



FOR MEDIA

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And Independent Contractors**

**Transcript of 'Inside Canberra'
Madonna King – ABC Brisbane**

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MADONNA KING: Dr Craig Emerson, the new Shadow Minister for the Service Economy, Small Business and Independent Contractors and Liberal MP for Blair, Cameron Thompson. They are going to end 'Inside Canberra' this morning with a song. They are both going to sing a Christmas carol and you can vote who has the best voice a bit later in the program.

Well it has been a big week in Canberra, principally on the Labor Party side. I have an interesting couple of guests in Dr Emerson and Cameron Thompson to have a chat about that.

Cameron Thompson for the Howard Government and he has got an interesting year ahead of him. His seat has been quite radically re-drawn in the last electoral redistribution and so he will be representing a whole lot of different people at the next election. And as I said, Dr Craig Emerson, a big winner in the Kevin Rudd reshuffle, coming back in from the backbench and taking a fairly large portfolio, Service Economy, Small Business and Independent Contractors.

Good morning gentlemen.

EMERSON: Good morning.

THOMPSON: Good morning Madonna, good morning Craig.

EMERSON: Hi mate.

KING: Now let's get on with the serious stuff. Craig Emerson, Kevin Rudd overruled factional bosses to give you this job. Bill Ludwig the head of the AWU in Queensland was fiercely against it. Was that a big thing for Kevin Rudd to do?

EMERSON: It is important that we put the best talent on the frontbench and if the judgement was that I was up to that task, then I am very happy about that. So yes Kevin did insist that I come back on the frontbench and I think we just need to move forward now. Factions, we could spend a lot of time arguing and debating factions, but really the Australian people are not very interested in that. What they really want is which party offers the best promise for Australia, a better plan for Australia. And that's really the battle of ideas that Kevin has been talking about and we're well and truly engaged in that.

KING: I think you're right, but I think the public's sometimes intrigued why this person isn't chosen by the leader, they're actually chosen by someone else. Do you think after Kevin Rudd doing that and taking on the factions that they will have less of an influence in a Kevin Rudd opposition?

EMERSON: I suspect so, but factions are also a way of organising a lot of people and so they do have a function. I think the old left-right divide is breaking down, and that has been going on since well before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Thank goodness for that. So back in the 50s and the 40s in the Labor Party there was a kind of left-right divide, but now it really is much more of a team approach. There are people on the so-called left who have as much a market approach to economic management as people on the right, and vice versa.

There is a role for organising people into different groups. In the Liberal Party they just don't call them factions. They might call them groups, the Santoro group or whatever. That's fine and I'm not trying to make a big deal out of that. I'm just saying that is what happens in an organisation when you have 80 or 100 people. It's a way of organising people, but the bad aspects of the factions, Kevin has I think prevailed over that. I suspect I would have had a pretty fair chance of getting on the frontbench anyway, through a full Caucus ballot, but I am grateful for Kevin for nominating me.

KING: So when he said 'Craig Emerson, you're back on the frontbench', what did you do. Be honest – punch the air?

EMERSON: Oh yeah, I've been in the sin-bin for two years and it is good to be back in the run-on side. I accepted my fate in going into the sin-bin, but it would have been nice to know how long you're in it. When someone gets sent off in a game of footy for foul play they know they are back on after about 10 minutes. Well it was two years in my case.

KING: The foul play was that you voted for the wrong leader.

EMERSON: Well you just have to make the best judgement and that's what I did.

KING: Your faction wanted you to support

EMERSON: Well there were people in that same grouping who voted for the same leader, but not in Queensland.

KING: Let's get onto Kevin Rudd versus John Howard because increasingly in Australia they tend to be presidential-style elections. Cameron Thompson, can I ask you what kind of opposition Kevin Rudd will be for the Howard Government as opposed to Kim Beazley? Is he a harder opponent or an easier opponent?

THOMPSON: Well Madonna, first I should congratulate Craig. The fatwa is over. He's back on the frontbench. I'm interested in the portfolio he's dealing with and I think that's an area that in which the Coalition of course has a huge lead.

KING: Well why don't they have a minister for it?

THOMPSON: The Coalition has got policies to do with small business and ...

KING: So who looks after service economy, small business and independent contractors?

THOMPSON: The small business minister. We have a senior minister, Ian Macfarlane and a junior minister we've got Fran Bailey in that portfolio.

