



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

Transcript
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton
19 May 2010

E&OE

Subjects: Tony Abbott.

PARTON: Let's go to Dr Craig Emerson who joins us on most Wednesdays: Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy, Consumer Affairs. G'day Craig.

EMERSON: G'day Mark.

PARTON: What an entertaining little pre-election campaign period we've got going at the moment. It's full on, isn't it.

EMERSON: Yeah, there's a lot of action around the place, that's for sure.

PARTON: And a lot of it's been provided by Tony Abbott. Mate, I want to know, honestly, what was the very first thing you said while you were watching that 7.30 Report interview on Monday.

EMERSON: Oh my God!

[Laughter]

It was a meltdown. I think it did show that Mr Abbott doesn't handle pressure very well - which is a problem for an aspiring Prime Minister. But he just kept digging. And the longer the questioning went, the worse it got.

PARTON: Did you feel for him...

EMERSON: It could otherwise have been described as a train wreck and...

PARTON: Emmo, at some point while you were watching it, did you actually feel for him, from one human to another, irrespective of what side of politics he's on?

EMERSON: I found it excruciating. And just sort of wondering whether he would somehow be able to draw a line under it and move on. But...

PARTON: Just wasn't to be.

EMERSON: He couldn't do it.

PARTON: But it was a massive gaffe, but I was out talking to a lot of Canberrans about it yesterday, and one of the things that shone through is that there are many who believe that Tony really just said it like it is. You all tell fibs.

EMERSON: Well there's a really serious point to this, and that is that he's put up a situation where there are two Tonies. One that you can believe and one that you can't. The one you can believe is gospel truth Tony. The one that you can't believe is heat of the moment Tony. And the problem going forward is that he has reserved the right, after the election, to say well I didn't mean that particular promise because I made it in the heat of the moment. It wasn't a scripted promise, and therefore it doesn't count. Now...

PARTON: But Craig...

EMERSON: ... we get criticised, and it's fair enough to criticise the government where it hasn't been able to, you know, to meet a commitment in full. But we expect to be called to account for that. We accept that we're called to account for it. But what Tony Abbott has done is carved out for himself an escape route so he can say no no no, I didn't really make that promise because I only made it in the heat of the moment, therefore it doesn't count.

PARTON: Or is he just being honest about it? Because I do recall hearing a man say that climate change was the greatest moral challenge of our time, but all of a sudden it's on hold until 2013. So...

EMERSON: Well it was blocked in the Senate, blocked in the Parliament three times.

PARTON: Could have gone to a double dissolution. If this was the greatest moral challenge of our time, wouldn't you have just dissolved the Parliament and said, let's put it to a vote?

EMERSON: Well what we did is a deal with Malcolm Turnbull, and that very deal became the subject of...

PARTON: But that's history now.

EMERSON: ... Tony Abbott's assassination.

PARTON: Yeah, okay, so that's history now.

EMERSON: And the non-passage of this legislation is history now. What we will do is when we have some confidence that the world is prepared to move, we are going to reactivate this. We remain committed to an ETS, we remain committed to the targets that are set out in the ETS. Look, I think when you say we will introduce an emissions trading system, and it gets blocked time and again by the Coalition, and then that's called a broken promise - well I suppose people can make up their minds about this.

FuelWatch is another example. That is regarded as a broken promise. Blocked in the Senate.

PARTON: Yep. Well it's \$1.45 a litre at the moment.

EMERSON: There's about 50 pieces of legislation blocked in the Senate. Now I'm not saying none of them will pass, Mark. But I'm saying it's 50 pieces of legislation in the Senate, and the Coalition says you're breaking your promises.

Well, help us keep them by passing some of this legislation.

But instead of that, they're saying, look; you're breaking your promise because we, the Coalition, are blocking it in the Senate. Now I don't think that actually is a genuine example of a broken promise. It's a Government trying to implement its policies, but being thwarted by the Opposition.

But we will be held to account. We accept that.

The difference with Tony Abbott is he's saying now he does not need to be held to account for any commitment such as "I won't bring back WorkChoices" because he might have made that commitment in the heat of the moment. And therefore, it is not gospel truth.

PARTON: Steve Price on the record, the Melbourne commentator, is saying that he believes that Tony Abbott's standing in the opinion polls will improve on the basis of that interview on Monday night. Is he dreaming?

EMERSON: Well other commentators have said it was a devastating problem that he's created for himself. So I'm not a commentator on where the polls might go. What I'm saying is that when Tony Abbott says that he won't bring back WorkChoices - but then he also says the phrase WorkChoices is dead - I think the

Australian people and the residents of Canberra have very good grounds to be worried that he would bring back WorkChoices in another name.

What is he going to call it? WorkOptions? Where people have no option but to go on an individual contract? Where people have no option but to accept when the boss says you're sacked for no reason, and given no explanation, and he'll call this WorkOptions? Very Orwellian Tony.

PARTON: Craig, thanks for coming on the program, really appreciate it.

EMERSON: Rightio. Thanks Mark. Bye bye.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson, the Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy, and Consumer Affairs.