



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Melbourne Talk Radio with Steve Price

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E&OE

Subjects: Convoy protest, steel industry, Craig Thomson.

STEVE PRICE:

I spoke with Peter Whitecross earlier this morning; he's driven his truck from Port Hedland to Canberra. He's part of this rally this morning which is being tagged as the co ... it's called the "convoy of non-confidence".

Now, these people have descended on Canberra from all over the country.

Government Ministers, though, are saying 'well, hang on, maybe some of these people involved may not be what they appear to be'.

Craig Emerson's the Federal Trade Minister; he's on the line from Canberra this morning.

Minister, good morning.

CRAIG EMERSON:

Good morning, Steve.

PRICE:

Any trucks outside your office yet?

EMERSON:

No, in fact, I'm not in my office yet, so we might have an interesting journey in. But we'll just see how it all pans out during the day.

PRICE:

We've got a long history in this country of truckie disputes and they do get very emotional. And average Australians have some sympathy for the problems of truck drivers. Is it going to be hard for you to argue against the passion from these blokes today?

EMERSON:

Oh, well, you're right; we have had a history of truck drivers making their views known very clearly. And that's fine, absolutely fine, as long as it's done in a reasonably orderly and peaceful and civil manner.

But this particular convoy: I'm not sure of how much it's about truck drivers and safe rates and all that sort of thing, given that it's led by a member of Mr Abbott's own political party who has been the endorsed Liberal National Party candidate from Mount Isa, and actually believes that climate change is all about the formation of a one-world government. And he's actually said it is possible that a global

government could bring in an international army to quell any uprising in the rogue countries.

PRICE: Well, this is Mick, Mick Pattel you're talking of?

EMERSON: Yeah, that's right, yeah; indeed. So, this is the people's protest that Mr Abbott has called for. I'd just be fascinated if he has that same sort of perspective on life. But obviously Mr Abbott believes the science of climate change is 'absolute crap' and that a tonne of carbon dioxide weighs not a tonne, but zero, nothing, because it's a weightless gas. That's the sort of level of understanding of important public policy issues that Mr Abbott has.

PRICE: But you're not suggesting, are you, Minister, that there's not genuine truck drivers in this protest today...

EMERSON: Of course, there are truck drivers...

PRICE: ... who are there, who are upset with the way the Government is governing?

EMERSON: Of course, there are truck drivers and indeed, this group is not the Australian Trucking Association; it's a different group that obviously has amongst it some people who are politically aligned with the Coalition. That's fine in a great big robust democracy. But, you know, it's

obviously the people's protest that Mr Abbott has called for and he wants those protests to continue.

PRICE:

But just as you'd have a protest led by maybe the union movement, you'd have to argue that they're aligned with the Labor Party, so...

EMERSON:

Oh, indeed, indeed; and the union movement would probably indicate very clearly that it is aligned with the Labor Party. If we had a rally of people who believe in the science of climate change and supported the government's position, they would be making it known.

I'm just saying that the leader of this particular rally believes in one-world governments and one-world armies invading Australia. He's entitled to those views. He's entitled to those views. I'm just saying that this is the people's protest that Mr Abbott has called for. He obviously shares some of their views. That's fine as well. But we'll just get on and do what we need to do, and that's govern in the long-term interest of this country.

PRICE:

Well, in ... on that, and as Trade Minister, news this morning that a number of workers - maybe as many as 1,200 - from BlueScope will have their jobs axed today. And that has been blamed on the high level of the Australian dollar. It's not exactly the most opportune time

to introduce a carbon tax, is it, if the steel industry is in that much trouble?

EMERSON:

Well, we are committed to putting a price on carbon and there's no suggestion that any job losses that might be announced later today are as a result of putting a price on carbon.

You're right; there is a lot of pressure on the Australian manufacturing sector because of the high value of the dollar, which has actually been driven up by the booming mining sector. That's what's called the two-speed economy. So, look, it's true that many manufacturing businesses in Australia are bearing the weight of that very high dollar.

But in terms of carbon pricing, yes, we are putting a price on carbon because we believe it's in the long-term interest of this country. And you can't just delay these things forever, which is really what the Coalition did. Mr Abbott had a scheme that's very, very similar - sorry, Mr Howard had a scheme that's very, very similar to ours - but didn't get around to doing it. And now, Mr Abbott, well, he doesn't believe in the science of climate change anyway. But others say ... they just keep putting it off because it's not a problem. Well, we think it is a problem.

PRICE:

Do you think it's appropriate that Craig Thomson stays as chair of the Parliamentary

Economics Committee while he has such a shadow hanging over his activities when he was running the union, that he was the boss of?

EMERSON:

Yes, I do. And the reason is that a range of allegations, of course, have been made against Mr Thomson. He's denied them all. None of them, by the way, are of a criminal nature. And there's no basis for him, therefore, to step down from that committee or to do what Barry O'Farrell, a senior Liberal, has asked for him to do and that is resign from Parliament.

And if we got into a world where when allegations are made by people they need to quit a committee or quit a parliament, we'd be in a very strange world.

And I'd just like to draw your attention, Steve, to yet another appalling double standard on the part of Mr Abbott. He's called for Mr Thomson to do this. He has in his own ranks an MP who deserves the presumption of innocence but who has been charged with a criminal offence, who is the chair of a Senate committee. And he doesn't believe that she should stand down. But he believes that Mr Thomson should stand down, who's the subject of no allegations of criminal ...

PRICE: This is the Senator who's facing shop-lifting charges?

EMERSON: Yes. And, look, I've got a lot of empathy for her and I'm simply making the point, not personally about this particular Senator. It's not about her. We haven't called for her to resign from the Parliament; we haven't called for her to resign from a committee. But Mr Abbott has called for Mr Thomson to resign from the committee. Mr O'Farrell has called for him to resign from the Parliament, despite having no allegations of criminality against him. Yet Mr Abbott has in his own ranks someone who has actually been charged with a criminal offence.

PRICE: Do you know Craig Thomson well?

EMERSON: I do. Yes, I do.

PRICE: Is ... do you support him?

EMERSON: I do. And he is a really important contributor to the Parliament through the parliamentary committee processes and also internally within our own Caucus processes. So he's making a valuable contribution. He has done very well in his local electorate and he will continue to do so.

So, look, allegations will be made. There's no doubt that this won't be the last time an MP is

the subject of allegations. The question is what should that MP be expected to do in response to allegations that are not of a criminal nature?

Now, Mr Abbott says if allegations are made against someone they should resign from a committee position. Mr O'Farrell, as a senior Liberal - quite probably working hand-in-glove with Mr Abbott - says if allegations of a non-criminal nature are made against a Member of Parliament, that Member of Parliament should quit.

Well, I imagine Mr O'Farrell will have a team of MPs - as would be the case in Victoria - who would be very worried by the standard being set by a senior Liberal; that is, if any allegations are made against you, you must quit the Parliament. What a ridiculous proposition. I hope he applies the same standard of course to his own team. I hope Mr Abbott sees the sense of applying the same standard to his own team, having called for Mr Thomson to stand aside from a parliamentary committee when a member of his own team is actually facing criminal charges and he sees no reason for her to stand aside.

PRICE:

All right, Minister, appreciate your time this morning. Thanks a lot.

EMERSON:

Thanks a lot.

STEVE PRICE:

Craig Emerson there.