KING: So you're got three.

EMERSON: Well that's right, I'm shadowing three government frontbenchers. That's bit of an accolade, I guess. I look forward to it.

KING: Come back to this. You're got Kevin Rudd versus Kim Beazley. As a member of the Howard team which would you prefer to be up against in an election? Is Kevin Rudd an easier target or a harder target, I'm trying to understand?

THOMPSON: Madonna, just yesterday when I was preparing for this, I looked up the newspapers immediately after Mark Latham was appointed and the headline in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, after that first poll was 'Latham on his way to the Lodge says polls'. Now you know, it is impossible to say at this point, just which of the two of them would be a better leader or not.

KING: I'm not asking that, both have been in parliament a long time. You've sat opposite them in parliament. Do you think it will be harder for the Howard Government to win at the next election with Kim Beazley as leader of the Opposition or with Kevin Rudd as leader of the Opposition? Who do you fear most? Who do you think it will be easier to win with?

THOMPSON: Look Madonna, I've been around in sort of ...

KING: You don't want to answer the question.

EMERSON: He doesn't want to answer this one.

THOMPSON: No, no, I'm trying to say I'm really don't think picking who would be the stronger opponent at this point would be like trying to back a horse in the Melbourne Cup for next year now. And honestly it may, like Latham, the whole thing might just roll up in a ball and get ugly but it may not. And so the ball is in their court. They have got to make their bed and at the end of it, they will lie in it. From the Government's point of view, our policies, our directions are out there clear in black and white. And I think one of Craig's big challenges is going to be saying to small business and people like that, just where the Labor Party can offer them something by way of consolation for some of the union depredations that they face.

KING: My guests this morning Dr Craig Emerson for Labor, Cameron Thompson the Liberal MP for Blair.

Can I ask you a similar question Craig Emerson? How different do you think Kevin Rudd and Kim Beazley are?

EMERSON: Both have a lot of substance behind them. Kevin is highly organised and he will have a highly organised team. Between Kevin and Julia Gillard they are real sticklers for detail, and I mean that in the most positive way. So, it will be a very organised frontbench. Policies will come out at the right time, when they are properly considered, following consultation with relevant people in the community. So I think you will see a very tightly organised outfit which will come across to voters as a very competent show and well and truly capable of governing the country.

KING: You use the word substance. Cameron Thompson, your leader John Howard, when Kevin Rudd was first elected he said words to the effect of, it should be more about substance than style. He raised this issue of style and substance. In Australian elections now are people voting just as much on style as substance, do you think?

THOMPSON: Madonna, I reject that. I think people are all about substance. And I think the intense media scrutiny that's applied, it doesn't matter how you dress, whatever kind of peripheral elements there may be to it, people can see through bs. They can see substance and I think that's really the guts of it.

EMERSON: I agree with that by the way. There's no doubt in my mind that although style might help you get on TV and so on, people see behind all of that. They really want to know and they make a very serious decision when they go into the polling booth. They want to know which party offers the better plan for

Australia and the best proposals to make their lives a little better. So they are interested in all the style, but they won't in the end make their decision on that because they know it is a very serious decision that will have a profound impact on their future and Australia's future.

KING: So come next year, and I hear a lot people saying we can expect a federal election in October or around about what is going to be the one or two issues where your parties are diametrically opposed, where when making that decision of I'm choosing this party for this reason.

THOMPSON: Madonna I think there is an interesting state of flux happening in relation to a few things. As I said the ball is very firmly in Labor's court. You know, what are they going to do with the IR laws?

KING: So you as a member of the government are saying industrial relations is a big issue out there.

THOMPSON: Oh yeah.

KING: In what way?

THOMPSON: We have seen the creation of 250,000 new jobs since *WorkChoices* got going, we've seen just in the last month 57,000 new jobs created.

KING: A massive success, *Workchoices* legislation?

THOMPSON: Well let me put that in context. Every month that has gone we've seen forecasts of maybe 10,000 new jobs. Well we've seen 30, 40 and 50,000 new jobs.

KING: I get confused on this. You say that, and I have no doubt that is accurate and then a couple of weeks ago we have a national rally where we had 50,000 people from around the nation protested over that exact same piece of legislation. Is this the thing that is going to decide the next election?

