



THE HON DR 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
ABC 612 Brisbane with Steve Austin
Monday 28 June 2010

E&OE

Subjects: Kevin Rudd, Queensland MPs, Julia Gillard.

AUSTIN: Well, the removal of Kevin Rudd as Australian Prime Minister by the factional powerbrokers in the ALP is perhaps notable at the moment for who's not talking, who's ducking for cover. Given the historic nature of the move, you'd think that people would want to explain. Not so.

Queensland's Premier Anna Bligh has categorically denied a story in the Gold Coast Bulletin that she recently checked with Bill Ludwig, one of those powerbrokers, about her security as Premier of Queensland against a background of very poor popularity polls.

The Queensland unionist, head of the AWU, Bill Ludwig, the kingmaker in Queensland, declined an offer on the weekend to come on ABC Radio this morning. He told me, quote: 'We've given it up, it's all over', unquote.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard is due to announce her new-look Cabinet this morning. Will Kevin Rudd be in it?

Someone who stayed loyal to Kevin Rudd is Craig Emerson, the Labor Member for Rankin, also the Minister for Small Business.

Craig Emerson, lovely to speak with you this morning.

EMERSON: Thanks for having me on the program, Steve.

AUSTIN: Let me ask you up-front; you stayed loyal to him, to Kevin Rudd, on a personal level. Why? Why didn't you go the populist route like the many others seemed to?

EMERSON: Well, I think we do need to put that behind us, but it's still a fair question; and I felt that Kevin had won the election in 2007 and that we should support him for having done that. But the judgement of the

Caucus was that we had lost our way. That we needed a renewed focus on the essential services that Australians rely on, like the extra doctors, GP super clinics, trade training centres, computers in schools and the National Broadband Network.

And there was a risk, Steve, that Tony Abbott would become the Prime Minister - there still is - but the worry was that if he did, of course, he'd bring back WorkChoices and really affect the penalty rates and overtime loadings and all of that for working Australians. So that was seen to be the bigger issue – the living standards of Australians – and on that basis, that's what the party room decided, to change the leader.

AUSTIN: The factional powerbrokers decided that the Australian public shouldn't be given the choice of Kevin Rudd or Tony Abbott, then...

EMERSON: Nice try, Steve. It was actually the members of the Parliamentary Labor Party, more than a hundred members, who are quite capable of making their own decisions.

AUSTIN: All right, well, I'll let that one slide. I'll move on.

You've worked closely with Julia Gillard, you know her well, and you've worked closely with Kevin Rudd. I assume you know him well. What's the difference between them in their style and personality?

EMERSON: Well, certainly Julia will reach out to all members of the Parliamentary Labor Party, whether they're in the Cabinet, in the wider ministry, in the party room – that is, the Caucus. And she's very consultative about the way that she goes about her business in trying to deliver better living standards for all Australians, not just working Australians, for aged pensioners, but the sort of services that we need. And so that's a real strength of Julia.

She's very, very well organised. It mightn't sound totally relevant, but it is, because if you're really organised then you can categorise the work priorities and make sure that we get the top priority work done.

And there are pressing issues for us, such as making sure we deliver the very services that I talked about and have a very strong economy.

AUSTIN: You worked under Kevin Rudd, I think, or at least with him, when you were former head of the Environment Department...

EMERSON: That's right, I did, yes...

AUSTIN: ... at a state level in Queensland. Is he as tyrannical, as hard...

EMERSON: No.

AUSTIN: ... as he's made out to be?

EMERSON: No, he, in fact, Kevin and I were both friends and had a really good working relationship when we were in the Queensland public service. As you might recall, Steve, Kevin was head of the Cabinet Office, and as you say, I was the head of the Environment Department. And look, we got great things done under Premier Goss, you know, enormous environmental achievements, doubling of the national park estate and a whole new set of environmental anti-pollution legislation. So very positive...

AUSTIN: [Interrupts] I've got to say there's mixed reviews, there's...

EMERSON: ... good things were done.

AUSTIN: There's mixed reviews of Kevin Rudd's time as Secretary of the Cabinet in Queensland at that time.

EMERSON: Well, he's a very deliberate and purposeful man, and that's important in terms of getting results.

AUSTIN: All right. Now, let me ask you, we know that some others did support Kevin Rudd. Jon Sullivan, the Member for Longman, very strongly supported him. I think, Chris Trevor, the Member for Flynn, as well. Why are so many Labor Queensland MPs so reluctant to say publicly where they stood on keeping Kevin, or not?

EMERSON: Well, I think they did. I think Jon Sullivan made some statements in the Courier Mail on...

AUSTIN: Yes, no, I've just said...

EMERSON: ... on Sunday...

AUSTIN: ... we know they support him...

EMERSON: ... I'm sorry, on Friday...

AUSTIN: ... but the ones who didn't...

EMERSON: Oh, I see...

