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## **PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
DOORSTOP, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, 27 FEBRUARY 1994**

### **E&OE PROOF ONLY**

PM: Last Thursday evening and Friday while I was at the Council of Australian Governments meeting trying to open up competitive breezes for the first time ever in Australia's great government trading enterprises and in unincorporated business and see further reforms on water and electricity, the federal Opposition frontbench were briefing the press about how they have given up the business of policies in politics and they are going to take up the business of dirt and smear in our public life. They ranked the Kelly sports matter, which is a dispute about policy delivery as their only success in recent years and in an article in The Australian they say that if one notes the success the Coalition has had in recent years in Victoria, in South Australia, in Western Australia and the Labor government's success in Queensland it was basically out of issues connected with smears, corruption and dirt. In fact they go on to say that "it has not been policy that has won and lost office in Australia in recent times, but stench" and go on to say these things " that the shift in the Coalition will be most evident next week when the focus of its attack in the House of Representatives shifts from pork barrel to pork politics. They particularly want to through mud at Paul Keating. The accusations as far as we can gather will not be of corruption by Keating, the aim is simpler - to ignite the politics of envy". They go on to say that "for the first time in almost a decade the Coalition is planning quite coldly to play the man in a desperate attempt to shake the Labor Party out of office federally". It goes on to say "this week the final stage of the Coalition's rejection of John Hewson's authority over it, he's stated preference for playing the game and not the man has been brutally overturned by the party's hard heads and leadership pretenders." It says " the parliamentary geriatrics - Andrew Peacock, Ian Sinclair, John Howard - this is the group who believe they can now start to destroy Keating and his government with a new attack. This is why the prize of a win in the new dirty politics will be much more important than anything to do with odour from a piggery. For Hewson this turn of events is a new disaster".

These people can I say, Ian Sinclair, none of you could remember one major contribution from him in public life over twenty odd years and you can pretty well ditto that for both Peacock and Howard though they led a Coalition in terms of policy change we saw from them, basically, next to nothing.

The issue is this, that the Coalition, and at the same time as all this Malcolm Fraser has "... Malcolm Fraser on the Party in despair ...". So this is a party without policies, who have had five election losses in a row, they say that I helped to defeat their leaders - Peacock, Howard, Peacock and now Hewson - and they'll seek to tear me down, but I beat them on politics and policies and not on their personal life. In an attempt now to break the unwritten rule of Australian politics and that is, that parties win on policies and policies and party leaders and ministers are attacked on policies and policies, they want to change the basis of our national politics away from these things while great policy changes are afoot to go back to personal attacks.

John Hewson knows what having your personal life exposed means and he knows that neither I nor any member of the Labor party took up one element of that two years ago. Not one bit. It was left where it ought to be left - as his personal affairs.

I have had now twenty months of questioning in the Senate, of claims and accusations against me at the hands of the Liberal party through Senator Baume, Boswell and others, all of which have been completely fallacious and as you know have gone absolutely nowhere because my personal investments and my life have nothing to do with my administration of the Commonwealth and yet despite this how does this compare with John Hewson acknowledging the fact that as a shadow minister he took consultancies from a financial institution, that John Howard to this day brazenly says that he is taking a consultancy from Clayton Utz - the major legal firm - and the question is: Where does now Dr Hewson stand on this tactic? Is it a fact that he has been as Ms Tingle says in her piece "... rolled by the Coalition." The final stage of the Coalition's rejection of John Hewson's authority of it, his stated preference, that the week and the tactics was a new disaster for him, where does he stand on this? Does he believe that low personal gutter politics ought to be substituted for real policy? Is that where the Liberal party is after five election defeats? Are the has-beens of the Liberal party - Howard, Peacock and Sinclair - going to come back and wreck it again when it has a chance to rebuild itself? And I want the Australian public to know who fired, if they want to fire these shots, who fired the first shot? Who fired the first shot in breaking the unwritten rule of Australian public life - that it is policies that matter not the personal affairs and lives of MPs or Ministers - and it will not be the ALP that fires this first shot because we believe there is enough differentiation out there in policy without this sort of nonsense.

For my part, if the Coalition want to move along this tactic that's fine. This is a very strongly written piece, it has been sourced obviously from the Opposition frontbench, we have heard rumours of this now floating around the Press Gallery and the business community for weeks and let's get it into the open. Let's say that if the Liberal party after five election defeats wants to now turn its back from policy, turn away from the game and hop onto the man playing the man and not the ball of rejecting John Hewson's view that that's the way public life in Australia should operate, that gives the Liberal party a chance to do as Malcolm Fraser suggests - find a new basis for itself in Australian public life. Let it make clear that it's the one who has decided on this path and let it make clear that we, and no matter what they think, whatever political success they might think they've had in trying to belittle Mrs Kelly with the sports program administration, that is in essence a policy matter over sport. This is an entirely different matter and I'm just giving the Liberal party a chance to make clear what its policy stance is and to let the country know that in this day and age with great change afoot as we saw on Friday, vast co-operations now between the Commonwealth and the states; a recovery on our hands; the government now attending to long term unemployment; that the best the Coalition can do is run around making fallacious claims about nothing which in my case has nothing whatsoever to do with my ministerial duties.

