



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,  
INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM, 7:30 REPORT, 4 JUNE 1992

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PL: Prime Minister, thanks for slowing down long enough to speak with one of the faded and jaded players.

PM: Well that's a pleasure. If that's how you want to describe yourself.

PL: Well that's how you described the established media outlets yesterday.

PM: Well I think they are. As I said a bit of fade on all of them.

PK: So you can't wait for those American quiz shows with all the custard pies and the plastic compares?

PM: I don't think you'll see those.

PL: You won't see them on Pay TV?

PM: No, I think what you'll see on Pay TV is blockbuster movies, the movies you see as first releases at the movie theatre, you'll be able to turn it on and watch it at home. That's what you'll see in the main.

PL: But apart from that though, do you think there's a whole lot of terrific TV programs out there that the established networks are, for some perverse reason, not showing people? Is all that product waiting to burst on the screen?

PM: Are you making a case against Pay TV?

PL: I'm just wondering if we need this sort of investment in this time in our nation's history. I mean, what about a bit of productive export production?

PM: I think information technology is going to be one of the important industries in Australia. And we have

the satellite, we have the technology available, and it's a matter of choice I think for Australians, I think if they want to lay out what is the equivalent of the price of a VCR they can beam into their home four channels of movies, sport, news etc.

PL: Done by somebody who's not been in the industry before?

PM: Well done by somebody who's been in the entertainment industry, not necessarily the television industry.

PL: And someone who is going to bid up a lot of money to get these first four channels off the satellite then twelve months from that, while they're still trying to get us to buy the dishes and sign up, everyone else gets in on the act and it's open slather.

PM: No, but the others have got one channel only, one channel not four.

PL: Yes, but one of the others could be Kerry Packer, or anyone.

PM: Kerry, even though I know he would regard himself as a radiating force, I don't believe he could beam four channels for himself when there's only one available. So he's got one channel even if he were to succeed. Whereas the first player is in the box seat. They get four channels.

PL: It's only in a year.

PM: More than that. Four channels on an existing technology as a new group removed from television, removed from newspapers, removed from telecommunications. As a new group, new players, diversity, which I think is what the public is looking for, they can go for their lives in signing households up to Pay TV. On transponders five and six, the single ones, that's where you're likely to see fibre optics, what's called interactive services where you can talk back to your bank or order your shopping and where you'll have block buster movies as well, news. But it's on one channel at this stage so they can't do it on one channel.

PL: But you've got all this rival competing technology coming. I mean we going to have aerial and black boxes everywhere you look aren't we?

PM: No, because I think the one black box we'll have will be common to them all. That is, that part of the legislative framework is that the black box you have in the house will be able to deal with any of the technology so you won't have to re-invest in it.

- PL: It's going to be a hell of a black box.
- PM: No, you know how minaturised things are these days, this is as clever as anything. So it means that Telecom, which has made a very large decision to wire up the Australian suburbs years ago with fibre optics as very few telecommunication carriers around the world have done, it could then profit from that decision and Australians could profit from their foresight in having interactive services which the satellite can't provide. So we get the best of all worlds - early, satellite - provided, quality Pay TV, blockbusters etc, and also the fibre optic option or a hybrid between the satellite and the cable.
- PL: And only 10 per cent of it by value Australian product.
- PM: That's right and I think that that will still take a fair bit of doing.
- PL: Now I know you have got this speedy, eat my dust style running this week, but ...
- PM: Well we've had it running for eight years really.
- PL: Yes, but its been metal on the floor since Sunday though hasn't it? Slightly speedier since Sunday?
- PM: What did you say? Metal on the floor?
- PL: Yes.
- PM: Yes.
- PL: But doesn't it all look like policy making on the run though? I mean this Pay TV thing was turned around in a couple of hours wasn't it?
- PM: I think the policy dexterity of the Government, the fact that you've got and you have in this Government, at least a good third to half that Caucus as technologically well informed about telecommunications, frankly as anyone in the bureaucracy, and people can sit down and discuss variants and options, in what is after all a limited discussion, and work their way through to the best option. I think we are able to do that and we did it with expedition.
- PL: Expedition is an understatement. I mean you say to Chris Schacht I dare you to take on this option and he says right-o, I mean its almost like a poker game isn't it.