AUSTIN: ... are not, sort of, they don't call back, they don't want to talk about it, they don't want to give their position, they say, there was no vote so I don't have to answer the question.

EMERSON: Yeah, look, I'm going to give you a pretty obvious answer to that question, and that is I can't speak on behalf of my other colleagues in Queensland. I can speak on my own behalf. And I think Julia Gillard will be a fantastic Prime Minister. I really do.

And the decision has been made and I'd urge all Queenslanders, all your listeners, who are inclined to vote Labor – you'll have listeners who never vote Labor and that's fair enough – but those who are

inclined to, to back Julia Gillard, because she will be a great Prime Minister.

She'll go down in the nation's history books as one of the greatest prime ministers, while at the same time, we pay tribute to Kevin Rudd for the sorts of things he did. You know, keeping the economy out of recession, the apology. Some people say that was just a bit of symbolism. If you were actually in the chamber, it'd bring a tear to your eye. We were so proud, and it was very important. Getting our troops out of Iraq; closing the gap for Indigenous Australians; the health reform; dealing with homelessness.

You know, these are great achievements of Kevin Rudd, but I can tell you, Julia Gillard is an incredibly hard-working and effective minister and now Prime Minister, and she'll do this nation proud.

AUSTIN: This is 612 ABC Brisbane. It's 21 minutes to nine. We'll be checking traffic again before nine. Craig Emerson is my guest. Craig Emerson is one of the few people who are prepared to come on and talk about the things this morning. He's the Labor Member for Rankin, by the way, and the Minister for Small Business.

Who else in Queensland Labor felt loyalty was more important? We've named one, Jon Sullivan. Are there any others who really felt loyalty was more important than what the popularity polls were saying about Kevin?

EMERSON: I actually don't know the answer to that question, Steve, because...

AUSTIN: All right, well, let me change my question? How do you think Queenslanders will regard the fairly brutal treatment he's received?

EMERSON: Look, I think Queenslanders – based on some reactions in the media – have some concerns. They do have some concerns about the transition. What I'm saying to Queenslanders is what's more important is to now look at the two parties and the two candidates for the Prime Ministership, the incumbent, Julia Gillard and the other bloke, Tony Abbott, who would bring back WorkChoices.

Julia Gillard, as you say, I have known for years, Steve, and she is so committed to ensuring that people who are disadvantaged in any way are given a fair go. And the work that she has done in building the education revolution, if I could just tell you out at Logan City in my electorate...

AUSTIN: Look, I don't really want to - I'll have time for that sort of detail another time.

What position could Kevin Rudd be given, if any, in cabinet?

EMERSON: I just don't know. I'm not privy to that, Steve, so I'd be making it up as I go along, so I'm not going to do that for you or your listeners. I don't think they'd appreciate it.

AUSTIN: Obviously, I mean, you've worked with him for a long time. He must have a skill set that you know of.

EMERSON: Well, he does have a skill set, and that's why he was the Prime Minister of Australia. But I can't speculate one way or another because I simply don't know.

AUSTIN: What time is the announcement being made this morning, do you know?

EMERSON: No, I don't. I'm just told it's soon, for which read today sometime, but...

AUSTIN: Right. Have you been told? Do you expect to retain your position in the ministry after your support of Kevin Rudd last week?

EMERSON: I would think so, but I haven't had any discussion. I have no reason to believe otherwise, and I can certainly say that Julia Gillard will move on. She won't look over her shoulder as to who supported whom in a non-ballot. She will move on to do the very best that she can for the Australian people, which is more important in the end, Steve, than the machinations of the Labor Party's internal manoeuvrings and all that sort of stuff. As intriguing as that is, what really matters is the delivery of services to the Australian people that they expect and keeping the economy strong, and we'll do both.

AUSTIN: Well, powerful people who can remove a Prime Minister are clearly of interest to the nation. Who are the key factional players in Queensland, in the Queensland Labor Party, that were involved in this? It seems like it was only really Bill Ludwig from the AWU faction. Is he really that powerful in Australia?

EMERSON: Well, I wouldn't think so because I would think that you should respect the answer I gave on this, Steve, and that is, once it became clear that there was a contest, members of the Parliamentary Labor Party worked out which way they would vote if there was a ballot. They weren't given instructions...

AUSTIN: Yes.

EMERSON: ...and even if they were given instructions, I can tell you that they wouldn't just fall into line.

AUSTIN: Of course.

EMERSON: Now, some people in the past have tried to urge me to vote a particular way – not in this particular ballot, but in the past – and I haven't done it and I'm still here...

AUSTIN: Julia Gillard...

EMERSON: ...as a minister, so...

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, you are a survivor, Craig Emerson.

EMERSON: [Laughs]

AUSTIN: Julia Gillard has very publicly said that she took her action because, and I quote, 'a good government was losing its way', unquote. In what way? How was the good government losing its way? She wouldn't actually articulate that.

