every detail. I've really, I've just got to talk to my staff and find out precisely what happened.

**JONES:**

Okay, we'll let you go and thank you for taking the call.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That's all right Alan. Always a pleasure to talk to you.

**JONES:**

Okay, thanks Prime Minister.

ends