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Transcript
4BC Drive with Mike Smith
Friday 25th June 2010

E&OE

Subjects: Leadership change, Paul Howes, Julia Gillard, Queensland voters

SMITH: I had a range of things we were going to talk about but we're just going to stick with this issue of the dispatch, the disposal, the coup d'etat against Mr Rudd yesterday, because our switchboard has gone into meltdown, likewise emails, et cetera.

I thought Tony Abbott was quite eloquent and sincere when he spoke in the parliament yesterday.

[Excerpt from Parliament]

SMITH: Yesterday the Government put up the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, to speak with us. Today they've rung us up and they've put up the Small Business Minister, local member, Dr Craig Emerson.

Craig Emerson, g'day.

EMERSON: G'day Mike.

SMITH: Tony Abbott is right, isn't he?

EMERSON: Well, we've made a change yesterday, a change that was made by the party room of the Labor Party. It was a change because the judgement being made was that we had lost some direction and that Julia Gillard offered the prospect of refocusing and getting on with the job of delivering basic services to the Australian people.

SMITH: The way it was done, Craig, was shocking.

EMERSON: Well, it was done in a democratic way within our party system and that is...

SMITH: Which is that it's directed by the union heavyweights.

EMERSON: No, it's not. I mean, we've got intelligent people...

SMITH: They say it, mate. They say Paul Howes said it.

EMERSON: Well, I don't think he did. In fact...

SMITH: He did. I've got it right here in front of me.

EMERSON: Well, what did he say? You say that Paul Howes reckons he told everyone how to vote, is that right?

SMITH: Paul Howes said he switched the Australian Workers' Union support to Julia Gillard after he commissioned union polling that showed Labor couldn't win under Mr Rudd. Paul Howes said, quote, reading it, it was pretty clear we could not win. That's a pretty scary prospect for my union. And he spoke to Bill Shorten or the Health Services Union national secretary, Kathy Jackson, who confirmed that she had decided by 4 June that Mr Rudd's message, quote, was no longer cutting through with voters. She said she decided - she's a senior ACTU vice president - that Mr Rudd's leadership was terminal. She says she approached Julia Gillard through Senator David Feeney.

Now, at the evidence of these people, they say it Craig, not me.

EMERSON: Well, actually, none of those said that they told people how to vote and that's my point...

SMITH: She says she approached Julia Gillard through Senator Feeney.

EMERSON: I don't care if she approached Senator Feeney or any other member of our Parliamentary Labor Party. We are all capable of making decisions on our own. And what you said at the beginning, Mike, is that Paul Howes told everyone how to vote and everyone just did what Paul Howes did. Untrue.

SMITH: No, no, no, Bill Shorten certainly.

EMERSON: Well, Bill Shorten doesn't tell me or anyone else how to vote. People form their own views. And there's nothing wrong in a democracy for a trade union, a community group, or any other association or organisation to express a view about the Prime Ministership or any other issue. That's called democracy...

SMITH: Are you s...

EMERSON: It's a different proposition to then say that they then told something like 100 elected members of parliament what to do, and then just on that basis, with no other thoughts in their mind, those people did what they were told...

SMITH: Craig...

EMERSON: They formed their own views and those views were expressed yesterday morning.

SMITH: Mate, you're like the one salmon swimming the opposite direction in the river. All of these people that ring me up are decent Australian people, many of them first time callers to talkback radio, who saw what happened yesterday. Are you trying to tell me, Dr Emerson, that you're sticking up for what happened yesterday?

EMERSON: What I'm telling you is that I'm sticking up for the right of a group of people known as the Parliamentary Labor Party to make the decision that they did. I'm rejecting, Mike, your proposition that they were told what to do by trade unions or anyone else. These are intelligent people...

SMITH: What if trade unions withdraw their support though?

EMERSON: No-one threatened that, and if they did threaten that they would be shown the door. We are not going to be directed by trade unions or anyone else. People will make their own decisions. And various...

SMITH: So trade union funding...

EMERSON: And various - that does not come into it. That does not come in...

SMITH: Trade union funding to your party does not have...

EMERSON: Exactly.

SMITH: ...any influence?

EMERSON: It does not come in to how intelligent...

SMITH: Craig.

EMERSON: Well, Mike, are we going to have an interview or are we going to have a speech from you?

I am telling you that people in the Parliamentary Labor Party, as in the Parliamentary Coalition parties, are quite capable of making decisions on their own. And the majority decision, the clear decision, in fact the consensus decision because Kevin didn't run, was that Julia should be the Prime Minister of Australia. And I can tell you she'll do a fantastic job at being the Prime Minister of Australia.

