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PRIME MINISTER

8 September 1997

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER

THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP

DOORSTOP INTERVIEW

THE CENTENNARY INSTITUTE

CAMPERDOWN, SYDNEY

E&OE.....

JOURNALIST:

What's your response to Pat Rafter's win, firstly?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look I think it is just fantastic. I want to congratulate Pat. This has broken a drought of a generation, in winning the US Open, it's the first time since 1973. His spontaneity, after he won, was Australian to a tee. His modest, unassuming comments would have added to the lustre of his win. It really is a magnificent performance and I'm sure that all Australians are delighted, particularly tennis followers, but I think all sportsmen and women around this country will congratulate him on a great achievement and he is really, along with the Woodies and others, he is really starting to put us back on the tennis map in a big way.

JOURNALIST:

With tax reform on the agenda, how high a priority is (inaudible) you personally feel this should be to enable people to contribute to this sort of research?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's an important element, encouraging philanthropic behaviour in the community is a part of the future successful partnership between governments and the private sector. It's certainly an element, along with a lot of other pieces of advice, that I and the Government will receive in the course of this tax reform process. It is something that I'd take very much into account.

JOURNALIST:

With the Productivity Commission's Report out tomorrow, a whole lot of people are very insecure about their jobs, which group will you be responding to?

PRIME MINISTER:

We'll take a quick decision. The Report is scheduled to be handed to the Government tomorrow. We will take a quick decision, don't tie me down to days, or a week, or whatever on that. In taking that decision we will pay very close attention to job security. Job security is a very important thing in Australia at the present time. We are part of a rapidly globalising world economy and feeling confident that the job you have today you will have tomorrow and have into the future, is an important component of the psychology of the Australian community at the present time. And quite plainly that will be very much in our minds, along with some other things, but very much in our minds when we take the decision.

JOURNALIST:

Does the latest economic data indicate the economy is picking up?

PRIME MINISTER:

The latest economic data is very promising. It shows strong growth, low inflation, falling interest rates. It makes it very likely that we can see stronger economic growth into the future for a number of years. If that does occur we can then at last see unemployment beginning to fall.

Unemployment is always slow to respond. You've got to get the fundamentals right. We have done that with the budget being put in order, labour market reform and other economic reforms. If you impose on that, superimpose on that, stronger economic growth, you really can hope to see unemployment fall in 1998.

JOURNALIST:

The Metal Trades Industry Association research says that full-time employment is in crisis, would you agree with that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I have read the summary of that report and the most crucial point made is that full-time employment in this country, in manufacturing, was king hit by Mr Keating's recession we had to have in 1990. In fact, in that particular year, 1990-91, there was a dramatic fall in the number of full-time jobs in manufacturing.

The report also goes on to say that we need growth at four per cent or more to get unemployment down and to get full-time jobs growing again. That's something I have been saying now for some months and all of our policies have been directed towards getting growth at a much higher level.

I think the only other observation that I would say is that a real job is a real job, no matter what sector

of the economy it's in. This notion that jobs in the service sector of the economy are not real jobs is completely wrong. I understand the importance that we should place on manufacturing but we have generated over the last thirteen years in the Australian economy 1.8 million real jobs in the service sector of the economy.

We need to create them in the manufacturing sector as well. But a real job is something that involves secure employment, whether it is full-time or part-time, and a decent wage, and the prospects of advancement and that can be found in all sectors of the economy, not just in one sector.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, what do you make of the latest data on the monarchy which suggests over the past week, both in polls and anecdotal evidence, that there has been serious decline, certainly Britain, in support to the monarchy, but also in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I have seen some reports of two polls, one in Australia, and I have heard a report about one in Britain. It's too early to make a concluded judgment as to whether the events of last week, which have shown an extraordinarily strong response to the Princess of Wales' death. It's too early to make a judgment about that.

So far as the role of the monarchy in Australia is concerned it will be the subject of a constitutional convention. I have always said that although personally I regard the present system as having delivered a great deal of stability and predictability, I don't want the system changed. I understand the feeling of some Australians - depending on which poll you look at, the level varies - that there ought to be change.

