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PRIME MINISTER 45

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E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, we missed the earlier comments you made about the compact or treaty. What exactly are you aiming for?

PM: I think the word is not important, the concept is though. I want to see a situation where before the end of this year, before we go into 1988, that there be a sense of understanding in the Australian community as a whole that next year we are celebrating 200 years of European settlement in this country. And that is 200 coming on top of a history of 40,000 of aboriginal culture and experience. And I would want to see an understanding in the Australian community that we have an obligation to the Aborigines of Australia that in that 200 years of European settlement there have been many grave injustices done; that since 1967 when the Australian people passed the referendum giving power to the national parliament that much more has been done to recognise these injustices, to direct attention to specific areas of problems like education, health, employment, training, And indeed I would say in the last 4½ years of acceleration of commitment and action, I think that we, as a people, ought to make a compact between one another. I use that word 'compact' - I am not wedded to it. There should be a compact of understanding as we go into 1988 of just what that 200 represents. It is, as I say, coming on top of 40,000 years of aboriginal history, that we do have a continuing commitment, that we will continue and I hope in a greater way to address the issues of concern. And if we can have that compact of understanding then I think we as non-Aboriginals, non-Aboriginal people, are going to be better placed properly to celebrate 1988. And importantly that there can be a greater sense of community between the Aborigines and the non-Aboriginal people so that 1988 can be clearly celebrated, properly understood, by all the citizens of Australia.

JOURNALIST: Is it something that you would place before the Parliament for a debate, for a vote, and that it would have any force in law?

PM: One suggestion that has arisen in the discussions I have been having quietly with a number of people is that perhaps the concept that I have could be included by way of pre-~~amble~~, a substantial pre-~~amble~~ to the legislation that we would bring in to establish the commission. That is one possibility. But again I make the point that I don't think it is so important as to whether you call it a treaty - the treaty doesn't ... appeal to me so much - but it is not the word that matters or where ... but that the people as a whole accept the point of what is involved. It is terribly important, I think, not just for the Aborigines but it is just as important for the non-Aboriginal population, that we understand these things before we go into 1988 so that we can have a sense of together and proper perspective. We wouldn't be celebrating 1988 properly if we thought that there wasn't 40,000 years of history before we came here.

JOURNALIST: Do you think it would have a greater impact though ...

PM: When you say enforceable, you can't enforce attitudes by law. What I am about is trying to get a sense of understanding of commitment if you like, between the non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal population. You can't enforce commitments or attitudes by law but it may, in fact, be useful to include these sort of concepts, as I say, in a pre-~~amble~~ to the legislation. That may give it a greater sense of status but I repeat that I don't think you should get hung up on the words or the method, ... of commitment.

JOURNALIST: ... inaudible question ...

PM: The rights of Aborigines should be enshrined in the laws of this country with our ... deliberately ... and we do that in many ways already. In the areas of specific programs for housing, employment and so on. And I am not in saying that implying that we have done enough but the concept of having an overall treaty, I don't know that that is necessarily the right way or the necessary way to do it. As I say, to get the right attitude, it is the understanding of where we are in history, what our 200 years as Europeans, what that bit of history is about, what its right place is. And if we can get that sense of understanding then I think it is much more likely that in the whole range of our activities we will, as a total community, have a better attitude towards one another.

JOURNALIST: Bicentennial planning has been going on for two years now, you are opening yourself up aren't you to the cynical observation by simply talking about this now, that the whole thing is designed to mute aboriginal protests in the bicentennial year.

PM: No, I don't think so Kerry. There are always going to be cynics around. All I can say is that from the time I have been Prime Minister I have said to the previous

PM cont: leaders of the Australian Bicentennial Authority and I have said it to Jim Kirk, that it is absolutely essential that we talk about the Bicentenary we talk about the 200 years of European settlement that there is nothing in language or in action which implies that the only thing of importance is the last 200 years. And I have always had the attitude, and I have conveyed it to those who have the responsibility for organising 1988, that there must be an understanding of that fact. Simply now, as we get closer to the year, I want to accept what I see as the obligation ... Prime Minister to clearly get into the minds of the Australian people these facts - because they are facts. It is not a question of saying you can wipe 40,000 years of history away and say that people who have been here for 200 years haven't got very significant obligations to those who have been here before. I think that I have the responsibility as we come up towards the Bicentenary to lead in this matter and hopefully to get that sense of understanding in the Australian community generally. And let me say this that it is not as though there is a desert of understanding out there. I think there is a very considerable understanding and I want to sharpen it. We shouldn't forget that it was 20 years ago that the Australian people, in that decision in the referendum, quite a remarkable decision in the history of referendums because they normally don't pass referendums. But by an overwhelming majority they made the decision that they wanted the national government to have responsibility in these matters. It is appropriate that as we come to this important year - 1988 - that we remember those obligations.

JOURNALIST: Just finally, and very briefly Mr Hawke, do you have any comment on the death of Alan Reid?

PM: Yes, and thank you for asking that question. By any standards Alan Reid was giant in his profession. I had the opportunity and indeed the privilege of not only knowing Alan Reid but being able to count him as a friend over very many years. As a political journalist, Alan's work was marked by many characteristics. They included, firstly, his total integrity, his dedication, his range of contacts, his capacity for analysis. As I have said before, there is no other journalist, as far as I know, who in fact has changed the structure of a major political party. It was Alan Reid's work in regard to the "faceless men" that led my Party, the Australian Labor Party, substantially to change its constitutional structure and to bring the parliamentary representatives into its federal executive and conference. That was, as I say, an indication of the magnitude of his work. He was also, if I may say this, personally an exceptionally good friend to me. He was prepared to share with me his incomparable knowledge of the federal parliament and the players of politics. And I certainly learnt very much from Alan. And I take this opportunity of conveying to his wife, Joan, and to his family, on behalf of Hazel and myself firstly, and on behalf of the Government and I think the people of Australia, our grief with them at his passing and our acknowledgement to them of the incomparable role that he played in political journalism in this country.

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