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PRIME MINISTER

124/93

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

LAWLESS LIBERALS

The Liberal frontbencher Ian McLachlan's approach to the Mabo issue is now one of seeking to brazenly defy a judgement of the High Court. There should be no place for him in the shadow ministry of a party which genuinely believes in the laws and institutions of this country.

For some time now I have highlighted the extraordinary arrogance and hypocrisy in the approach of many Liberals to the Mabo High Court decision. As conservatives, they stand by the rule of law and the sanctity of private property. But when a decision of the highest court in the country doesn't suit their vested interests, they say the court is in error and the decision should be overturned.

Mr McLachlan's performance on ABC Radio this morning was the most flagrant confirmation to date of this moral bankruptcy. In effect, he endorsed Professor Blainey's view that because some Australians of influence do not like the judgement of the High Court, the Chief Justice should call his court together to explain themselves, or resign.

His agreement with the "general thrust" of Professor Blainey's incitement to defy the Court in Adelaide last night is an indictment of the Liberals, and an indictment of Dr Hewson for failing to pull him into line.

Mr McLachlan also described Premier Court's legislation - legislation which Mr McLachlan endorses - as "the start of a process of reversal of the native title decision". Dr Hewson should dissociate himself from Mr McLachlan's views, and from the Western Australian legislation now, or stand accused of the same arrogant refusal to accept the decision of the Court which even Mr Hugh Morgan describes as "the keystone of the Constitutional arch".

But where was Dr Hewson while this was occurring? Giving Senator Bishop the political equivalent of another kiss on the cheek in exchange for her hollow assurance that she doesn't want his job. The Liberal Party leadership is now a vacuum waiting to be filled.

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