- PM: This is a subject which has been around for donkey's years and if we were to allow the plodding rate we've had through the bureaucratic ...
- PL: But suddently you're talking about giving networks 45 per cent of the action. Yesterday they get none.
- PM: No, yesterday they get 100.
- PL: Oh well the tail end of the game.
- PM: That's right. No, you've got to understand. You see your not up to what it means either. Do you understand? I mean this policy is moving awfully quickly.
- PL: Has it moved again since yesterday has it?
- PM: The thing is we went from 45 per cent, we went upwards to infinity to 100, but not on the first four channels. On the first four ...
- PL: You went down to zero?
- PM: We went down to zero and that way we do get a new player. I mean this is a very strong case for a new player in the media so we are not dealing with the Newslimiteds, or the Consolidated Press or any of the other established players, or TCN 9 or 7 or any of these other people. It's basically a group that will be new to the media, as we've seen new people to radio come, as we've seen new people to regional television. It will make Australia more diverse in media and that's got to be good.
- PL: And there's all that talent out there is there that we've not spied before, that's just eluded us up until now, all that programming talent, that networking expertise.
- PM: We have been able to run a picture theatre business for fifty years in this country.
- PL: Yes, but that's nearly gone broke recently.
- PM: I don't know why some of them and the providers of television and movie products can't run a Pay TV station. It's basically a video shop tubed into your house.
- PL: We'll find out won't we? For the moment at least you appear to have left the Marshall Islands affair behind in your slip stream, but what if the Democrats decide after all to join the Coalition in demanding a Senate inquiry?
- PM: I think that would be an abuse of the powers of the Senate.

- PL: Why, they've got every right to do that?
- PM: No, I think this is a matter where obviously Senator Richardson, the person first involved in this, had made an unguarded connection with someone who was prepared to fight ruthlessly to prey upon his good instincts and goodwill. But there was never any notion of anything improper being there and for this to be dragged out for political reasons is not to be applauded.
- PL: But all those former associates of Mr Symons, the public servants, all giving evidence, I mean it could look a bit messy after a while.
- PM: But what former associates and which public servants. I mean who are Mr Symons contacts. Millions of Australians deal with the Commonwealth Government, why should they be the subject of inquiries other than the entirely appropriate ones which are done in the normal course of bureaucratic investigations.
- PL: Whatever you think though they can do it, can they not?
- PM: You see the Opposition, this can only happen with the support of the Liberal Party.
- PL: And they're red hot for it aren't they?
- PM: And in these two weeks when we've been recasting the airline system of Australia, remodelling the airline system and establishing for the first time pay television, and at the same time working on a rejuvenation of TAFE, technical and further education, Dr Hewson is there publishing pamphlets frightening older people about the prospects of them being burgled, but they won't be if they introduce a consumption tax.
- PL: Which might be good politics, elderly people are afraid of crime.
- PM: We've got to have a proper moral basis to our politics and if it gets down to it, this is the Liberal Party ...
- PL: You're saying he is immoral?
- PM: I think that style of argument of immoral, yes I do and when the Government is so obviously on the tangible issues in public life and while the Cabinet is sitting at night doing these things, they're sitting at night working out ad campaigns they've taken from the worst elements of American electioneering.

- PL: Well let's talk about another real issue, the Mabo decision in the High Court yesterday. You said you'd welcome it, why?
- PM: Because I think the whole notion of dispossession is put down by it.
- PL: Galarrwuy Yunupingu says the Government must either move quickly to negotiate a treaty now and implement comprehensive national land rights or face a barrage of litigation as a result of this decision.
- PM: I don't think that's right. I don't think it's wise for Aboriginal leaders to take that position.
- PL: There's a lot of crown land out there they could lay claim to.
- PM: Many have not, but the Court itself stressed that there wouldn't be a threat to private property as a result of the decision. It's just we're recognising the fact that even though the Aboriginals have not had our traditional association and ownership with the land, or have not worked the land as Europeans have worked the land, that did not entitle us to take the view they were dispossessed of the land. This is what this decision means.
- PL: Training in general and TAFE in particular, what's the latest stage of the game? I mean the Ministers are meeting tomorrow aren't they - the State and Federal Education Ministers?
- PM: The latest stage of the game is I would like very much for the States to accept the Commonwealth offer for the Commonwealth to take over TAFE in total.
- PL: Why do you think ...
- PM: Just understand it, funding and administration.
- PL: Why though? Why do you have to take it over to make it work?
- PM: Because it has not been developed as a national system, it is not adequately providing certainly not enough places for kids as they leave school, but more than that it is not adequately reflecting the training profile of the labour market as it should.
- PL: But what if the Premiers so no again?
- PM: Well let's see what they say.
- PL: But you've suggested if I read you right earlier today, that some of them might start missing out on some money?

