



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF COMMENTS, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 23 FEBRUARY 1987

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JOURNALIST: ... treating Sir Joh as joke?

PM: No, I don't think anyone treats Joh entirely as a joke.

JOURNALIST: ... chance of becoming Prime Minister?

PM: I don't think so but Mr McMullan was quite right in looking at a whole range of scenarios - some of them fanciful - but that is the job of the Secretary of the Party, to look at every conceivable scenario. He was quite right in doing that. But as I said this morning on an earlier program the real test is will Sir Joh come down and face up to a real parliament. He doesn't operate in a real parliament there. He doesn't have any sort authorities within the public accounts type of system that will look over what he says and does. He refuses to have any supervision of that sort which every other parliament has. I doubt that Joh has got the guts - as I put it - to come here and enter a real parliament where you have to be tested. But I repeat - Sir Joh is not the real issue at the moment. The real issue is the temporary Leader of the Opposition - Mr Howard, and Mr Sinclair. And that is who we will be dealing with while we get on with running the country.

JOURNALIST: You said Sir Joh is the main game, Sir?

PM: He is the main game in the Opposition side and ultimately he looks as though he may be the main game. But what I am saying is that I wish he would come here and play the game where he can be really tested. The way he is operating and the way certainly Mr Howard and Mr Sinclair are operating, they think he is the main game. If he is, let him come, let's play it.

JOURNALIST: You are not underestimating him at all?

PM: I just go about the business that I am elected to do and that is governing the country. And you have this sideshow going on of what passes for an Opposition and all the fighting that is going on there. I can't ignore that - I have got to have a look at it and try and take it seriously because it is the only Opposition that there is. But really we have got a terribly difficult job of running the country in the circumstances where, as I say, we have had so much of our national income wiped off it. Every Prime Minister would like to be in a position where you could be cutting taxes, where you could be handing out more goodies - but that would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to this country. There has got to be restraint, pretty tough restraint, and we have unfortunately got the job of doing that.