



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Melbourne Talk Radio

24 August 2011

E&OE

Subjects: Craig Thomson.

STEVE PRICE: The Trade Minister is Craig Emerson; he's joined us on the line. Minister, thank you for your time.

CRAIG EMERSON: My pleasure.

PRICE: Is there a cover-up going on over Craig Thomson?

EMERSON: No, and what is actually happening is that the police are assessing material that Senator George Brandis sent to them. But they are not investigating that material, as falsely claimed by the Opposition Leader yesterday in a further attempt to smear Mr Thomson. What is going on is the Coalition has abandoned all pretence at supporting the presumption of innocence, from which they themselves have benefited in the past.

BOLT: Craig, you're right in that we cannot assume guilt on the part of Mr Thomson - there is a presumption of innocence. But would you accept that whichever

reading you take of how that credit card was used, the members of the Health Services Union have seen their funds illegally used by someone to purchase the services of prostitutes?

EMERSON:

Well, obviously there are claims of that nature around, Andrew, and I think it's true to say that those sorts of claims are being investigated by Fair Work Australia, and that's where that process should be allowed to flow, proceed, free of political interference. Similarly, the police should be able to do their work free of political interference, and free of claims such as those made under Parliamentary Privilege by Andrew Robb, where he said that there is evidence that Mr Thomson has lied and is a thief.

Now in a civilised society, Andrew, and I think you would agree with this, that you should not be making such cowardly statements under Parliamentary Privilege, and let me go to...

BOLT:

Look, I tend to agree with you there, Craig, but I want to stick to something else that really does disturb me. You are a Labor man. All I've heard is that you are a very ethical man. Does it not disturb you, does it not even astonish you, that the Health Services Union, when it is beyond question that its credit cards were used to purchase the services of prostitutes - it represents the lowest-paid members of hospitals; they're working in hospitals - that it does not call in the police? I mean, if you had been in charge of that union would that not have been the very first thing that you would have done?

PRICE:

As Bill Shorten said this morning, he would.

EMERSON:

Well, what I'm saying is there is a process, and...

BOLT: But it wasn't, that's my point.

EMERSON: ...but I'm saying there is a process now, and it should not be prejudged.

BOLT: No, no, I know that, Craig. But that wasn't my question. There is a process that only because...

EMERSON: Yes, but you want me to prejudge...

BOLT: ... only because...

EMERSON: You want me to prejudge, and I'm not...

BOLT: ...no, I don't; that is not what I'm asking...

EMERSON: Yes you do. You want me to say, 'isn't this horrible, isn't this terrible?' Well, you can ring...

BOLT: No, Craig, can I just rephrase my question really specifically...

EMERSON: ...you can ring up the Coalition, and they will say very conveniently to you Andrew, 'yes, it's horrible; yes, it's terrible. He's a thief, he's a liar...'

BOLT: No, that is not what I'm asking, Craig, and every listener knows exactly what I'm asking. Every listener knows exactly what I'm asking, and I think will be judging your answer in relation to that. My question was very specific: it wasn't about Craig Thomson, it was about the union...

EMERSON: I understand that...

BOLT: Does it not amaze you that a union, who represents the lowest-paid workers in hospitals, does not call in the police, when it is beyond question, on any reading of how it actually occurred, that members' money was illegally used to purchase the services of prostitutes?

EMERSON: No, well, see, there you go again - you've just said that members' money was illegally used. This is the subject of a Fair Work Australia investigation. You want me to pre-empt that by saying, 'yes, I agree that money was illegally used'. I do not know that.

BOLT: But Craig Thomson agrees with that.

EMERSON: I do not know whether money was illegally used. I do not know that, Andrew, and I am not going to ...

BOLT: So you think it's possible that it was legally used then to purchase the services of prostitutes?

EMERSON: I do not know that it was illegally used, and I am not going to entertain you by saying 'yes, Andrew, you make a very good point; money was illegally used'. I will not do that. I will refer, for example...

BOLT: That's really disappointing, Craig, because everyone listening...

EMERSON: Well, I'm sure it's disappointing...

BOLT: ...everyone involved knows that the credit cards were used for these purposes...

EMERSON: Yes, yes, of course, of course, yes, that...

BOLT: ...and they're hearing a Minister of the Crown not even wanting to acknowledge that.

EMERSON: Good monologue, Andrew. Can I just refer - I think you've spoken glowingly with some understanding of Mr Howard in the past, on matters like this - who said: "But a lot of people who are under investigation end up having nothing to answer for. It's a police investigation, and the appropriate thing for me to do, is let the police investigation run its course." Well, why don't we do that?

BOLT: I think you're sending very bad cultural signals here, Craig, I really do...

EMERSON: Oh yes, well, I just quoted John Howard; I just quoted John Howard...

BOLT: But that cuts no ice with me: you quote me against me, but don't quote someone else against me. Look, the point is, credit cards were illegally used, whichever reading you take of it...

EMERSON: No, you don't know that, actually, you don't know that.

BOLT: Well, the owner of the credit card says they were; the owner of the credit card, Craig Thomson, says someone else used this card...

EMERSON: Yes, that's right...

BOLT: That's right, it was illegally used.

EMERSON: Well, you said it was illegal, Andrew; you've made your decision. You've made your mind up about this ...

BOLT: Well, I'm astonished that you can't see that.

EMERSON: ... you're not waiting for an investigation to occur. That is not surprising in the slightest, in terms of your attitude to these things. I think, Andrew, you personally would value the presumption of innocence. I think you personally would agree that investigations should be allowed to take their course free of political interference. But if you want to side with the Coalition on this, go ahead, it doesn't actually surprise me.

BOLT: A very cheap shot, Craig. It's a cheap shot, you're...

EMERSON: Well, you're a big man...

BOLT: ...defending...

EMERSON: ... and you should actually defend the presumption of innocence, you...

BOLT: ...no, no, no. No, you should consider how this sounds to people listening...

EMERSON: ...you should defend the presumption of innocence to the hilt, because that is the cornerstone of our system. And there is no criminal allegation against Mr Thomson, none whatsoever.

BOLT: I wasn't mentioning Mr Thomson; I was mentioning the use of a credit card, and the refusal of the union to call in the police ...

EMERSON: Yes, and you said there was illegal use of a credit card...

BOLT: That's right.

EMERSON: I am saying, let the Fair Work people do their investigation, without prejudging it. I know you would think that was outrageous; I actually think that it's proper.

BOLT: No, before you said I would agree with it.

PRICE: Just before you go, Minister: this issue has now ended up in the Prime Minister's Office. What does she know about the deal done between New South Wales Labor and Craig Thomson in regard to his legal bills?

EMERSON: Well, the Prime Minister was asked a question about this in Parliament, and she answered it. And I'll allow the Prime Minister to answer ... her answer to stand on that. I haven't discussed with the Prime Minister what she knows or doesn't know about matters involving the New South Wales Labor Party.

PRICE: Okay, appreciate your time, thank you.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot. Bye bye.

PRICE: Trade Minister, Craig Emerson there - 131 873 is our number.

BOLT: What did you make of that, Steve?

PRICE:

I don't think that the Minister wants to engage in an honest conversation about how this is all unfolding, because you make a very valid point: that even Craig Thomson admits the card and the phone were used for prostitute business. He doesn't dispute that ...

BOLT:

It's beyond question.