THE NATION.

SIMON: THE VERY DAY JAMIE WHYTE WAS ELECTED TO REPLACE JOHN BANKS AS ACT LEADER, HIS PARTY REGISTERED ZERO IN THE LATEST REID RESEARCH POLL, SO IT SEEMED THE ONLY WAY IS UP, JAIME WHYTE JOINS ME NOW…

I WANT TO START OF PAINTING A PICTURE. POLLING ZERO, PREVIOUS LEADER JOHN BANKS ON HIS WAYTO COURT, ANOTHER PREVIOUS LEADER RODNEY HYDE BUSTED FOR PAYING FOR HIS GIRLFRIENDS HOLIDAY AND ONE OF THE ACT MPS STOLE THE IDENTITY OF A DEAD BABY AND NOW YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT INCEST. I THINK THAT PARTY IS PRETTY MUCH STUFFED BEFORE YOU EVEN BEGIN REBUILDING?

JAMIE: I DON'T THINK SO, THERE'S QUITE A LARGE PORTION OF THE POPULATION WHO AGREES WITH ACT. IT'S TRUE WE HAVE TO RUN A TIGHT SHIP WE HAVE TO GET OUR ACT TOGETHER AND I'VE MADE ONE MISTAKE ALREADY.

SIMON: I DON'T THINK A LARGE PER CENT OF THE POPULATION AGREES WITH YOU, IF YOU LOOK AT OUR POLLING NOT EVEN THE MOST RECENT POLLING NOT EVEN UP TO ONE PER CENT.

JAMIE: NO I DON'T THINK THAT IS TRUE, YOU'VE GOT TO DISTINGUISH FROM BACKING A PARTY AND AGREEING WHAT THE PARTY STANDS FOR. I THINK THAT WHAT WENT WRONG WITH ACT IS THAT WE STOPPED BEING HEARD, OUR MESSAGE, OUR CORE IDEAS WERE LOST IN ALL THE NOISE, ALL THE KERFFUFLE AND IT'S NOT THAT PEOPLE DON'T AGREE WITH US ANYMORE ITS JUST THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BACK THE ACT PARTY. SO MY JOB AS LEADER IS TO REMIND PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT WE STAND FOR AND MAKE IT SEEM LIKE A CREDIBLE VEHICLE FOR THOSE IDEAS.

SIMON: OK SO THAT'S YOUR JOB BUT AT THE MOMENT IF I SAID ACT TO YOU, WHAT DO YOU THINK PEOPLE THINK ACT STANDS FOR?

JAMIE: WELL I THINK A HANDFUL PROBABLY REMEMBER THE ORIGINAL IDEAS WHEN WE GOT GOING AND YOU'RE RIGHT THEY PROBABLY THINK ABOUT THE VARIOUS SCANDALS. AND WE GOT TO MAKE OUR IDEAS WHAT PEOPLE TALK ABOUT AND WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU MENTION ACT AND NOT ALL THIS RUBBISH.

SIMON: WELL LETS TALK ABOUT WHAT OBVIOUSLY YOU THINK IS A MISTAKE. YOU WERE ASKED ABOUT INCEST THIS WEEK AND YOU SAID FROM A CLASSIC LIBERAL VIEW OF WHERE THE STATE DOESN'T GET INVOVLED WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES, YOU SAID THAT CONSENTING ADULTS SHOULDN'T BE TOLD WHAT TO DO?

JAMIE: YEAH I DID…

SIMON: DO YOU STAND BY THAT?

JAMIE: HERE'S WHAT I THINK ABOUT THAT, I MADE A MISTAKE TO GIVE ANY ANSWER AT ALL REALLY BECAUSE I GOT DRAWN IN. I USED TO BE AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER AND I GOT INTO A KIND OF PHILOSOPHY DISCUSSION. BUT I'M NOT AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER ANYMORE I'M THE LEADER OF THE ACT PARTY, SO IT WAS A MISTAKE AND IT WAS A SILLY THING TO DO. AND ACT HAS,

MAINLY IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ACT POLICY, IT'S NOT AN ISSUE AND ACT HAS A STRONG MESSAGE ON OTHER TOPICS TO REDUCING THE TAX BURDEN, REFORMING THE WELFARE, EDUCATION AND SO IT'S JUST RIDICULOUS TO GET SIDETRACKED.

SIMON: ON THAT BASIS, IF YOU CONTINUE ON THAT POLITICAL BELIEF, POLYGAMY WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE?