EMERSON: I think there was concern over an accumulation of issues, but the most recent, of course, was the mining tax issue, where we reiterate our support, strong support, for a profits-based tax on mining to get a fairer share of the benefits of extracting our non-renewable resources for the resource owners, namely, the Australian community. But it had become quite acrimonious and was absorbing all of the attention of the Government and indeed the media, whereas we have other priorities as well.

We will press ahead with the mining tax; Julia's taking a more conciliatory approach. But we'll spend a lot of time working delivering the very services, such as those GP super clinics and doctors and nurses that I was talking to you about.

AUSTIN: It's looking like the choices that Australians have is, with on the conservative side of politics – what's the word? – the Liberal National Party, who seems to be aligned with the mining industry, or receiving, you know, donations from the mining industry, or the Labor side of politics, which seems to be scared or fearful of the mining industry.

EMERSON: Well, I don't believe that the coming election, where people will exercise a choice, will be all about the mining tax. In fact, the conciliatory approach that Julia is taking may well lead to a resolution of that matter and so that it is not a significant issue on which people will cast their votes.

I think they'll cast their votes on who will be best able to manage the economy. The reason I say that, Steve, is that that's the way so many people have cast their votes over so many elections, and we did keep the economy out of recession and are returning the budget three years early in three years' time.

AUSTIN: But that'll have to be revised if you don't get all the funds from the super profits resource tax, won't it, because you were supposed to go back into, to balance the books in three years, but that's predicated on the super profits resource tax coming in.

EMERSON: No, it's not, actually. It's not predicated on that at all. There's a number of expenditures that would be funded directly by the resource super profits tax, such as the...

AUSTIN: Okay.

EMERSON: ...small business tax breaks and infrastructure. But no, it wouldn't affect it one way or the other. We will bring the budget back to surplus in three years' time, and we don't want WorkChoices, and that's what Tony Abbott would bring us, bring back to this country.

AUSTIN: You've been very generous this morning. Let me just ask you a couple more.

It seems as if Australia, certainly the political heads, don't like the Queensland style of leadership - authoritarian, strong, not consultative enough. Would you agree?

EMERSON: I don't think there's a particular Queensland style, really, Steve. I'm a bit surprised you say that. I think it's just the individual styles of different people, whether they're Queenslanders or Victorians or Western Australians. And Julia's style certainly will be very consultative, very inclusive. That's no reflection on Kevin. Kevin achieved an enormous amount in two-and-a-half years, and that's because he was so driven, frankly, to do a good job for Australia. And it has been a good government, it has been a good government, but we probably lost our way a bit there.

AUSTIN: [Laughs] How's he feeling today? Do you know?

EMERSON: I don't really know, but...

AUSTIN: When was the last time you spoke to him?

EMERSON: Oh, I spoke to him after the party room meeting the other day, and obviously – well, you saw publicly he was very upset.

AUSTIN: So that far back? I mean, is anyone speaking – I mean, is anyone caring for him, is anyone looking after him?

EMERSON: I have been in contact with him. I haven't had a conversation, but I'd rather not go into the details. He's, you know, it's a tough time, but he's managing okay. Kevin's managing okay.

AUSTIN: But many of us, I mean, many people listening have been sacked from positions in the past or been removed. Most of us know what it feels like. I'm sure you do too. Surely someone in the party, if he was that good, surely someone in the Labor Party has, you know, got their arm around him saying, you know, how are you mate, you know, let's go for a drink, you know, are you okay. Someone in his Cabinet, surely, someone there has got him under their wing and saying, you know, let's go for a walk, let's talk.

EMERSON: Sure. Well, I don't know if John Faulkner has been in touch, but he spent a fair bit of time with Kevin. I do know his family very well. I remember Nicholas and Jessica doing a nativity play when they were about eight and nine years of age, and now they're young adults. We used to go around to Kevin's place quite a lot. That family with Therese and Marcus is incredibly close-knit, and they were there to support him on the day...

AUSTIN: Thank goodness.

EMERSON: ...and they will continue to do so.

AUSTIN: He was denied his WorkChoices, wasn't he, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Well, when you get onto questions of WorkChoices, I think that's a very big issue at the coming election. But look, I think we just need to move on. Kevin will cope; Kevin will manage. We all go into politics on the understanding that things can take an unexpected turn. And, you know, that's just life. I think we all understand the terms of our engagement.

I'll give you an example...

AUSTIN: Look, I'm afraid I'm getting the wind-up from my producer.

EMERSON: ...every three years the Australian people get to make that choice about us, and you know, that's just the reality.

AUSTIN: Any hint on the election date? Do you have any idea?

EMERSON: No, I don't.

AUSTIN: Right, I'll leave it there. I appreciate your time. You've been very generous this morning.

EMERSON: All right. All the best mate.

AUSTIN: Craig Emerson is the Federal Labor Member for Rankin.

ENDS