If we are to change, then we have got to make certain that the change is for the better - to use the old saying - or it is at least as good. There's no point in changing the system if the new one is inferior to the present one. I don't think it is wise to assume that the events of the last week have had an impact this way or that way in relation to long-term attitudes towards the monarchy or the possibility of a republic in Australia.

At the end of the day, I say to the Australian people, I will put in place a mechanism whereby they can decide the issue. It's theirs to decide. It's not the feat of an individual politician. It's theirs and theirs alone to decide and I can promise the Australian people that I will not stand in the way of a full, free, open and proper expression of Australian opinion.

But I hope it's done in an informed, calm way and not under the shadow of a really very traumatic week which raises some very interesting questions about the nature of modern society and what we are looking for as a community, what symbols mean to us and what lies behind such profoundly emotional and very deep responses.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think the Royal Family did get a grilling this week and made errors of judgment that have damaged their standing?

PRIME MINISTER:

They really are in a damned if you do, damned if you don't situation. If they had been too fulsome publicly, at the beginning, people may have accused them of hypocrisy. By not doing that, at the

beginning, they have been accused of reticence. It is a very difficult situation.

I would have the very strong view that whatever is done by them now and whatever was done over the past few days, the emotional security and the emotional comfort of the two young boys is the thing that above else matters. They were the two people in the whole thing, in my view, that were most profoundly put at a point of emotional vulnerability. It is an awful thing to lose your mother when you are that young and I think the concerns and thoughts of all of us ought to be in that direction.

JOURNALIST:

What do you think of Australia's response to the death of Mother Teresa and will you be attending the funeral?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it's very difficult to summon enough words to accurately pay tribute to the life of somebody who, in every sense of the word, is a Christian Saint. She was a woman who dedicated her entire life to looking after the poor and the sick and the wretched and the abandoned and the ignored and the neglected in the most appalling physical conditions. And this is not just a transient commitment. It was something she dedicated her entire life to.

She is, in my lifetime, the ultimate role model of a selfless Christian life - she really is. I can't pay a stronger tribute to her than that. We'll presumably receive some invitation from the Indian Government about representation. When I get that invitation I will determine the representation of Australia. It hasn't been received yet, so it's a bit out of order for me to say who's going.

JOURNALIST:

There is a report out on literacy, saying that one in five Australians are illiterate. How much of a concern is that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think it underlines very strongly the importance that we have placed, as a Federal Government, on standards of literacy and numeracy in schools. David Kemp has been pushing very strongly for this over a long period of time. It raises some questions about the emphasis on the basics, if I can put it that way, in our school system.

It probably casts some doubt on some of the more faddish approaches to education in our schools that have held sway over the last generation and if the figures are as bad as that reports indicates then it is a matter of quite significant concern to all governments. I'm not singling out this or that government, but it's a matter of real concern to all governments. And it does highlight the importance of the drive towards standards of literacy, that has been a major focus of what Dr Kemp has been on about as Minister in recent months.

JOURNALIST:

Would you (inaudible) to an early election over Wik?

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't want an election before the three-year term of my Government is up. I do, however, want the Wik legislation. We have produced a Bill that will fix the problem. We won't be accepting any

changes to the basics of the Bill, will talk around the margins.

The fundamental things like the right to negotiate remain and we won't compromise on that. I hope the Labor Party and the Democrats do what I am sure the Australian public wants them to do, and that is pass the Bill. We have had enough confusion, enough delay, enough doubt, enough hesitation. It's time for the Legislation to be passed.

JOURNALIST:

What do you say to farmers who are living in NSW and Queensland today, but wanting to put the weights on the National Party over that very issue?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I would say to the farmers of Australia, if you want security support my legislation. There's no alternative. The legislation that I have produced is the result of months of debate. It, in itself, represents a compromise between different points of view.

It doesn't give everybody everything they want, but it does give to Australian farmers security, predictability and protection and they would be very foolish indeed to try and impede its passage through the Parliament. It won't help them. The only real friend the farmers have on this issue is the Coalition. They don't have a friend in the Labor Party or the Democrats. The Liberal Party and the National Party are the farmers friends on Wik.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, you are here promoting and appraising Australian medical research, yet your Government, in this budget, has foreshadowed huge cuts in medical research over the next two years. They have cut \$174 million down to \$128 million in the next two years.

PRIME MINISTER:

I think that you will find medical research is very well treated in all of my future budgets.

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