JAMIE: AS I SAY AGAIN THERE IS NO DEMAND FOR THIS, IT'S NOT ACT POLICY, IT'S JUST NOT SOMETHING I WANT TO EVEN TALK ABOUT AND I WAS FOOLISH TO LET MYSELF GET SIDE-TRACKED

SIMON: PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW YOU, YOU ARE A NEW LEADER, YOU'RE UNKNOWN AND THEREFORE THEY WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOUR POLITICAL BELIEFS COME FROM AND...

JAMIE: IF ANYONE WANTS TO KNOW WHAT I BELIEVE IT'S MUCH EASIER THAN ANY OTHER POLITICIAN. MOST POLITICIANS FUDGE A LITTLE BIT, I MEAN I GOT ASKED THIS QUESTION BECAUSE YOU KNOW I'VE GOT MORE COHERENT VIEWS AND THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD PUSH ME. IF ANYONE WANTS TO KNOW MY OPINIONS ON THINGS THEY CAN FIND IT OUT IT'S ALL PUBLISHED.

SIMON: SO YOU'RE POLITICALLY NAIVE THOUGH REALLY AREN'T YOU? BECAUSE YOUR PERSONAL VIEWS ARE GOING TO GET MIXED UP WITH THE VIEWS OF THE PARTY.

JAMIE: WELL MY PERSONAL VIEWS ARE LARGELY CONSISTENT WITH THE VIEWS OF THE PARTY. IF YOU READ MY WORKS THEY'RE MAINLY ON ECONOMIC POLICY, STUFF LIKE THAT AND I DON'T THINK ANYONE IN THE PARTY WOULD BE EMBARRASSED OR WORRIED ABOUT THEM, SO I DON'T SEE A PROBLEM WITH THAT.

SIMON: SO IT'S A LOGICAL STEP FROM INCEST BEING ACCEPTABLE BETWEEN CONSENTING ADULTS TO POLYGAMY BEING ACCEPTABLE AMONGST CONSULTING ADULTS ACCORDING TO YOUR PURE POLITICAL VIEWS?

JAMIE: YES. BUT AS I SAY I'M THE LEADER OF THE ACT PARTY, ACT HAS NO INTEREST IN THIS AGENDA. THERE'S NO POLICY, I WAS ON THE POLICY COMMITTEE FOR MONTHS BEFORE I BECAME LEADER AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT MARRIAGE JUST DIDN'T COME UP.

SIMON: BUT MOST OF YOUR PERSONAL PARTY VIEWS ARE IN SNYC, YOU JUST SAID THAT.

JAMIE: YEAH THEY MAINLY ARE. LOOK ACT LIKE ALL POLITICAL PARTIES IS NOT THE IDEA THAT THE PURELY IDEALOGICAL MOVEMENTS, A GROUP OF PEOPLE. ACT HAS SOME VERY BOLD DISTINCTIVE POLICIES, SOME PEOPLE IN THE PARTY, THE FOUNDERS OF THE PARTY ACTUALLY CAME FROM A BIT OF A LEFT WING POSITION THEY WANTED TO HELP THE POOR. SO POLICIES OF TAX REFORM, WELFARE REFORM AND SO ON. OTHER PEOPLE CAME IN AS LIBERTARIANS, THERE'S A CORE OF STUFF IN THE PARTY THAT WE ALL AGREE ON AND IT'S MY JOB AS LEADER OF THE PARTY TO REPRESENT THOSE VIEWS, NOT SOME KIND OF FRINGE STUFF AND THAT'S WHAT IM GOING TO BE DOING.

SIMON: WELL THAT IS WHAT YOUR JOB IS TODAY, GIVING A SPEECH AT THE CONFERENCE WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO BE CHANGING ABOUT THE PARTY?

JAMIE: WHAT IM GOING TO BE CHANGING IS NOT A CHANGE SO MUCH AS A REVERSAL, IM GOING BACK TO THE ORIGINS OF THE ACT PARTY, ACT WHEN IT GOT GOING WAS A PARTY OF BOLD IDEAS. STRONG POLICIES OF FLAT TAXES, LIBERALISING EDUCATION POLICY, REFORMING PENSIONS AND THAT ALL GOT A BIT LOST AND SO IM GOING BACK TO THAT.

SIMON: WELL I UNDERSTAND YOU'RE ALSO GOING TO BE TALKING ABOUT EXTENDING THE THREE STRIKES CRIMINAL LAW TO BURGALRY, WHICH IS ONE OF OUR MOST COMMON CRIMES. THAT IS NOT ONE OF THE ORIGINAL CORE BELIEFS OF ACT, THAT IS A POPULAR CRIME POLICY SORT OF INTRODUCED UNDER THE REGIME OF RODNEY HIDE.

