

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM TURNBULL,
JUNE 5, 2014**

ALAN JONES: Thank you for your time. Can I begin by asking you if you could say after me this? As a senior member of the Abbott Government I want to say here I am totally supportive of the Abbott-Hockey strategy for Budget repair.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Alan I am not going to take dictation from you. I am a Cabinet minister. I support unreservedly and wholeheartedly every element in the Budget. Every single one.

JONES: So you're totally supportive of the Medicare co-payment?

TURNBULL: I support every element, of course, including the Medicare co-payment. Do you want to go through the whole list?

JONES: You're totally supportive of the increase in the fuel excise?

TURNBULL: I support... no, let's go through it. I support the re-prioritised funding of official development assistance. I support introducing co-payments for general practitioner pathology and diagnostic imaging services in the Medicare Benefits Schedule. I support the reforms to higher education. I support the changes to family payment reform. Do you want me to read through the whole Budget?

You're sounding very nervous Malcolm. Why are you nervous?

TURNBULL: I'm not nervous.

JONES: You're angry Malcolm.

TURNBULL: Alan...

JONES: We had a yarn last night, Malcolm, I should tell my listeners. And I told Malcolm I'd ask him the first three questions. He is now very well prepared and I am grateful for that preparation. But Malcolm I've coached Australia in rugby. If one of my players on the eve of the rugby test was seen socialising, having dinner, privately inviting a member of the All-Blacks on the eve of a major test match the player would be sent home Malcolm.

TURNBULL: Well Alan this is not football here. We are not playing football.

JONES: Oh, I see. You're having dinner with Palmer. You're happy to acknowledge him as a friend. This is the same man who has flaunted his contempt for Abbott, your leader. Accused Abbott of lying – Abbott's your leader. Has told Abbott to give himself and uppercut – Abbott's your leader. Called Abbott a lightweight – Abbott's your leader. Called him WTF, worse than Fraser – Abbott's your leader. And Senator-elect, Jacqui Lambie has called Abbott psychopathic and Palmer opposes everything controversial in Abbott's Budget and you invite the bloke to dinner.

TURNBULL: Well Alan let me tell you something. We can't get anything through the Senate after July 1 unless we get Labor and the Greens to vote for it, without the support of Palmer's group. So all of those things are true that you've quoted him as

saying. And they're all bad and I reject all of them. But the fact of the matter is, this business, as John Howard said, is governed by the iron laws of arithmetic. And we need his support, we need to be engaged, you can't get around that. He will have after July 1 the group of four senators all of whom have been constitutionally elected and all of whom have a vote.

JONES: Did Abbott, your leader, indicate in the party room that meetings with Palmer were to be coordinated by Abetz and Pyne? Were Abetz and Pyne aware that you were meeting with Palmer? Was your leader aware that you were meeting with Palmer? Was Hockey aware you were meeting with the head of Treasury?

TURNBULL: The answer Alan to your question is that there is no, as Tony Abbott has made quite clear by the way, there is no restriction or limitation on me or anyone else meeting with cross benchers. The only matter that is to be coordinated is, with Pyne and Abetz, is when we are – and we are obviously not at that stage yet – when we are at a point of negotiating passage of legislation or amendments and you know we don't want to have the Minister for Health or the Minister for Communications in my case, trying to get the numbers for a bill.

JONES: Was the party room told?

TURNBULL: No it wasn't Alan. It was not.

JONES: That Abetz and Pyne were to coordinate meetings with Palmer. Your leader didn't know you were meeting with Palmer.

TURNBULL: Look he didn't and nor did he need to. And the fact

of the matter is, meetings happen here in Canberra.

JONES: I spoke to your leader after that and he was very generous about you he said, oh Alan they would have just bumped into one other. You seem to be quite happy to allow it to be interpreted as being bumped in, until Palmer belled the cat and said no Malcolm invited me. Just imagine a senior member of the Government inviting to have dinner with him a bloke who is perhaps the most trenchant critic of that person's leader. Did you raise all of these issues with Palmer at dinner, did you challenge him about being economically illiterate in terms of the things he was opposing. Did you defend Tony Abbott to Palmer?

TURNBULL: I defend Tony Abbott all the time and all I can say Alan, I'll just remind you of this. That we are a team, Tony and I are a team. We have a very united team here. And the thing that has distressed me this week is that people, yourself, Andrew Bolt in particular, have set out to suggest that there is dissention in the government that there are challenges to Tony's leadership.

JONES: There is no challenge to his leadership. They are suggesting Malcolm precisely because you have no hope ever of being the leader. You've got to get that into your head. No hope ever. But because of that you're happy to throw a few bombs around that might blow up Abbott a bit. That's what they're saying.

