



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
SYDNEY DOORSTOP
26 August, 2011

E&OE

Subjects: Craig Thomson.

CRAIG EMERSON:

Today Mr Abbott has made statements that he knows to be false. Mr Abbott has said that even before the public knew about the Fair Work Australia investigation into the Health Services Union, the Prime Minister was monitoring the situation. This is a false claim. This is a lie from Mr Abbott as he has sought to smear the Prime Minister by telling lies about the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff who, at that time, did have a conversation with the Registrar of Fair Work Australia.

The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff - who was then the Deputy Prime Minister's Chief of Staff - after the publication in newspapers of a report saying that the Fair Work Australia was investigating the

Health Services Union, simply made contact to ascertain whether that newspaper story was true. He simply made contact to ascertain whether that newspaper story was true. The Registrar advised Mr Hubbard, the Chief of Staff, that it was true.

All of this was confirmed in Senate estimates in May of 2010, when Mr Abbott's co-accuser, Senator Ronaldson, asked questions about this, and all of this was confirmed: that is, that the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Mr Hubbard - then Chief of Staff for the Deputy Prime Minister - after reading a news report, contacted the Registrar simply to ascertain whether that was true.

The whole world knew from 8 April 2009 that Fair Work Australia was investigating the Health Services Union. The whole world knew, including Mr Abbott. He knew from 8 April 2009 that this was happening. And yet today he has falsely accused the Prime Minister of knowing something that the public did not know, and acting in some way that was not proper.

Now, Mr Abbott again in his desperate, grubby attempts, his slimy attempts to smear the Prime Minister of Australia, has overreached, and has made false statements, knowingly, to the Australian public. This is reminiscent of Mr Malcolm Turnbull's efforts in relation to Godwin Grech, where Mr Turnbull overreached. But of course Mr Turnbull has learned of the consequences of overreaching. In this case, Mr Abbott knew. Mr Abbott knew exactly what he was saying because all of this information was revealed in the Senate estimates processes as a result of questions that Senator Ronaldson asked in May of 2010. He knew it was false because it was the subject of a newspaper report on 8 April, 2009.

Mr Abbott and Senator Ronaldson knew all of this, and yet Mr Abbott this morning has maliciously and falsely accused the Prime Minister of doing something that she did not do.

QUESTION:

So, Minister, if you knew all about these allegations about Craig Thomson, why was he pre-selected for Dobell again in 2010

if he was going to be a big liability?

EMERSON: Well, that is not really the point. I mean...

QUESTION: Why?

EMERSON: The reason it's not the point is that the Fair Work Australia was investigating the activities of the Health Services Union, the Health Services Union. And Mr Thomson was pre-selected and, to the great disappointment and consternation of Mr Abbott, he won the seat of Dobell, which is what this is all about; that Craig Thomson won the seat of Dobell, and Tony Abbott is not the Prime Minister of Australia.

And because he's so upset, still pouting, still sooking that he's not the Prime Minister of Australia, he chose today deliberately and maliciously to try to smear the Prime Minister of this country with allegations and claims he knew to be false - he knew to be false.

QUESTION: Isn't it true that if there were more than one seat in this, that you wouldn't be defending this MP to the extent that...

EMERSON:

I would defend anyone on the presumption of innocence. And I think any Australian would expect to be given the presumption of innocence. There are no criminal allegations at this point against Mr Thomson. There are certainly no charges against Mr Thomson.

There is, however, a Coalition Member of Parliament against whom charges have been laid. And, in fact ... charges were actually laid in May of this year, and it didn't become public until July of this year.

So there you had Mr Abbott knowing that a member of his team had actually been charged with a criminal offence; sat on it; said nothing. And now he says that the Prime Minister should make a full statement about Mr Thomson, and has absolutely and totally, falsely and maliciously accused the Prime Minister of something that she did not do.

And Mr Abbott knew, full well, in making these statements this morning, that he was making a false statement; that he was lying to the Australian public because he is so desperate. He is so

desperate now to smear the Prime Minister because he just can't get over the fact that he's not Prime Minister, and he wants an easy, sleazy way to The Lodge. He's not going to get it.

QUESTION:

But, Minister, should Craig Thomson make a statement to parliament, as the HSU is calling for, to clear his name there?

EMERSON:

Well, Mr Thomson has denied the allegations against him. He therefore deserves the presumption of innocence as one of all of the Australian people who deserve, similarly, the presumption of innocence; who, like the Liberal Senator, deserves the presumption of innocence. That's the reality of the situation.

And what's going on today, and today's development is that Mr Abbott maliciously sought to smear the Prime Minister of Australia.

This is an important matter in respect of an Opposition Leader: knowing that he was lying to the Australian public but just hoping that there would be enough smearing that he could damage

the reputation of the Prime Minister - challenge her integrity, challenge her honesty, when in fact he knew that the statements he was making were false. Why did he know? Because of a newspaper report on 8 April 2009 and Senate questions from Senator Ronaldson, his co-accuser, which were answered in May 2010.

Mr Abbott has clearly lied. He knows what he's doing and he's overreached because he just wants to smear his way to The Lodge. And the Australian people don't like that sort of tactic.

QUESTION:

Minister, surely comparing a \$93 shoplifting charge with \$100,000 worth of escort services and [indistinct] free trips is really stretching it.

