



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND
THE SERVICE ECONOMY
MINISTER FOR COMPETITION POLICY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON
DEREGULATION

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E&OE

Subjects: Tony Abbott: gospel truth and heat of the moment.

EMERSON: Mr Abbott has revealed that there are two Tonys: the gospel truth Tony and the heat of the moment Tony. The problem for the Australian people now is they won't know when Mr Abbott is making a promise whether it is the gospel truth Tony making that promise or the heat of the moment Tony.

We'll only know that after the election, if he becomes Prime Minister, because Mr Abbott has reserved for himself the right, after the election, to say of any promise that he makes that that was just made in the heat of the moment and therefore doesn't count.

Now today, Mr Abbott's sidekick, Barnaby Joyce, has said that we need to understand, because Mr Abbott is new in the job. What Mr Joyce is saying is that Mr Abbott is inexperienced, that he's not ready to be the Opposition leader. And if you're not ready to be the Opposition leader of this country, how can you be ready to be the Prime Minister of this country?

So Mr Barnaby Joyce has belled the cat again by saying that Mr Abbott is inexperienced and is still learning the ropes. Well that is not a basis for electing someone to be the Prime Minister of this country.

The truth is Mr Abbott has "RISK" written right across his forehead, because he is a great risk to the Australian people. He is saying that 'if I make a promise before the election, I reserve

the right to break it after the election because it was a heat of the moment promise, not a carefully scripted promise'.

What that means for WorkChoices is that when Mr Abbott says that he won't bring back WorkChoices, can we believe him? Is that a heat of the moment commitment or is that a gospel truth commitment? Is it like the real gold, rock solid, iron clad commitment that Mr Abbott gave before the 2004 election, when he said that, if re-elected, he wouldn't tamper with the Medicare safety net, and did exactly that after the election?

So Mr Abbott is a very big risk. He's a very big risk to working Australians, because he has now reserved for himself the right, after the election, when he says he won't bring back WorkChoices, to say 'I made that as a heat of the moment comment and therefore I don't need to be held to account'.

In relation to WorkChoices, we know, before the 2004 election, in the period when Mr Abbott was industrial relations minister, they said not one word, not one word about WorkChoices. After the 2004 election, they inflicted WorkChoices on the Australian people.

And last night, Mr Abbott was saying 'Yes, we will have individual contracts. Yes, we will remove protections for millions of Australians from unfair dismissals. But we'll work within the Government's industrial relations legislation'.

What he really means is that they will change the Government's industrial relations legislation because they have to change the Government's industrial relations legislation to move to individual contracts, to reinstate those, and in relation to unfair dismissals, to remove those protections.

So again, Mr Abbott has obviously made a heat of the moment comment last night. They will change the industrial relations legislation. These two issues, the unfair dismissal laws and individual contracts, go to the heart of WorkChoices.

Make no mistake that Tony Abbott is a big risk to working Australians because he will bring back WorkChoices and he'll say, after the election 'I only made that promise not to do so in the heat of the moment'.

QUESTION: Where do you distinguish between what he has said last night and your government's decision to break promises?

EMERSON: Well we will be held to account. We accept that. If we can't fully implement a commitment or a set of commitments, that we be held to account for that. And we are being held to account for that. We accept that.

What Mr Abbott is saying is that he does not want to be held to account for breaking promises because he reserves for himself the right to say 'I made that promise in the heat of the moment and therefore it doesn't count'.

QUESTION: He said he's okay if he's got something written in front of him. Would you just like to see him read off a piece of paper?

EMERSON: Well, this is also disturbing and it highlights the fact that Mr Abbott is a risk. He's basically saying 'if it comes out of my mouth and if it comes out of my mind, it's a heat of the moment promise and it doesn't count. But if it comes from my staff and they've written it down on a piece of paper for me or it's a speech, then that is a gospel truth promise. But if it comes from me, from my heart or from my mind it doesn't count because that's a heat of the moment promise'.

How can the Australian people ever trust another word that Mr Abbott says? Between now and the election, every promise he makes the Australian people will ask was that a gospel truth promise or a heat of the moment promise? And the answer will be given not before the election, but after it.

QUESTION: Have all of your public statements been gospel truths?

EMERSON: I have, on occasions, been asked, for example, about Cabinet discussions and I won't reveal Cabinet discussions. I have done my best and I think that I have told the truth. I have been truthful. Sometimes you cannot reveal everything you know. That is the Cabinet system. That is the Westminster system.