TURNBULL: Well that's what you're saying. And that is what Andrew Bolt is saying. And it is doing the Labor Party's work.

This is the most united, cohesive government we've had in this country for a long time and I think it is just very sad that you and Bolt are doing the work of the Labor Party in undermining the Abbott Government.

JONES: So we're the bomb throwers.

TURNBULL: You are Alan. Yes you are.

JONES: Bolt says today, Turnbull should run a mile from Palmer. The most dangerous politician in parliament. An erratic populist preaching voodoo economics, blackmailing the Government, vilifying a Liberal staffer and using his status as one of Australia's richest people to influence others. How could anyone possibly argue with that observation?

TURNBULL: Well I'm not going to argue with Andrew Bolt about his criticism of Clive Palmer. I'd simply say to you that we get back to the fundamental question of arithmetic that if we want to get legislation through the Senate – and we do; we've been elected to govern, we've been elected to legislate – we will need to get the support of Palmer's group.

JONES: So Tony Abbott pulled you in and said, 'Malcolm go and have a yarn with Palmer'?

TURNBULL: Well he did not.

JONES: Oh I see.

TURNBULL: I'm not suggesting he did Alan. Why would you put those words into my mouth? You know that's not true.

JONES: Well I would have thought that in such a controversial

environment you would discuss this with your leader. He is your leader, you know. That's the way teams work, Malcolm. You're not much good at teams. You're not much good at teams. I mean, in 2009 you were the leader. Godwin Grech told you he had found an email proving the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was corrupt, arranging a loan for a donor mate. Grech had forged the email and later checked himself in for psychiatric care. You're supposed to be one of these forensic lawyers, evidentiary proof, habeas corpus, must produce the body. Not anymore. No, Malcolm Turnbull's judgment was, you swallowed it hook, line and sinker. I'm putting it to you that your judgment is just as flawed here in choosing to have dinner with the bloke who is the most trenchant critic of the Government and standing in the way of the kind of budget repair that your Government wants.

TURNBULL: Well let's assume he is standing in the way of our budget repair. Let's accept that. Do you think the best way to get him out of the way, Alan, is to abuse him in the sort of language that you're abusing me with?

JONES: I'm not abusing you.

TURNBULL: Oh really? I don't think any of your listeners would be under that misapprehension.

JONES: I know but you've got a few sensitive nerves there, Malcolm.

TURNBULL: Alan, the problem with you is you like dishing it out but you don't like taking it.

JONES: I'm willing to take it. Dish it out. Go away, do your best.

TURNBULL: I'm saying to you that you have been promoting the impression that there is disunity in the Government and you have been promoting the impression that I'm after Tony Abbott's job –

JONES: No I've told you you're not after Tony Abbott's job. You've got not a hope in hell of getting Tony Abbott's job. That's not my case –

TURNBULL: Alright, that's Andrew Bolt's case.

JONES: I don't think it's Andrew Bolt's case. I'm simply saying, if you are loyal to your leader and to the Government you will work with that Government to decide on the appropriate strategy of dealing with the crossbenchers. That will be a Government approach. You are seen by people who are loyal to the Liberal Party and loyal to the Government breaking bread with Palmer and they say, 'oh here's Malcolm, what is Malcolm up to again?'

TURNBULL: And Alan, Alan, you are seen by people who are loyal to the Liberal Party as undermining Tony Abbott's Government at a time when we are trying to sell a very difficult budget because it's got some tough measures in it. And we need to have those tough measures because we have to fix the financial mess the Labor Party left us. So we are all working very hard to sell that budget and explain it – 'selling' the budget is probably not the right term – but explaining why we've got to do it. And we're working very hard to do that. And this sort of

stuff that you're going on about is a distraction. It's a non-issue. And I just think it's so sad that someone who's put in so much effort into supporting Tony Abbott like you would now be undermining his Government. It's heartbreaking really, to listen to you do it.

JONES: Well I don't want to break your heart Malcolm. I'd be the last person who would want to break your heart.

TURNBULL: Oh good, good Alan. I don't want you to break Tony's heart either.

JONES: No, no. I don't want to break any hearts here. Now look, coming back to Peta Credlin who worked for you. Here is the same man a couple of days previous you're hosting for dinner and he's reached the bottom of the bird cage that Tony Abbott's pursuing a parental leave scheme because it would help Peta Credlin. You know for a fact that Peta Credlin as a public servant would not benefit from such a scheme because she's eligible for a generous taxpayer-funded scheme. She's got it already. And she worked for you. I was waiting – I couldn't hear any echo from Canberra of Malcolm publicly springing into defence and saying what reprehensible, disgraceful behavior this is. And what an obscenity that this woman who worked for me should be attacked in this way. I was trying to hear the echo from Canberra, Malcolm. I couldn't hear any reverberation at all.