But I reject the basis of your proposition, Mike, that unions told intelligent elected members of parliament what to do, and they just went along and did it. That is not true. It is not fair. It's inaccurate.

SMITH: Okay. What did Kevin Rudd do that was so bad that he should have been peremptorily sacked in the manner that he was?

EMERSON: Well, I'm not now going to engage in an analysis of Kevin's performance. I think he was a good Prime Minister...

SMITH: But - I mean, hang on a sec, mate, your party is the party that is associated with the Your Rights at Work, et cetera, with reasonable process...

EMERSON: And proudly, and proudly. We got rid of WorkChoices and...

SMITH: Okay, so what did this bloke do...

EMERSON: ...[indistinct] you're...

SMITH: What - hang on, Craig...

EMERSON: ...[indistinct] to will bring it back and that's Tony Abbott.

SMITH: Craig, Craig, Craig. What did Kevin Rudd do that was so bad you had to sack him on the spot?

EMERSON: Well, there were a number of mistakes, there's no doubt about that. But I'm not going to dwell on those mistakes because that is just...

SMITH: Well, but you sacked him, mate...

EMERSON: ...dwelling in history.

SMITH: You're setting the example. What - so what did he do that was so bad?

EMERSON: Well, you know that there are issues associated with the emissions trading scheme, there are issues associated with

some of the rollout, for example, of ceiling - the insulation program, and so on. But I'm not going to sit here and indulge you, frankly, Mike, in a list of mistakes that the Labor Government has made because, in fact, the Labor Government has done some really important things for the Australian people, like keeping this economy out of recession when very few other countries were able to do so.

SMITH: Craig Emerson, look Craig, you and I have spoken before. You're listed...

EMERSON: And I get about a quarter of the interview and you get three-quarters [laughs].

SMITH: You're listed in the Financial Review in David Crowe's piece today, and you know what I'm talking about, that piece. You're listed as a loser out of this. Can I ask you, are you...

EMERSON: In fact, I haven't read that piece. Maybe I'm not a typical politician but I don't pore through the newspapers. I'd rather look through the Rugby League...

SMITH: Do you want me to read it out to you?

EMERSON: I don't mind whether you do or not...

SMITH: Okay, it's got two tables...

EMERSON: ...I mean, you've got about three-quarters of the interview, might as well take up 80 per cent of it.

SMITH: Okay, I'll read it to you. David Crowe has written it. It says, winners, Parliamentary Secretary Gary Gray, Bill Shorten, David Feeney, Senator Don Farrell who cemented their role as factional bosses, and Treasurer Wayne Swan has been promoted.

Losers, Small Business Minister Craig Emerson who was previously in a relationship with Julia Gillard and who opposed the leadership change.

You haven't read that?

EMERSON: No, I haven't.

SMITH: Is that true?

EMERSON: Well, just because it's written it's not true.

SMITH: Well, what do you say about it?

EMERSON: Well, you know, because you would have read other newspapers, my position going in to the contest between Julia and Kevin. You know that position, that I indicated that I would support Kevin. That's the truth of it.

What I respect is the will of the Labor caucus; that is the 100 or so members who are elected by the people of Australia, and they made that decision. I respect the decision. My view is that Julia Gillard will be a fantastic Prime Minister because that is what I believe. But I actually had a position of supporting the leader at the time.

But that has now come...

SMITH: Let me ask you again then, Craig...

EMERSON: ...and that has now gone, and I am supporting Julia Gillard as strongly as I supported Kevin Rudd.

SMITH: Are you proud to be associated with what we saw yesterday?

EMERSON: I'll tell you what I'm proud to be associated with, and that is a reforming Government. I'm proud to be associated with the great reforms that we have been implementing. Yes, some mistakes, but you don't deliver...

SMITH: Was yesterday a mistake?

EMERSON: ... three rounds of tax cuts...

No, I'm talking about policy mistakes.

SMITH: Was yesterday a mistake?

EMERSON: No, it wasn't a mistake...

SMITH: All right, okay.

EMERSON: We move on because we now have a Prime Minister who will do a brilliant job for this country and for the people of Queensland in particular. She knows Queensland well. She has a very good sense of what the community needs and wants. We will be working on delivering better services for the people of south-east Queensland and Australia more generally. She is a good natured person, a good hearted person...

SMITH: Righto, Craig...

EMERSON: ...I know her well and I support her completely.

SMITH: Thanks for your time, Dr Emerson.

EMERSON: Okay, thanks Mike.

SMITH: Craig Emerson, who is the Minister for Small Business and Trade *[sic]*.

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