



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
DOORSTOP, CANBERRA, APRIL 2 1992

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PM: I'll just start by making a couple of points. In the House this afternoon the Leader of the Opposition in a motion which apparently the Opposition had planned this morning and was not spontaneous, that was a censure of the Speaker, in a premeditated, careful and deliberate way tried to suggest and link me and my role in public life with some criminal behaviour which is now part and parcel of the NSW prison system.

Dr Hewson promised to make our public life and elevate the parliamentary debate when he became Leader. The Opposition has not been travelling well in Parliament House for a number of weeks. But there are ways for them to remedy that, that's lift their game and not try to suggest that the NSW Labor Party is a criminal organisation.

I rang Dr Hewson a moment or two ago and I said to him that I was very disappointed that he should have stooped to such a tactic. Very much more in sorrow than in anger, I said to him that I thought he should reconsider his position, that he should either make a withdrawal of what he said or repeat it outside the Parliament where it can be adjudicated upon in the appropriate manner, of course in the courts. He said 'I heard what you said', and I said in that case you'd better go and think about it. So I've left him on that point.

But I simply say this, that the contest of the House of Representatives should be as it's always been - about policy and occasionally, of course, in the heat of the moment personal remarks are made. But premeditated remarks which reflect and try to put a criminal slur on the one branch of the Labor Party which more than any other has been pivotal the Federal Labor Party's federal success and suggesting that it's a mafia which runs from the prison system to the Prime Ministership is a deliberate slur, totally without foundation,

unjustified and can do nothing but lower the esteem of the Parliament in the eyes of the public.

J: Do you think Leo McLeay's performance might have lead Dr Hewson to exasperation?

PM: No. Because the Opposition were considering this morning moving a Censure of the Speaker and you notice it was moved not after in a raucous part of the debate or a raucous answer, it was moved as Question Time had come to its natural end. It was a premeditated movement to attack the one person who is not able to attack in the Parliament. They have attacked the one person who can't fight back, I mean if he wished to attack anybody he should attack me. But as you know the Question Time didn't go well for the Opposition and hasn't done for weeks and they've decided now that they should attack the most defenceless person in the place which is the Speaker.

J: Prime Minister, what about the performance of the Speaker, what do you really think?

PM: I think all Speakers are put under pressure whenever the contest of ideas is being fought out. We've got now two packages, we've got the 'One Nation' Statement and we've got the GST tax of the Opposition, the goods and services tax, and the debate is willing as it should be in the national interest. And I think it is very unfair of the Opposition to try to make an assault on the speaker. If they wish to attack anybody, let them attack the Government and we can handle their attacks with consummate ease.

J: Mr Keating, does the Speaker enjoy your unqualified support?

PM: He does enjoy my unqualified support. But the point is not movement of a motion against Mr McLeay can for one second absolve the Leader of the Opposition from what I think is a sort of detraction which was only last seen in the Parliament when a former Opposition Leader, the former Opposition Leader called the former Prime Minister a 'little crook'. This is the last time the Parliament has got down to these depths and I think Dr Hewson should repair the position.

ENDS.