TURNBULL: Well I'll tell you what I did Alan, because I don't want to create any more pain for Peta than she has already suffered. What I did was – and I told Peta about this at the time. I wrote to her, and I sent her a note at the time, that very

morning. I sent a message to Palmer, telling him he should man-up and apologise. I then rang him and spoke to him and told him in no uncertain terms that he should apologise. And he sent a note which obviously wasn't an adequate apology. And he's been rightly condemned for it, as you said earlier. A newspaper asked me if I would write an op-ed writing about Peta Credlin and Clive Palmer and I said to the editor, I'll ask Peta about that because this is a very sensitive and painful matter and I put it to her and she said, look, I'd rather not. Alan, I don't want to make political capital out of Peta Credlin's pain, other people do. I've worked with Peta Credlin, she does a very good job for Tony and the nation, she does a tough job. This is really hurtful, personal stuff.

Others can jump up and down, make political capital for and against on this. My only foremost interest has been in ensuring (a) that Palmer apologised and I was unsuccessful in that. And (b) in minimising the pain caused for someone for whom I have considerable respect.

JONES: Ok, well I'm not here to mark you out of ten but that is an excellent answer to the question that I raised. What sickens other people though is your argument on January 31 to an ABC program 'There's no more passionate defender of the ABC than I'. You told Paul Kelly on March 9 the ABC has a great reputation. On March 19 you addressed the ABC Showcase at Parliament House you said: 'The ABC my friends, is more important than ever. The ABC's a very, very special organisation.' In another way, is this the same ABC that interrupted the Prime Minister of Australia 37 times during that radio interview in

Melbourne? Is it the same ABC that's frightened disabled people into thinking that your Government will kick them off the disability support pension? Is it the same ABC that broadcasts the weekly Question and Answer program that religiously has a panel dominated by left-wingers, and you? Is it the same ABC that took seven months to apologise for broadcasting a doctored image of a journalist, your former chief of staff, Chris Kenny, having sex with a dog? Is it the same ABC that was found to be biased on four occasions when broadcasting stories about asylum seekers receiving burns? Is it the same ABC which failed to feature any stories about the union slush-fund allegations against Bruce Wilson and Julia Gillard when it should have been front page news? Is it the same ABC which broadcast unsubstantiated claims that cholesterol medication could be doing more harm than good, leading doctors to fear their patients would stop taking that medication? Is it the same ABC that caused an international incident when broadcasting Edward Snowden's allegations that Australia had been spying on Indonesia? Is it the same ABC that runs 5000 stories about the health gap between rich and poor but pays eight of his staff more than \$250,000 including the boss, Mark Scott, on almost twice your salary? Is it the same ABC that caused our live cattle industry to be suspended and almost destroyed? Where do you stand on that ABC?

TURNBULL: Well Alan, you've gone through a long list of failings and mistakes and so forth of the ABC. I can't remember them all, it's a very long list. But can I just say this to you? The ABC is a very, very important public institution. It is our national

broadcaster. If you live in regional Australia for example, and I know you're very fond of the bush then the ABC is the single most important source of news. It covers a whole range of issues that struggle to get an airing in the commercial broadcast media nowadays. And the ABC is more important than ever and it has a heavier responsibility to be balanced and accurate than ever because some of the other great foundations of journalism and news, the big metropolitan newspapers in particular, are struggling as their business models have been challenged by the Internet. Having said all of that, look what I've done. I am the first Communications Minister for decades, if not ever, who has actually put in a thorough, detailed analysis of the finances of both the ABC and SBS. I got -

JONES: Not of what they say, not of what they say. And not of what they do. Even last night, there was supposed to be a settlement. Chris Kenny worked for you.

TURNBULL: Hang on. Yes he did and he's a very good friend of mine. He's a very good friend of mine.

JONES: Have I read anything where you've been out there attacking this behaviour of the ABC?

TURNBULL: I was highly critical, I condemned that skit immediately after it was done.

JONES: What word would you use to properly describe it?
Having sex with a dog?

TURNBULL: Well it was crude, tasteless, appalling. I mean pick your epithet.

JONES: And there was to be an apology last night and part of the apology was, there was to be no criticism of the ABC by anyone within the ABC for the apology that was delivered and yet statements were made by the same people on the Chaser that they will never apologise to Chris Kenny. Tonight's on air apology is from the ABC not us. And they're still working for the ABC today are they?