- PM: No, we're saying that if in the event that they don't accept that offer, if we look at a joint funding model, the Commonwealth will provide growth to it providing we get commitments from the States. Obviously we will not be providing our funds, or certainly growth in our funds, to States which don't give the commitments.
- PL: So the ones that don't join in could miss out to some extent?
- PM: Again, we may maintain our recurrent funding but the growth factors, why should we support a system which is not growing as it should.
- PL: What do you think of the idea of a youth wage. Many people say that that's a good idea, do you agree?
- PM: We are now looking at the Carmichael Report and entry level training wages, and I think the whole notion of getting young people into work, into companies and at the same time have a training focus to it is important and there is a great possibility there of doing something good. It is therefore doubly important that the TAFE system provides that training place and on that basis I think the Carmichael recommendations can succeed and the, if you like, the trials we will now fund the models we're looking at within that, those pilot programmes will be I think important precursors to the development of such a system.
- PL: And you have talked of helping companies that are offering a fair bit of work based training to youngsters, haven't you?
- PM: Yes, a number of companies have expressed to me an interest in taking up many thousands of young people and we are seeing how that might be accommodated. And I am going to hold a meeting with a number of the significant companies.
- PL: Many thousands?
- PM: Many thousands, yes.
- PL: What ten thousand?
- PM: Well maybe not in any individual company, but certainly multiple thousands in individual companies. And certainly, probably many more than ten.
- PL: But if their giving these kids a genuine go and teaching them things on a trainee basis, you might, the Government might help them? Is that how it might work?

- PM: That's right, that's right. But again that is to be looked at and negotiated under the pilot programs.
- PL: The APPM dispute, Prime Minister, if the ACTU targets other operations of North Broken Hill Peko this dispute could go national very quickly.
- PM: Well I have said in the House and I will take the opportunity of saying here, this is the sort of industrial mayhem John Hewson would give us if he was Prime Minister. This is exactly the approach that the Coalition are following - say to the company don't deal with the union, only deal with the individual employees.
- PL: But how can we stop it? How and when is it going to end?
- PM: Well it can only end when the company comes to its senses. In this one you have got the Tasmanian Liberal Government, the Commonwealth Labor Government, the Industrial Relations Commission, the Commonwealth Minister for Industrial Relations, the Tasmanian Premier, all saying to the company don't sack people, take them back as per the agreement.
- PL: But they started sacking them today and your Industrial Relations Minister says the IRC doesn't have the power to force the companies hand. Meanwhile it threatens to go national, we have got a current account to worry about, I am sure you worry about it more then most people.
- PM: Well I think, and can we say the current account is now down to a very low level as we noticed two days ago ...
- PL: We don't want to start importing too much more paper though do we?
- PM: ... in the national accounts, no we don't. This is a matter of great disruption for the people of Burnie and I could only enjoin the company to take the advice of the Commonwealth, the Commission, and indeed, the Liberal Premier of Tasmania Mr Groom, in saying take the people back on and re-start the business in terms of the agreement made last week.
- PL: Bob Hawke would have stepped in about now wouldn't he?
- PM: Well maybe he might have, but the fact is this is exactly the kind of industrial relations policy that Dr Hewson has been enjoining us to adopt, a la New Zealand. See APPM said they will not deal with the union, they will only deal with the individual workers. Well, Australians should contemplate what



prospects they would have as individuals in dealing with a business or a company. Not as a group as a union, or as a collective group, but as an individual. And of course that is what the dispute is about, this is the policy Dr Hewson and Mr Howard are championing.

- PL: Why does the Reserve Bank want to get rid of Caroline Chisolm from the \$5 note? What have they got against her?
- PM: We are dancing around the topics.
- PL: Around the world for sixpence.
- PM: I don't know. I think that Caroline Chisolm was probably the most significant woman, in certainly our early history, and her effigy was on the five dollar note.
- PL: They want to put the Queen there do they not?
- PM: The Board has decided it should have an effigy of the Queen. Now I wrote to the Board when I was Treasurer to say that I disagreed with this and that I thought that Caroline Chisolm's effigy should be maintained, or retained. But the Board in its wisdom have decided otherwise, and in this respect the Board has a clear power given to it by the Parliament under the Reserve Bank Act.
- PL: So what the Prime Minister thinks is irrelevant, is it?
- PM: I think in this subject it may not be irrelevant, but the prerogative is that of the Board's.
- PL: So she could go, Caroline Chisolm could go?
- PM: I think that is a possibility but the Board, in its wisdom, may at the eleventh hour choose otherwise.
- PL: But the Queen is still going to be on the coins is she? No problem about that?
- PM: No, none whatsoever.
- PL: You were asked today in Parliament, when will we see your submission on changing the flag?
- PM: Well we have had so much on at the moment, airlines, there the ones you see, and there's all the other things that go through Cabinet, we have had such a program, and particularly with the Parliament sitting for the last two weeks. I will get round to bringing a submission about it.
- PL: A few weeks, or months or what?

- PM: I think probably a few weeks, maybe a month, where we can sensibly think about the flag and its future. That would be within the context of not changing the flag, whatever the Cabinet decides, and however it may approach a change in the design of the flag. Not actually changing the flag in its official designation without a plebiscite of some kind. Not a referendum because a referendum has States majority questions, what have you. But a plebiscite, a vote.
- PL: So something a bit better than what an opinion poll might say?
- PM: Well, I think that on this it is important that the public believe they have a right to say what they think about the flag. But I certainly take the view that we can't go on flying the flag, our flag, with the flag of another country in the corner.
- PL: Would you be unhappy with linking this plebiscite to the next federal election?
- PM: Well it depends what I take to Cabinet, and we we'll see.
- PL: My last topic Prime Minister. What we discovered yesterday was that you, Dr Hewson and Peter Reith have all reported late on the affairs of your private companies. Not a very shining example by the nation's leaders to the corporate sector, surely?
- PM: Well I wasn't upbraiding Dr Hewson.
- PL: No, but nevertheless you were all in the wrong as it turned out.
- PM: But the interesting thing is while I have been beavering away on these various policies in the last two weeks, Dr Hewson, the fellow who said he would bring some decent politics to Australia, is down at the companies office digging out my company return to find out whether the information return was lodged on time, and had the gall to go on about it and have Mr Peacock ask me about it, having failed himself for three consecutive years to lodge his return on time, and Mr Reith the same for two consecutive years.
- PL: And both have conceded their embarrassment, and there is lots of egg dripping off face. But nevertheless, you were all in the wrong and are you happy to cop it sweet and pay a penalty if that's what happens?

- PM: There is a late lodgement fee and a penalty, and that has already been paid in my case. And obviously they will get theirs in on time now too.
- PL: You know if you keep on making investments though, like half a million dollars in a piggery, you are going to have to stop taunting John Hewson about being wealthy though, aren't you?
- PM: On that's not the value of one of his Ferraris. I mean, he has got more in toys, in his garage, in one toy, than I have invested in a simple primary industry.
- PL: It's a lot of money though half a million.
- PM: Do you think it is today, in terms of investments?
- PL: Well I tell you what, if you would like to leave it somewhere in a paper bag I'll pick it up.
- PM: The thing is Dr Hewson has a vast collection of assets, which if you turn up the pecuniary interests of the Liberal front bench you will find a plethora of companies and trusts, reflecting of course the wealth which these people have traditionally had.
- PL: The truth is you are all pretty wealthy these days aren't you?
- PM: I don't think that is true. I think you will find most members of the Government have one house and probably a mortgage. That's certainly my position, one house and a mortgage, and an interest in a farm.
- PL: What do you know about pigs? What is so good about pigs?
- PM: I never found how anyone was so interested when Mr Anthony had a similar interest, no one ever questioned him about his interest in a piggery.
- PL: There seems to be a political link here. I mean, Rodger Douglas in New Zealand went into pigs.
- PM: Yes they are very much the vogue. I have got to say that.
- PL: What's so good about them?
- PM: I don't know, I don't know. But Howard asked me yesterday about it, I said I wouldn't take you there because I would then have to find you again, and that would be a problem.
- PL: Thanks for your time and I hope we haven't interrupted for too long this feverish pitch or policy change.

*big farm*