JAMIE: WELL ACT IS A PARTY WHICH BELIEVES IN INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND YOU CAN'T BE FREE IF YOU'RE FRIGHTENED OF BEING HARRASSED, NOT JUST BY THE GOVERNMENT BUT BY OTHER CITIZENS AND ITS VERY IMPORTANT IF YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A FREE SOCIETY THAT YOU HAVE A PEACEFUL SOCIETY WITH LOW LEVEL CRIME. SO BEING TOUGH ON CRIME IS COMPLETELY CONSISTENT WITH THE FREE MARKET, LIBERAL KIND OF IDEAS OF THE ACT PARTY

SIMON: SO HOW'S THIS POLICY GOING TO WORK? HOW IS 3 STRIKES FOR BURGLARY GOING TO WORK?

JAMIE: WELL I DON'T UNDERTSAND WHAT YOU MEAN, YOU KNOW HOW IT WORKS, THEY'LL WORK LIKE ALL OTHER THREE STRIKE POLICIES. IF YOU DO THE SAME CRIME REPEATEDLY YOU GET A FULL LIFE JAIL TERM.

SIMON: FOR LIFE? OR IS IT THE MAXIMUM PENALTY? OR ARE YOU GOING TO BE SENDING BURGALERS TO JAIL FOR LIFE?

JAMIE: WELL WE'VE GOT TO WORK OUT ALL THE DETAILS FULLY BUT YOUR NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO GO ON JUST REPEATEDLY DOING THIS CRIME, YOUR GOING TO GO TO PRISON FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

SIMON: OK LIfE? OR IS IT GOING TO BE THE MAXIMUM PENALTY FOR THE BURGALRY CRIME? YOU SHOULD KNOW THE DETAIL OF THE POLICY YOUR JUST ABOUT TO ANNOUNCE?

JAMIE: OH I'M NOT ANNOUNCING THAT POLICY

SIMON: YOU'RE NOT?

JAMIE: NO I'M JUST, WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF PUTTING THE POLICY DETAILS TOGETHER I'M ANNOUNCING THE DIRECTION OF THEM TO THE PARTY SO THEY KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING.

SIMON: SO THIS POLICY HAS NOT BEEN FORMULATED

JAMIE: A LOT OF OUR POLICIES ARE BEING FORMULATED, SO FOR EXAMPLE WE'RE IN FAVOUR OF LOWER FLAT TAXES BUT WE HAVEN'T YET WORKED OUT THE EXACT RATES WE WOULD PROMOTE. AND ON THIS POLICY, WE HAVEN'T YET WORKED OUT THE TARIFFS WE WOULD BE IN FAVOUR OF FOR THE CRIME BUT THERE WILL BE A THREE STRIKE POLICY.

SIMON: CAN I SAY THIS POLICY IN INCONSISTENT WITH THE IDEA OF THE GOVERNMENT BEING SMALL BECAUSE PUTTING MORE AND MORE PEOPLE IN JAIL IS GOING TO COST A LOT MORE

MONEY. NINETY THOUSAND DOLLARS PER PERSON AND IF YOU'RE GOING TO PUT PEOPLE IN JAIL FOR THE MOST COMMON CRIME UNDER THE THREE STRIKES LAW, IT'S GOING TO BE THOUSANDS MORE PEOPLE.

JAMIE: IT'S VERY IMPORTANT, WE ARE IN FAVOUR OF SMALL GOVERNMENT BUT THERE ARE THINGS THAT GOVERNMENTS ARE FOR AND WE DON'T BELIEVE IN ANY GOVERNMENT. THE PRINCIPAL THING THE GOVERNMENT IS TO CREATE IS THE RULE OF LAW AND WE'RE ENTIRELY HAPPY WITH GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON THAT. SO THERE IS NOTHING INCONSISTENT WITH OUR PRINCIPALS. THE GOVERNMENT ACTUALLY AT THE MOMENT DERILECT IN ITS DUTIES, IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO GET JUSTICE IN NEW ZEALAND, AND WE WOULD BE HAPPY TO SPEND MORE MONEY ON THAT TO SEE TO IT THE PEOPLE GOT JUSTICE. THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT IS A PROBLEM BUT THE GOVERNMENT MUST DO THE THINGS IT'S PROPERLY SUPPOSED TO DO.