EMERSON: It is the battleground in the contest of ideas, there's no doubt about that. People are worried, if not for themselves - and many are worried for themselves - they really are worried for their kids' future. So we're happy to have a full engagement with the government on this and about whether the current Government has passed its peak, whether it's on the way down. I think it is. Our critique will be that the Government has failed to invest in Australia's future, most particularly in the talents of our young people.

KING: How you can say the Government's on the way down when you look at the polls and you see how popular John Howard is?

EMERSON: Well I don't want to put too much emphasis on the polls at all. The one that came out yesterday, they will flop around, there's no doubt about that, but he's not looking that popular vis-a-vis Kevin Rudd. That may change, but I think the shine has gone off this Government and it is fraying at the edges. But more importantly than that, if we don't invest in the country's future, if we continue to basically cruise on the back of a mining boom, then we are not looking after this country's future prosperity.

KING: Right of reply Cameron Thompson

THOMPSON: Well Craig, it's interesting isn't it, that we talk about, how Craig and I have just agreed that the underlying message is going to get through and people are going to see the substance, but straight away the question is about the poll. Now polls will go all over the place, particularly mid-term for governments. But what the questions people have are 'who has a vision for the direction of Australia, who is looking after our interests'?

KING: And you say rightly that IR is one of those.

THOMPSON: Well I would say that and I would say right now there is a very strong sense of re-casting the position or questioning the position as to where the Labor Party is going to come from.

KING: You're tearing up the *WorkChoices* legislation. Is that right?

EMERSON: That's right we will and at the same time ensure that business can prosper in this country.

KING: How?

EMERSON: By the very fact that it had prospered in this country before the *WorkChoices* legislation came in. The *WorkChoices* legislation actually led to a big drop in productivity growth, a pointy-headed point I know. But that is all about Australia's prosperity and that is a bad sign for the future.

KING: So obviously IR is one of those big battlegrounds come the next election. People are saying environment maybe another one, but are there policies where Kevin Rudd will now change Labor's position as Cameron Thompson was alluding to before. I see in the paper this morning a couple of things. He's more cautious on the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. He says he is not going to go ahead with Kim Beazley's core policies, some of them including the plan for overseas visitors to sign an Australian values statement. Can we expect the Labor Party to announce a fair amount of change to existing policies in the coming months?

EMERSON: It is the prerogative of the leader to stamp his own authority on the show and Kevin is doing that. I think both of those changes are for the better. We

will see, as I say, a highly organised program of policy development and delivery so that the Australian people will have a very good choice at the next election.

KING: And Cameron Thompson, that's your point - that it's bit of a moving target, until you know what the policies of the ALP are.

THOMPSON: I think Madonna that Craig is brave to keep saying that they are going to tear up the *WorkChoices* legislation. I can't for example see how Kevin Rudd can revitalise manufacturing in Australia by shuffling them to a 19th century IR system that Labor wants to introduce.

EMERSON: We don't want to introduce a 19th century IR system, we want to introduce at 21st century IR system, so you are out by a couple of hundred years there mate.

KING: We are certainly not going to get any agreement on industrial relations. I am going to leave that until next year.

Now, *Craig Emerson's Christmas Carol Booklet*. Was that taxpayers' money used in this, I should ask?

EMERSON: Indeed it was and people are very happy to receive such a non-political community-focused publication from me and also at the back you will notice ...

KING: A picture of Santa.

EMERSON: ... of Santa, that's right. That's the real one. And also an urge or request that people contribute to the wishing tree for underprivileged kids.

KING: All right, have you both picked a song? I want a one paragraph of a Christmas carol from each of you and then our listeners can call in for the rest of the program and say who do you think should give up their day job and join the choir. All right, what are you going to sing Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: I think we will do *Oh come all ye faithful*.

KING: Together?

EMERSON: Would you like to do that?

THOMPSON: Yeah, I had the other ... well okay. Let's do it.

KING: One, two, one, two three.

EMERSON AND THOMPSON: Oh come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. Oh come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, born the king of

angels. Oh come let us adore him. Oh come let us adore him. Oh come let us adore him. Christ, the Lord.

KING: I think you both deserve a round of applause. And they are shaking hands. Dr Craig Emerson and Cameron Thompson, Liberal MP for Blair.

EMERSON: Merry Christmas to all your listeners.

THOMPSON: Yes to you Craig and to you too.