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PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM, IN KATHERINE, FOR
7.30 REPORT - 3 SEPTEMBER 1987

E & E O - PROOF ONLY

LYNEHAM: The Prime Minister's suggestion of a compact between white and black Australia came during an interview on Aboriginal community radio in Alice Springs and the timing of his public comments caught everyone, including Gerry Hand, the new Aboriginal Affairs Minister, by surprise - not that Mr Hand was anything other than delighted. Indeed as the day wore on, taking the Hawke entourage north to Katherine and the Kalano Aboriginal Community, it was clear that the news of Bob Hawke's suggestion had spread quickly across the Territory and in many minds had already taken on the status of a firm commitment. But a commitment to what exactly? A cosy Claytons treaty aimed at a trouble-free Bicentenary or a genuine bid to forge a new relationship between black and white? What's the essence of the Prime Minister's plan?

PM: The essence is to try and establish in the minds of the Australian people that the time of European settlement - important as it is and appropriate to be celebrated - that 200 years comes at the end of 40,000 years of Aboriginal history and culture and that if we are to properly celebrate in 1988 we must recognise, as non-Aborigines, the obligations and the commitments we have to them.

LYNEHAM: Would this involve a commitment on the part of the Government to help them more with things like health, education and housing?

PM: What I've said is that in the period since we've been in office in real terms there's been an over 30% real increase in funding. So the commitment to more funding has been there. It's demonstrated. I don't have to say yes we'll do it. We've done that. I think we ought to continue, within the necessary economic constraints that are imposed upon government, to continue to do more. But I come back to the point I started with, Paul. If we think about this issue just in terms of money then we'll have missed a large part of the point. It's an attitudinal question. I think we've got to, as non-Aborigines, just understand, as I've tried to say from the time I've been in government, that this 1988, 200 years of European settlement, that that comes on top of a great history, a great culture, great

traditions of 40,000 years. The attitude has to be right. But we came here, we came into an existing civilisation if you like, an existing history and I want to get the attitudes right.

LYNEHAM: Charles Perkins, Head of Aboriginal Affairs, says a compact, that sort of idea, is not good enough. He says we want a treaty that can be written into the Constitution for all time.

PM: We're used to Charlie putting his points fairly directly and immediately. As I've said, I'm not trying to impose a particular view. I want to get the thinking started.

LYNEHAM: But your thinking is, you said yesterday, a treaty doesn't appeal to you so much.

PM: The main concern I have about it is that people think, they're insisting, it must be a treaty. They seem to have the view that the word itself is significant and I think if you get the attitudes right the words don't matter very much because you can say we've got a treaty. You can have a piece of paper and call it a treaty, you can have another ... and call it a compact but because one word has compact on top of it and one has treaty on the other is not going to mean something different. What it does mean -

LYNEHAM: In that case why not call it a treaty?

PM: If you rouse undue expectations by a word, if people say that of itself is going to do something, I'm not sure that's wise. It's much more important that we get our sense of understanding right and then in that sense I'm not hung up about the word treaty, I'm not going to fight to the last ditch about that as such. I just have some sense that it's not the most appropriate word. But let's start thinking, and certainly I've had a discussion with Gerry Hand about this and I know he's starting to talk with others, let's talk about what's the best way of doing it. One suggestion for instance is that the concept could be embedded into legislation as part of the preamble to the legislation establishing the new Commission that we intend to establish. ←

LYNEHAM: The Commission for Aboriginal Affairs next year?

PM: It's suggested that that could be one way of getting it some legislative stature.

LYNEHAM: Is that as good as it being in the Constitution?

PM: A lot of things in the Constitution, just because they are there, don't mean a great deal. I think we're starting on completely the wrong approach. See what we're doing now, spending ten minutes talking about a word. It's just a wrong concept.

LYNEHAM: Have you any thoughts about the idea of some sort of ceremony or special occasion along with this?

PM: I haven't addressed my mind to that, but provided that what came out of the processes of consultation could be seen to be acceptable broadly - you're never going to have something acceptable to everyone - then the concept of some ceremony could be appropriate.

LYNEHAM: But you would see it, in the essence of it, a sense of white Australia making some recompense to black Australia?

PM: Recompense in one sense, yes, but again don't let's just get the word of recompense, of payment. That is obviously a part. We've got to fund programs. But I keep coming back to the issue. If we just think of it in terms of money then we've avoided the essence of the problem. In that sense we've put, let's say that the budget is now \$200 million. You say, alright and you double it and make it \$400 million and you've done your job. That's nonsense. I'm not saying that in the sense of avoiding the necessity for financial obligation. But in answer to the question you just asked, how do you change attitudes, it's not something you do overnight. But I think if you have Leaders of Government and I hope of Opposition, the political parties will accept the concept of obligation, accept the fact that as we go into 1988 we musn't think of it just as our 200 years of European settlement but in some sense of continuum, of grasping something new and different into and onto a more ancient history and civilisation. If we understand the interaction of obligations then how long that takes, how you do it, I don't know, but I think it's important that we start it before we get into 1988.

LYNEHAM: But what difference will the compact make to white Australia's big birthday party? Does Bob Hawke believe it will help us to celebrate with a clear conscience?

PM: I think we won't celebrate 1988 properly, I don't think we'll celebrate properly if we either ignore the previous 40,000 years or if we regard that pre-existing period as some sort of embarrassment. We should recognise honestly that in our 200 years many injustices have been done to the Aboriginal people, many injustices, and that no-one is guiltless about that. It crosses Party lines, it crosses State lines, it crosses the lines of decades. We've all got an accumulated responsibility to what's happened and if you accept responsibility, whether it's in regard to Aborigines or any area where you've got ... the first step in being able to live properly is to recognise your responsibilities. You've then got a much more likely chance that you're going to do something about that responsibility and in a sense be at peace yourself. That's human nature isn't it.

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