SIMON: OK SO IT'S PROPERLY SUPPOSED TO CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT OK BUT A SMALL GOVERNMENT MEANS THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO BE A PART OF OTHER THINGS. LET'S TALK ABOUT WHAT GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T BE IN, SCHOOLS?

JAMIE: GOVERNMENTS SHOULD FUND EDUCATION SO EVERYONE CAN GET AN EDUCATION BUT THERE IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAYING FOR THE EDUCATION AND MAKING SURE EVERYONE GETS ONE AND RUNING THE SCHOOLS

SIMON: SO WHO RUNS THE SCHOOLS? DO YOU WANT THEM TO ALL BE PRIVATE?

JAMIE: WELL ANYBODY CAN RUN THE SCHOOLS IT COULD BE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS BUT THERE SHOULD BE FREEDOM TO COMPETE IN THE MARKET FOR ANYBODY AND THOSE PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE GOVERNMENT FUNDING. SO THINK OF IT LIKE THIS, EVERY STUDENT COMES WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR EDUCATION BUT THEY CAN SPEND THAT FUNDING WHEREVER THEY LIKE

SIMON: OK WHAT ABOUT HOSPITALS? SHOULD THEY BE PRIVATISED?

JAMIE: WELL IDEALLY - AND THIS IS GOING TO TAKE A LOT LONGER BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION WE ARE IN - BUT WE'RE TALKING IDEALLY HERE, IDEALLY IT WOULD BE VERY SIMILAR. SO THAT THE PROVISION OF HEALTHCARE IS NOT RUN BY THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THE GOVERNMENT HAS A ROLE IN ENSURING EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, SO VERY SIMILAR TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

SIMON: WHAT ABOUT LAND? SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT HAVE LAND, SHOULD IT HAVE FARMS

JAMIE: THE GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T OWN FARMS, NO OF COURSE NOT

SIMON: SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT OWN CONSERVATION ESTATES?

JAMIE: I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THAT ONE ACTUALLY TO BE HONEST; SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN RAISING THIS, THINKING ABOUT IT. I'M NOT SURE WHAT I THINK EXACTLY, ACT DOESN'T HAVE A POLICY TO STOP THAT. ON THE WHOLE WE BELIEVE THAT CONSERVATION IS BEST DONE BY PRIVATE OWNERSHIP, PRIVATE OWNERS HAVE MUCH BETTER INCENTIVE THAN ANYBODY ELSE TO PRESERVE THEIR PROPERTY TO MAXIMISE THE VALUE OF IT. SO IN GENERAL WE'RE IN FAVOUR OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

SIMON: SO THAT'S A POSSIBILITY THEN THAT YOU COULD SEEL A CONSERVATION ESTATE?

JAMIE: I HONESTLY HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT, I DON'T WANT TO SAY WE'RE GOING TO DO THAT BECAUSE I HAVEN'T EVEN THOUGHT IT THROUGH.

SIMON: LET'S TALK ABOUT NATIONAL PARTY'S INTRUSION INTO PEOPLES LIVES. THEY'VE RECENTLY RAISED TOBACCO, TAXES, THEY'VE GOT A GOAL OF BEING SMOKEFREE BY 2025, And DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

JAMIE: NO.

SIMON: WHY NOT?

JAMIE: WELL I THINK THAT PEOPLE, IF THEY SMOKE IT'S UP TO THEM. SMOKING IS HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH, I DON'T SMOKE, I WOULDN'T WANT MY CHILDREN TO SMOKE BUT IF PEOPLE CHOOSE TO SMOKE I DON'T SEE WHY THE GOVERNMENT HAS ANY REASON TO TAKE A VIEW ON IT.

SIMON: ALRIGHT BUT YOUR PREVIOUS LEADER, JOHN BANKS, SUPPORTED THAT LEGISLATION

JAMIE: WELL I DON'T

SIMON: SO YOU'RE SAYING THINGS WENT WRONG UNDER JOHN BANKS?

JAMIE: ALL I'M SAYING IS WHAT I JUST SAID, HE SUPPORTED A PIECE OF LEGISLATION THAT I DON'T. I MEAN THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE IN THE ACT PARTY AGREES ON EVERYTHING IS RIDICULOUS, OF COURSE THEY DON'T AND THEY DON'T IN OTHER PARTIES.

SIMON: JOHN BANKS ALSO SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT TO GET ITS GCSB BILL THROUGH , WOULD YOU HAVE VOTED THAT WAY?