But Tony Abbott is being unique here. Tony Abbott is unique. He is saying he reserves for himself the right to break a promise on the basis that, when he made the promise, he didn't have it written down with the fine detail prepared by his staff, and therefore it was a heat of the moment promise and it doesn't count.

This is extraordinary. Barnaby Joyce saying 'this guy's just new on the job; we have to understand that he's new in the job and just finding his feet'. And now he's come up with this contrivance which says that, if a promise is made by Tony Abbott, out of his mouth, from his mind or his heart, it is a heat of the moment promise and doesn't count. If a promise is made out of his mouth, reading a script, prepared by his staff, that is a gospel truth promise.

So who are we to believe, Tony Abbott or his staff? And the problem is the Australian people cannot believe a word that Tony Abbott says between now and the next election, because he is uniquely reserving for himself the right to break any and

every promise on the basis it wasn't prepared by his staff, it came out of his mouth, it came out of his mind, it came out of his heart, and therefore it was a heat of the moment promise and he can reserve the right to break it.

QUESTION: You mentioned WorkChoices. Do you think there's any other promises that Mr Abbott's made so far that may have been a heat of the moment?

EMERSON: Well he asserts - Mr Abbott asserts that, when he made the promise of no new taxes or increased taxes, when he made that promise, that was a heat of the moment promise. This was the basis of the distinction that he made last night.

Now he made that promise a day after, or more than a day after, unveiling the Coalition's alternative to an emissions trading system that would cost in the order of \$3.2 billion...

Now, Mr Abbott is saying that he made that promise in the heat of the moment. He had plenty of time to prepare for the inevitable question: if you're going to spend billions of dollars, Mr Abbott, how are you going to finance it? Will there be any tax increases?

He says that he wasn't prepared for that question and therefore made a commitment that there will be no new taxes or increased taxes and broke that commitment, only one month later.

How? By imposing a great big new tax on everything you buy that will affect every Australian in every department store, every supermarket, every bank account transaction and every time they go into the petrol station. Because he said now I'm going to inflict on you a great big \$10.8 billion new tax on everything you buy. And the promise that I made, only one month before, was a heat of the moment promise and doesn't count.

Now the worry for the Australian people must be that he will continue to use that contrivance all the way through the rest of this year until the election and reserve for himself the right, after the election, to say all of those promises were heat of the moment promises. The few, other few, that I'm prepared to keep as Prime Minister, were written down by my staff. They weren't even my idea. But they're the fair dinkum gospel truth promises. The rest are completely dispensable and I, Tony Abbott, will not be held to account for them.

QUESTION: Do you think voters would really be surprised that a politician has said that they might not have been totally truthful, they might not be totally truthful? I mean, there is a perception out there that politicians do lie.

EMERSON: But this is going forward... Now, this is going forward from last night, onwards, right through to the election, where he has said you need, the Australian people need, to understand that I will make promises that I am quite willing to break after the election. I'm making those promises in the full knowledge that I have reserved for myself the right to break them, because they came from my mind, my mouth and my heart, and therefore I'm not to be trusted. But if the staff wrote the promise down and I spoke the words of the staff, then that's a gospel truth promise. But if it comes from me, Tony Abbott, the man, then it is not a gospel truth promise – it's a heat of the moment promise.

QUESTION: You don't think it could have been just a bit of a slip of the tongue?

EMERSON: Well I think what we saw last night is Tony Abbott melting down under pressure with Mr O'Brien questioning him on the fact that he changed his position within a month, saying absolutely clear to the Australian people that there'll be no new taxes or increased taxes.

One month later, he says there will be a great big new tax on everything you buy, a \$10 billion new tax on everything you buy, to pay for his paid parental leave scheme. He was trying to justify how he could change his position, so completely, so dramatically reversing that position.

Now that's happened. But the worry for the Australian people must be that, in seeking to justify that, going forward, he has said there are two Tonys. There's the Tony who makes the gospel truth promise and there's the Tony who makes the heat of the moment promise. And I'll tell you after the election which of my promises were made in the heat of the moment and which were gospel truth.

You can't trust Tony Abbott. As Barnaby Joyce says, he's new in the job. He's inexperienced. He's still learning to be opposition leader. How on earth can he put to the Australian people a serious proposition that he should be the Prime Minister of Australia?