



PRIME MINISTER

THE PRIME MINISTER WITH JOHN LAWS ON 2UE, FEBRUARY 28, 1992

E & EO - PROOF ONLY

LAWS: Well, you promised us excitement and vitality when you moved into the top job. You've certainly given us excitement.

PM: Well, I just.. I mean it's really our friends in the Opposition who've picked up quite un.. on quite unremarkable remarks by me when I spoke both to and with the Queen last week. What I was saying was, simply, that as Britain moved more towards a Common Market in Europe, we were moving independently of Britain and Europe more towards the Asia/Pacific. And, of course, I was adding, and I had already said before I said that, that the Queen was part of this independence when she became Queen of Australia. So, it was quite unremarkable but I'm afraid our friends in the Opposition have this sort of propensity to sort of bow and scrape and that one can't even sort of express Australia's independence without it being a matter of some comment.

LAWS: Well, now the British people have reacted in what I consider a most defensive way to the comments that you've made. They've been critical of you: we have one gentleman who suggested that you've 'mauled' the Queen, we have another one suggesting that your wife was less than courteous. And, as I was just saying, we have a lot of British migrants in Australia who must shudder at the attitude of their countrymen in light of what happened. Now, while you were saying that we were moving towards independence, I have never heard you at any time want to rush the issue of this place becoming a Republic. And while you were saying what you were saying, the delightful Duchess of Kent was in Brisbane saying precisely the same thing. You were not aware of what she was saying because she was saying it about the same time. And she said that Australia's grown up, they can get by without the help of other people and, obviously, she said if I was an Australian, I would be thinking about becoming a Republic too. But, of course, we'll always be good friends, won't we. And she said it as nicely as that. Now, in essence that's what you were saying, wasn't it?

PM: Yes, except I did not.. no, I wasn't even saying that much. I was just simply making the point, John, that Australia

naturally.. I was remarking about the fact that she had been crowned 40 years earlier. It was a speech of congratulations on her coronation 40 years ago, and to say that in the 40 years so much had changed. That Britain had become a much more European country in terms of its outlook and its arrangements. Australia had become a more Asia Pacific country. That was all I was saying.

LAWS: That, of course, what you're saying is undeniably true, isn't it?

PM: And the Queen had herself recognized this change that 25 years after her coronation she adopted the royal style and title of Queen of Australia. She doesn't come here as Queen of Great Britain, she comes as Queen of Australia. And that was the point I made. But of course, Palace authorities, when questioned about this who were travelling with the Queen, thought it entirely unremarkable and couldn't quite understand what the kerfuffle was about.

LAWS: Well, why did John Hewson and John Howard, in particular, and Tim Fischer - not that it matters a great deal what he thinks - but they seem to consider it is remarkable.

PM: I know. Because, you see, it's all part of this point I made yesterday, the sort of torpor which Menzies put the place in, a sort of forelock-tugging business. I mean, if it was left to these people we'd still have knighthoods and we'd still have all these sorts of things. And we'd be still tied up to a country 12,000 miles away. It wasn't until 1986 that the Queen signed and gave royal ascent to the Australia Act.

LAWS: Yes, in fact, it's next Monday, will be the exact day that in 1986, 2nd March, 1986, that she did that.

PM: Yes, that was the thing which finally severed the links between Australia, the Constitutional links or the Parliamentary and Appeal links to their Privy Council and where the British Parliament could change the Australian Constitution by Act of the British Parliament. She severed that link as short a time ago as 1986. So, it took us all that long to actually cut the knot. But our friends in the Opposition who want to tell us that they're the people of the Nineties keep extolling the virtues of the 1950s. And now they're in there telling us what a great period of tranquility and progress it was in the 1950s and sort of saying 'isn't it a pity, really, we've got to change from all of that'.

LAWS: The Opposition will say, and have suggested that the whole thing, the outburst - and it was an outburst - because you were very firm, did you lose control?

PM: Oh, no, no. It was the very essence of control, I'm quite clear about what I wanted to say.

LAWS: You said it very loudly.