JAMIE: I WOULDN'T HAVE

SIMON: YOU WOULDN'T HAVE? THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREME PRESSURE FROM NATIONAL FOR YOU TO DO THAT

JAMIE: WELL I'M NOT SAYING THAT I DON'T BUCKLE UNDER PRESSURE, I HOPE I WOULDN'T. WHAT I'M TELLING YOU WHEN I SAY I DON'T VOTE FOR IT IS THAT I DON'T AGREE WITH THE POLICY. IT'S A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT QUESTION. WOULD YOU HAVE… IF I HAD BEEN IN THAT POSITION WOULD YOU HAVE BUCKLED UNDER THE PRESSURE? HOW CAN I POSSIBLY KNOW? I HOPE NOT. I THOUGHT YOU WERE ASKING ME IF I AGREE WITH THE LAW.

SIMON: WELL OBVIOUSLY YOU DON'T AGREE WITH IT, BUT IF YOU WERE IN HIS POSITION YOU SAY THAT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE VOTED FOR IT AND YOU HOPED THAT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BUCKLED UNDER THE PRESSURE? WHEN IT'S THAT PARTICULAR VOTE, YOU'VE GOT JOHN KEY ON THE PHONE SAYING I NEED YOUR VOTE AND YOU'RE PART OF THIS COALITION…

JAMIE: THIS IS AN INTERESTING QUESTION IF YOU'RE IN A COALTION YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING TO HAVE TO OCCASIONALLY VOTE FOR THINGS THAT YOU DON'T REALLY AGREE WITH, I THINK THAT'S RIGHT. AND I THINK THAT'S PROPER BECAUSE YOU'VE ENTERED AN AGREEMENT. SO IF YOU ENTER IN ON AN AGREEMENT AND CERTAIN VOTED WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE AGREEMENT, YOU'VE GOT

TO HONOUR THAT AGREEMENT ABSOULUTELY AND ACT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VERY RELIABLE COALITION PARTNER SO THAT'S QUITE PROPER. IF IT'S NOT WITHIN THE AGREEMENT THEN YOU'VE GOT A FREER HAND AND YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE A DECISION ON WHETHER OR WHETHER NOT IT'S IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO CAUSE A BIT OF A FUSS.

SIMON: LET'S TALK ABOUT BEING FLEXIBLE, COALITION PARTNERS. LET'S SAY I SAY COLIN CRAIG TO YOU, WHAT DO YOU SAY?

JAMIE: I LAUGH A LITTLE AND YOU KNOW I WOULDN'T RULE OUT WORKING IN A COALTION WITH COLIN CRAIG, HE SEEMS LIKE A DECENT CHAP, I'VE BEEN CATCHING UP WITH HIM HE'S A DECENT GUY, I DISAGREE WITH HIM ON SEVERAL THINGS BUT I THINK THERE ARE FAR WORSE POLITICIANS IN NEW ZEALAND.

SIMON: ALRIGHT MAORI PARTY?

JAMIE: THE MAORI PARTY HAS WORKED WELL WITH US ON PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS, SO THAT'S WORKED WELL…

SIMON: BUT THERE'S BEEN A WHOLE RAFT OF OTHER THINGS INVOLVED

JAMIE: THEY DO DISAGREE WITH US WITH MOST THINGS; I THINK THEY'D BE RELUCTANT TO WORK WITH US NOW.

SIMON: DEAL OR NO DEAL IN EPSOM? ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE A DEAL?

JAMIE: NO I DON'T THINK SO, WE HAVEN'T MET, WE'VE HAD NO EXPLICIT DISCUSSION ABOUT IT BECAUSE I DON'T THINK A DEAL IS REQUIRED

SIMON: CAN YOU WIN EPSOM BY YOURSELF?

JAMIE: YES I THINK WE CAN AND I'M NOT PRETENDING THAT IF IT WEREN'T FOR MMP EVERYONE IN EPSOM WOULD BE VOTING ACT, THEY ARE VOTING, IT'S A TACTICAL VOTE FOR ACT. I THINK THAT THE PEOPLE OF EPSOM DO ACTUALLY AGREE WITH ACT, A LOT OF THEM AGREE WITH OUR POLICIES. AND THEY CAN SEE THAT THE KIND OF GOVERNMENT THAT THEY WANT, THEY SHOULD VOTE ACT. AND THERE'S NO NEED FOR US TO DO AN EXPLICIT DEAL

SIMON: ALRIGHT ACT LEADER JAMIE WHITE, LEADER OF ACT THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME THIS MONRING.