EMERSON:

Well, in fact, you've just done what I don't think anyone should do.

QUESTION:

What's that?

EMERSON:

And that is you have denied Mr Thomson the presumption of innocence. There is no charge against Mr Thomson. There is...

QUESTION:

But the comparison is wrong.

EMERSON:

... no criminal charge. And I think you and others, including Mr Abbott, should have some respect for the law. And the law is there is a difference between someone who has been charged with a criminal offence and someone who has not been charged with a criminal offence.

Mr Thomson has not been charged with a criminal offence.

QUESTION:

Minister, in terms of smearing of the Prime Minister, you may be aware that on Sydney radio this morning this affair with Mr Thomson has reheated material that, as you well know, has been around for many years about whether a unionist the Prime Minister was once personally involved with may have derived similar inappropriate benefit. And whether the Prime Minister, before her political career, may have shared in that. What do you make of that? Is it simply an example of how this whirlpool is dragging everybody down to the bottom?

EMERSON: These are old allegations that have been dealt with many, many, many times over, and I don't believe they should be revisited.

QUESTION: So you don't think she has a case to answer at all regarding...

EMERSON: These are simply old recycled allegations and the Prime Minister, before she was Prime Minister, dealt with them comprehensively, making numerous statements about them. They are old and I think that they should not be recycled. If people want to recycle them, that's unfortunate. But she has dealt with them and they are not current allegations.

But what is a current allegation is the Opposition Leader's allegation that the Prime Minister knew information before the public had that information and was monitoring a situation closely. It is a false, malicious claim by Mr Abbott. He knew it because his co-accuser, Senator Ronaldson, had asked questions and had them answered. He knew it because that same information was available in the Australian media on 8 April 2009.

QUESTION:

Is Craig Thomson's position now untenable?

EMERSON:

Craig Thomson is entitled to the presumption of innocence. Now, if we are going to challenge the tenet of the presumption of innocence and say ... because someone has made an accusation against Mr Thomson, who denies the accusation, where there is no criminal charge against Mr Thomson. At this point to my knowledge there is not even a criminal investigation, but an assessment. Then on what basis should we, that is anyone here, be judge and jury on Mr Thomson?

Why not let the due processes take their course without pressure from the Liberal Party ringing up their mates in New South Wales who then rings up the Police Commissioner, without the Liberal Party ringing up other police commissioners. They are just falling over themselves excited that they might actually be able to sleaze their way to The Lodge. Let's have due processes take their course and let's have the Opposition Leader apologise.

And I call on the Opposition Leader to explain today, not tomorrow, not the next day, why he made a false and malicious statement designed to smear the Prime Minister of Australia.

Mr Abbott must explain today why he chose to make a false and malicious statement designed to smear the Prime Minister of Australia when he knew that statement to be untrue.

QUESTION:

Minister, we're standing in the building where Mr Thomson was financially bailed out a few months ago. Can you enlighten us at all on how that transaction occurred? Are you happy with the propriety of it?

EMERSON:

Again, I don't know the details of that. I haven't sought the details of that. But, again, there is no suggestion of any criminality whatsoever in relation to that.

QUESTION:

Minister, will there be a happy ending to Craig Thomson?

EMERSON:

Well, Mr Thomson just has to work his way through these set of allegations. He has to work his way through - sorry, he has to

work his way through due process, which I'm sure Mr Thomson is willing to do. But while due process is proceeding there should not be interference and there should not be false and malicious statements by the Opposition Leader, who has taken a leaf out of Malcolm Turnbull's book and gone too far, overreached. But at least in the case of Mr Turnbull he learned from that. The difference here is that Mr Abbott knew he was lying to the Australian people; knew he was making a false accusation against the Prime Minister of Australia; knew that what he wanted to do is to smear the Prime Minister of Australia to mark out and chart a cheap, sleazy, easy way to The Lodge. The Australian people will judge Mr Abbott for his actions today. And Mr Abbott must come out today and explain why he willingly and maliciously smeared the Prime Minister of Australia.

QUESTION:

Graham Richardson has described Craig Emerson like a suicide vest around the neck of Julia Gillard. Now, surely...

JOURNALIST:

Craig Thomson, surely?

QUESTION:

Yeah, Craig Thomson as a suicide vest; not yourself.

So, surely ... I mean, as a long-time Labor member, you must be really feeling sad about the fallout from this. How do you personally feel?

EMERSON:

I personally believe in this: that there should be a presumption of innocence. I believe in due process. I believe that people are entitled to be presumed innocent, not presumed guilty, as Mr Abbott and his colleagues and other co-accusers have judged him.

If I had ever had any accusations against me, you know what I'd like to see happen? Due processes proceed without political interference and without political pressure. I think that's a reasonable request.

QUESTION:

Are you concerned there might be a culture of deception and deceit in unions in New South Wales?

EMERSON:

Well, when we talk about deception and deceit, we have had it played out today, writ large, by the occupant of the position of the Leader of the Opposition, who

deliberately sought to deceive the Australian people into believing the Prime Minister had acted in a way in which she did not. He knew that to be false. That's deception, that's deceit, that's grubbiness. And Tony Abbott thinks that this is going to be a cheap, sleazy way to The Lodge. The Australian people will deliver their verdict on this sort of behaviour.

Thanks very much.