PM: I wanted to make it quite clear that Dr Hewson and Mr Howard would be better in the Constitutional Museum we're thinking of creating at the Old Parliament House as a sort of pair of Fifties relics. And not anybody who'll likely be leading Australia in the 1990s, given that they're quite happy to still doff the old hat, you know, tug the forelock to the British Establishment, which is what they're about.

LAWS: What you said, you said - with a great deal of strength - you did it say it with some venom and you obviously meant it. They are going to say it was a deliberate ploy to bury John Hewson's reply to your Economic Statement.

PM: Well, he was going to get his reply and that'll give us both the same amount of press attention, it was just to make the point. They say that they have concern for the position of the Monarchy and the Queen but they did their best to score from it on the day in question and score in a way which paints them back into the sort of fogey corner of the 1950s. And I mean it just is remarkable that two relatively young men, relatively young men, should be such 'old' young men. You know what I mean?

LAWS: Yes, I understand what you're saying.

PM: That they are trying to say, well 'we're the people from the Nineties' when, really, they're harking back to the Fifties or Sixties and isn't it a pity that we don't have all these arrangements just as they were between us and Britain and the Monarchy. I presume they'd be quite happy for the Queen to be still Queen of Great Britain and Australia and to be playing 'God save the Queen', instead of 'Advance Australia Fair'.

LAWS: In your reflective moments since yesterday, do you regret any of the things you've said?

PM: Oh, God, no. Oh no.

LAWS: You obviously don't mind upsetting the British.

PM: No, look, those British tabloids - I mean, God, they're the pits. I mean, the fact of the matter is Australia has every right, we have every entitlement for Australia to be aggressive about its own future, about its independent place in the world, about its culture and not to be seen by our leaders, Hewson and Howard, as some sort of cultural derivative of Britain. It's finished. It's over.

LAWS: Can we afford to alienate the British, and do you think we have or you have alienated the British?

PM: I'm speaking about a period past. I'm speaking about a period in the Fifties and Sixties which is past as far as I'm concerned with Britain. The people who operate Britain today have a very clear idea about all this. The British Government have a very clear idea about all this. The only people here that don't have a clear idea is the Leaders of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the National Party and former leaders like Mr Howard.

LAWS: So you don't regret anything that you said yesterday?

PM: Not a bit.

LAWS: Do you regret any of the comments you made about the Second World War?

PM: Oh, no. That was entirely true. I mean, here we were in the 1960s, as Menzies had us in this sort of time warp and torpor, as Britain was trying to break through and sign the Treaty of Rome and join the Common Market and leave all our agricultural exports behind, all the former markets of Australia and New Zealand - leave them behind, as we had to beg to get our own troops back to defend ourselves after the attacks by the Japanese. After all that period they were still plugging the forelock and bowing their knee.

LAWS: And you are aware, I imagine, that when we did try to get our troops back after the fall of Singapore, Churchill said that Australians who wanted to go back to the South Pacific were 'like rats deserting a sinking ship'.

PM: Well, I wasn't quite sure about the words, but the history of all this is quite clear and one would have thought when Menzies became Prime Minister there in '49, with that history behind us, and then by the Sixties when Britain was attempting to join the Common Market that then, even he would have said 'Australia is entitled to an independent position of its own and we'll have to trade its way in the world in its region. But instead of that, it waited till another Labor Prime Minister came along to change the national tempo - and that was Whitlam in 1973.

LAWS: Yeah. And prior to that, of course, Churchill had referred to John Curtin, who was a fine Prime Minister, as a 'wretched second rate man' and now Britain chooses to be critical of you as Australia's Leader because of comments that you have made about them. It's a little like the pot calling the kettle black, isn't it?

PM: Not the sensible people in Britain, not the sensible ones that I run into at international meetings or the people that run the major business institutions. It's not them - they understand it all, it's just these sort of 'throw-backs' that still inhabit some of the cracks and crevices of the British Establishment.

LAWS: Well, as I say, you promised us excitement and vitality, you certainly gave it to us yesterday.

PM: I tell you what I'll give you always, John. I'll always give you a pro-Australian view. And we're not going to be doffing our lid or tugging our forelock to anybody.

LAWS: Well said. Thanks for your time, good to talk to you.

PM: Thanks, John, good-bye.

LAWS: Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating.