



## PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM, 7.30 REPORT  
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**PL:** Prime Minister welcome again to the program.

**PM:** Thank you Paul, it's good to be here.

**PL:** Another 43, 800 Australians lost their jobs in September. Do you think they believe the recession ended a long time ago?

**PM:** Well the point about my making that point was to signal to Australia that the negative growth in the economy was over and that we can now work and look forward to, I hope, a long recovery.

**PL:** But it sounds callous, too smart by half, uncaring.

**PM:** I wore the opprobrium for the technical act of the economy slipping into recession, that was two quarters of negative growth.

**PL:** You wouldn't wear that until you had no choice at all, would you?

**PM:** And for daring to note that we are now long, technically out of recession, in the lack of maturity in the debate, to make the point, and to tell the public that Australia can look forward to a low inflationary recovery and that the act of coming out of that negative growth signals a start, I hope, of a long recovery for Australia.

- PL: But there is a queue of community leaders out there over the last 24 hours giving you the message that it doesn't feel like it is over out there.
- PM: And of course it is not, Paul, that is why the Government introduced the One Nation statement, that's why we have expanded fiscal policy in the Budget, that's why we had the youth summit to produce the outcomes to ameliorate the effects of unemployment and to see the economy grow. The effects are not over, obviously, but the economy is growing again, in the last year we have grown by 1.6 per cent. By contrast, Britain for instance, has declined, contracted by 1.6 per cent. It is important I think that the Australian public know that the economy is growing again, notwithstanding the fact we are a long way away from ameliorating the problems of unemployment which we have to continually attend to, but the best way to attend to it is growth.
- PL: And while we have this considerable human suffering still across the community, we have this intense and growing bitterness between you and John Hewson, don't we? I mean it is getting worse and worse everyday.
- PM: Well you haven't seen the Labor Party run ads against him as he has me, which is seeking to personalise the debate, designed as some sort of spoof on people with disabilities. I mean this is the sort of stuff he traffics in, and today I had the temerity to get up and say that the Government has consulted all the way since 1983 in the Economic Summit, the Tax Summit of 1985, in the One Nation statement, in the Youth Summit recently, and listened to criticism and taken it. I had the temerity to say that when his representatives, he and his representatives, hopped in to the Catholic Bishop and two Priests for daring to say a tax on food was inequitable, and the general way in which he has responded negatively to every interest group, whether it be BHP or the Reserve Bank, or the Japanese, or the car makers, or the renters, or the nurses, now the Catholic Church, and then having hopped into them in the most savage way, both by letter and by argument, then evoke an encyclical, the Pope, to support Fightback.
- PL: But the Opposition has released the Catholic Church's reply to Peter Reith talking about their deep and sincere appreciation for the meeting, saying at the end of the letter that they hope to maintain continuing the good relationship that exists between the Coalition parties and this Commission, the Catholic Social Welfare Commission.
- PM: They came around saying they were attacked, this is what they said to them, this is Senator Alston, 'It is understandable that those untrained in the laws of economics should at times feel uncomfortable about debating them, the crass attempt at moral intimidation is surely no substitute for a practical poverty alleviation dialectic', it goes on this way, Christians who propose schemes for poverty relief have a commensurate duty to know the laws of economics and do their homework, rather than childishly dismiss as unfair.

- PL: And that's not just robust politics?
- PM: No, no. This Government has pursued policies of inclusion, we always listen to interests groups, in the Tax Summit of 1985 they were all arraigned around me as Treasurer.
- PL: But there are 10,000 kids sleeping in the streets of Sydney, that's not inclusion Mr Keating.
- PM: There was no savage response by the Government like this to any interest group, let alone a group of priests who have come to talk about the interests of the poor and the low paid and maybe the regressive impact of taxes on the essentials of life.
- PL: But how do the niceties of who writes what to whom in a letter compare with that enormous suffering that Dr Hewson alluded to in Parliament today? There are kids sleeping in the streets, that's not including anybody in anything.
- PM: And who's done more about the homeless policy than this Government? No other government, in terms of the policies now about youth, to get all those young people back into work. I had Dr Hewson telling me I don't see anybody, I don't listen to anybody - I go around this country all the time.
- PL: But you only talk to businessmen and people with suits on don't you?
- PM: He's trying to tell me, as a life long member of the Labor Party which has its heart and soul in social policy, he's trying to tell me that I don't get around. He gets around on the yacht on Sydney Harbour, up at the Panorama 500, they're the sort of occasions. My occasions are with working people and people with businesses who are trying to employ people.
- PL: But there does seem to be a lot of political point scoring now, it's just going to get worse and worse as we go to the election.
- PM: The Opposition has tried to focus on me and yet what we see, Dr Hewson's now presiding over the most spiteful Opposition party we've ever seen. Every single interest group is named and attacked. That is, whether they are nurses or teachers or renters or whoever they might be and as well as that they're taking their names down. He has told everybody there's a list of the Fightback supporters and antagonists. This is the sort of low morality to our politics which the Opposition seems now to be trafficking in; taking the names of the dissenters - to what? In government? Have retribution against them? Is this the way our leadership in our nation should be? I believe that you take the criticism on the chin and you respond and change your policy accordingly. They believe what you do is you hop into people and particularly a couple of Catholic priests locked away in a room, hop in to them with all the political toughs and at the same time go and evoke the name of the Pope in support of your policy.

- PL: But doesn't an Opposition leader have a responsibility to oppose the Government and to offer new alternatives and to be critical?
- PM: Yes, but not to slap down any legitimate interest group which has problems with his policies which is what his stock and trade is.
- PL: You don't like him do you? This really is personal this stuff now isn't it?
- PM: I couldn't care less about him in an individual sense. But the fact of the matter is almost everyday in the Senate they're attacking me, almost every day he has his henchmen over in the Senate hopping about.
- PL: About your pig farm?
- PM: Everyday for the last two and a half months that's been on, he never leaves me alone personally, he's got his ads on television against me personally.
- PL: While we're on this subject, how come the book value of this pig farm increased ten times in six ...
- PM: Don't get up to his stunts Paul.
- PL: Did it or didn't it? There's a lot of people curious about how this all works.
- PM: The thing is you've got to know how to read a set of company accounts. The fact of the matter is I've been in Parliament for twenty three years and to have an Opposition leader getting stoolies up in the Senate, hopping into me every day while going out as though he's pristine pure with all the understated comment at doorstops, the understated voice, where in fact what we see in the Parliament is vicious behaviour by him and his henchmen. Whether it's against me or the Catholic church or the representatives or the nurses or the teachers whoever it might be. All I'm saying is that this country is in a recovery, we have got a lot of our problems; just this very day we've got Cathay Pacific announcing that it will centre its computer operations, one of the largest airlines in south-east Asia, centre them in Sydney; Air New Zealand saying they will put 10,000 jobs into Australia flying out of Brisbane. Is this the country on a slippery slope to nowhere? Is this the country which has now doubled its exports to GDP, which is now integrating with Indonesia and Japan on a slippery slope to nowhere? Is this the country we should berate? I say no and I'm not going to see it disparaged in this way and the efforts of Australians disparaged in this way.
- PL: Given the innocence of this business venture of yours, why don't you prove it by opening the books then?
- PM: What are you suggesting now? Don't tell me you're picking up this muck Paul.

**PL:** I'm suggesting that there have been questions asked in the Parliament ...

**PM:** I made a simple investment in a piggery, an income producing business which employs Australians. Dr Hewson's spent twice that much on a weekender which he says he's visited twice, he's spent twice that much on a weekender. In other words I've gone and practiced what I've preached, invest in income producing, value adding exporting industries, I haven't gone out and bought a building, an office block, a weekender, I've gone and done the things I've preached for a decade; that is back Australians in in doing what they can do best, that's selling it to the world, innovative products, good things, valuable things, wholesome things.

**PL:** Thanks for your time.

**PM:** Good, thanks.

**END**