TURNBULL: Well Alan, I don't know. I don't know whether they are or not.

JONES: Well are you pulling Scott in?

TURNBULL: Listen, I had to be very careful once litigation began not to seek to influence the conduct of litigation between the ABC and somebody who is, as you've noted, a friend of mine. But this is what I've said publicly, and this is what I say privately. I say the same thing. The ABC like any other media organisation, including your own, when it makes a mistake, whether it is a crude attack like that or it just gets the facts wrong, it should as a matter of responsibility and common sense, apologise and correct immediately. Now the stupidity about the Kenny episode is that had Mark Scott picked up the phone to Kenny the next morning and said, 'look, I'm sorry these guys are idiots, I've given them a kick in the bum. We apologise.' And if they had published an apology that would have been the end of it. All this has done is cause Chris and his beautiful wife Sunita a lot of pain and anguish over this.

JONES: And they get away with it.

TURNBULL: And has resulted in the lawyers, all of the costs of which are now paid by the ABC, running up to -

JONES: By the taxpayer.

TURNBULL: Correct. Running up bills of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

JONES: And these people are still in defiance of whatever authority the ABC management has. Why are they still today in the employment of the ABC when they have defied the order and defied the authority of the ABC?

TURNBULL: That is a very good question and it is one that I am sure that Mark Scott will be grappling with today.

JONES: If he can't grapple successfully what will you do?

TURNBULL: Alan one of the difficulties, it is a fact of life, I cannot direct the ABC. They have an Act of Parliament and they are independent, they are governed by their board. All I can do is the following -

JONES: Change the Act.

TURNBULL: But then of course I would have to talk to Mr Palmer, wouldn't I? I can't do that so that probably wouldn't get through the Senate. The -

JONES: Text him, you can just text him.

TURNBULL: Yeah, exactly.

JONES: That's what you do.

TURNBULL: I'm glad both of us are getting our sense of humour back on that one. Can I just get back to what I've done about the efficiency of the ABC?

JONES: I think that's understood. I'll just ask you one other question about the ABC because you and I have got to go. If there was a journalist working for the ABC, which there is, wanting to do a story on Mr Di Girolamo, which they are, what would you say if you knew that journalist was ringing another journalist asking that person if he knew where Mr Di Girolamo's children went to school? Does this mean that we are seeking to involve innocent children in a critical analysis of a parent? And is that acceptable tactics and behavior by the ABC?

TURNBULL: Alan I couldn't, look honestly without knowing the context -

JONES: Happy to tell you off the air, happy to tell you off the air.

TURNBULL: Children should be kept out of it but look -

JONES: Happy to tell you off the air.

TURNBULL: The ABC you have got to remember, I know like any broadcaster they make mistakes and do dumb things from time to time, but they were the ones that exposed Eddie Obeid. They were the ones that first brought the whole Obeid corruption scandal which is a really black stain against the Labor Party in NSW, they brought that to light. So the ABC does practice a lot of very good journalism but I recognise that it's not always right. My point about them being more important than ever is that because they are there, the public broadcaster with public

money, they have a responsibility to be accurate and balanced that is much graver and higher than any commercial media. I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't try to be balanced and accurate but the ABC has to be like Caesar's wife, they have to rise to a standard that is so much higher than the private sector. And that's a responsibility that I take very seriously in reminding them of that.

JONES: Just one final thing because in a very, very balanced and sympathetic interview which we've conducted you're entitled to the final say. I'm sure there is something you want to say before you leave the programme this morning because we will be talking often and again. What finally would you like to say?

TURNBULL: What I want to say Alan is that the big issue that we're facing at the moment as Australians is how do we get our public finances back into shape. We recognise, all of us, Tony, Joe, all of us, we recognise that there are measures in the budget that aren't popular. No one wants to pay more money to go to the doctor, nobody wants to pay more tax, no one wants to pay more at the petrol bowser. But the fundamental fact is this; if we let things go on as they were we would have ended up with deficits forever. We would have ended up with \$667 billion of debt within the decade for our, presumably, hoping perhaps, that our grandchildren might be able to pay off. So the real challenge for those who are critics of the budget, and I respect the criticism, people's criticism, of course I do. But the real challenge is what is your alternative plan? Because unless you have got an alternative plan then what you're really saying is, 'don't worry, keep on spending, keep on borrowing,

and we'll just kick the fiscal can down the road and let the grandkids sort it out'. And that is just not responsible.

JONES: Well done, final say.

TURNBULL: Thank you.

JONES: Talk again soon.