



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, SHERATON BREAKWATER CASINO-HOTEL,
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- J:** Prime Minister, where is Carmen Lawrence now that she seems to have lost her avenue for ...
- PM:** Well, she hasn't lost the avenue, she hasn't lost the matter, it is a jurisdictional matter where the High Court has said that the Western Australian action she has, that process has to be complete before it would be competent for the High Court to hear it. So, the matter of substance is not yet determined. But, the legal options which she might have will now have to be considered and no doubt she will do that.
- J:** Are you happy to continue supporting her while she exhausts every legal option that she has available to her?
- PM:** Of course I am because this process of the Royal Commission in Western Australia is directed to extending the arm of the Western Australian Executive and in this matter, she has taken the view and so has the Federal Cabinet that the rights of MPs versus the Executive are important ones. But again, I think, she has taken the view right through that she is prepared to tell her story at the appropriate moment.
- J:** Her affairs must be doing some damage to the Party?
- PM:** I don't think it is doing as much as the Liberal Party is doing to itself in Western Australia. In Western Australia we have now a third person hopping out of the Liberal Party on the weekend - after Mr Rocher and Mr Filing. Now, Mr Howard told everybody last week that he was resolving the matter and he had this, as he said, this sort of mock expulsion of Senator Crichton-Browne. Well, if that has assuaged the fears of Western Australian MPs, Mr Rocher wouldn't have run as an Independent, Mr Filing may have come back into the Party and

certainly the candidate for Swan wouldn't have shifted from the Liberal Party to Independent status. I notice in the Sydney Sunday Telegraph a story which says "Howard's strategy may backfire on him". Mr Howard told all those gullible enough to believe him last week that he had exercised authority and secured the agreement to push Senator Crichton-Browne away from the processes of the Liberal Party. What we now know is that this is untrue. It turns out that Mr Court and David Honey prevailed upon Senator Crichton-Browne to remove himself from the activities of the Liberal Party. After having found that out, Mr Howard then put out a statement. In other words, it wasn't Mr Howard who did that at all. Let me just say, and I am winking here, there is at least one Canberra journalist who said to me if it is to be revealed that Mr Howard was not central to Mr Crichton-Browne's "removal" from the Liberal Party, he would say so volubly in his medium. Now is his opportunity because Mr Howard has told an enormous porky here. What he has done, basically, it is a very revealing article. It says that, for instance, last week Mr Howard said 'I got rid of Noel Crichton-Browne from the Liberal Senate ticket'. Senior Liberals dispute this. They say Senator Crichton-Browne made his decision to stand down from the Senate solely after discussions with the Western Australian Premier and are adamant that Mr Howard had no influence on his decision. Howard will say anything and he does. It goes on to say 'Mr Howard's announcement banning Senator Crichton-Browne from party meetings also came after he (Crichton-Browne) had announced his withdrawal from party affairs.

So, certainly this is hurting the Liberal Party in Western Australia and what it shows is John Howard's weakness, indecisiveness, lack of support for those who have supported him. By contrast, last week, I said I was supporting Martin Ferguson. I made it clear that I would be supporting him at the National Executive were it to have met today and as you know that matter was resolved within the Labor Party with other candidates withdrawing. So, again, let me just underline here John Howard's duplicity and weakness in dealing with these people in his Party in Western Australian over Senator Crichton-Browne. They are leaving the Liberal Party in droves in Western Australia. There is a real crisis there, a complete party split is on over there and let me complete on those words by the former Senator Reg Withers when he said there is a civil war on over there and that is exactly what is on in the Western Australian Liberal Party.

- J: Prime Minister, have you given any consideration or had any discussions, even in private, about who might take over the health portfolio ...
- PM: None, what so ever and I'm not considering it.
- J: Would you be comfortable with Carmen Lawrence giving evidence at the Royal Commission?

PM: Of course I would be comfortable with her giving her evidence in any body. But, again, there is a matter of principle here about the rights of the Executive and the rights of Members of Parliament and that will probably run its full course.

J: Does Martin Ferguson go to the preselection for the seat of Batman as damaged goods now?

PM: No, I think, the public are very shrewd assessors of these processes and they see that Martin Ferguson represented working Australians over a long period of time in the Miscellaneous Workers Union and then as President of the ACTU and they would see it as a natural shift for him to make a change to the Federal Parliament in the Labor Party. This will be good for the Labor Party. It will make us stronger, it will make the Government stronger and, again, it just renews that contact we have had with working Australians, to have the leader of the industrial movement in the federal caucus. So, I would think most Australians will regard this as a sensible outcome and like me would probably appreciate the commitment which was made by the other candidates and the decision which they took to withdraw from the contest.

J: ... of Independents, Phil Cleary, says he may run somebody ...

PM: Well, good on you Phil, do your hardest. In a democracy you can put your money, put your deposit down and it is everyone for themselves.

J: Have you written off the next election as a loss?

PM: Where do you get those questions for God's sake. I mean, has the sun got to you?

J: Are you prepared to consider the plea by veterans from the Pacific that they get some personal reward?

PM: We have a mature system of supporting veterans and we have had it in place now for a very long period of time and you might also know that those who were particularly disadvantaged, prisoners of war, you might have seen Tom Uren's remarks of a day or so ago, supporting the Government in support of those people who did suffer at the hands of the Japanese and Germans. But in the broad, of course, we have a very mature system of assessment and support for veterans.

J: What about ones in the Pacific, in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands?

PM: That is for the whole of the service in the Second World War. Thank you.

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