J: Mr Keating, last time Ian McLachlan raised the question of your piggery in Parliament, you also raised questions about his residence and his pecuniary interest - what's that if not playing the man?

PM: That was in response, but I have never raised in a frontal, personal way over twenty five years in public life the personal affairs of any of these people. I have never made any reference to Mr McLachlan's assets before he made a reference to mine. Last year I had Dr Hewson and Mr Reith who put Mr Peacock up to a question about the lateness of a return of a company I had with the Australian Securities Commission and I in response said - yes, and your two companies are late by two and three months. I have only referred to their matters in response to them attacking me. I have never taken this matter on, this sort of stuff on. What we have here is the old guard. This is the crowd who not only did nothing in the 1960s and 1970s, but essentially robbed the Liberal party of its victories in the 1980s. Coming back, I mean, when you see them on the front bench, for me it is like a trip down the time tunnel to twenty years ago, to see this group who took the country and the Liberal party and the Coalition nowhere surrounded by a group of backbenchers who just don't know what they are doing. And the few in the Coalition who have some idea of policy, not being able to get a toe hold - whether that's Hewson or Wooldridge or who ever.

- J: If they pursue this strategy, are you going to hit back?
- PM: We'll see what they will do, but if there is to be any middle class moralising going on in the editorials of this country and there is plenty of it, let them contemplate this kind of change to our public life and let them understand that what these old guard renegade group are up to is not the politics and the policies of the new Australia, but basically the old smear rubbish that they think brought down a series of Coalition state governments. What brought down a series of Coalition state governments and Labor governments was basically financial mismanagement of financial institutions. In the case of the National Party in Queensland, proved corruption. In Western Australia, the Western Australian Inc matter, but these went to Ministers' management of their portfolios. This is entirely a different matter.
- J: What's it going to mean for the week in Parliament Prime Minister. Are we going to see a repeat of last Thursday?
- PM: I think you have got to say to Dr Hewson - does he support these sorts of tactics? Is this background briefing so strongly given to The Australian an indication of the frontbench policies; was he rolled last week; was the tactics of taking on censure motions and uproar in Parliament all part of that sort of thing or does he believe as he's always said he has, that politics is about playing the issues and not the man. For my party, I have been around here a long time and I can look after myself, that you don't need an assurance. But it is up to the Liberal Party to say whether the useless, old guard is going to take charge again of its parliamentary politics.
- J: Do you accept no blame for what happened last Thursday?
- PM: Look, I'm not here to debate last Thursday. Last Thursday was a different matter around different issues.
- J: Are you saying you have no option but to respond in kind if those are the tactics that are embarked on?
- PM: I'm not saying anything like that. Let me just tell you this - that for twenty months, not two months, I've had Senator Baume, Boswell, O'Chee and others up making a set of charges. All it came to nothing. One, that I changed the foreign investment policies in the 'One Nation' Statement to advantage myself - completely fallacious and was proven to be so. Second, that I connived with AQIS to bring in pigs from Denmark - totally debunked by the AQIS people before a Senate committee. The third was that I introduced accelerated depreciation policies in the 'One Nation' package to avail myself of them - which I didn't do. Every single claim has fallen to the ground because it is just basically dirt and rubbish.

- J: How do you see the attack on Mrs Kelly fitting in with these new tactics of the Opposition. What is your view on Mrs Kelly's position now?
- PM: Whatever I think about the strength of Mrs Kelly's position in terms of the administration of the sports program, which is a discretionary program for grants to minor amateur sporting organisations, whatever claims are made about this, it is a pursuit of the administration of a federal program. I am just trying to make the point again. This is an entirely different matter to the personal life of ministers.
- J: So you still stand by Mrs Kelly as you have so far?
- PM: I said yesterday, I don't think I can add to what I said yesterday, that the Opposition are all about process and in this respect so too is the government and we established a House of Representatives committee to look at all of the aspects which none of the rest of us on the front bench are able to do in such a comprehensive way, not being able to give it that sort of time and attention. That report is coming down this week and, obviously, I will be waiting to read that report.
- J: You said you would see Mrs Kelly tomorrow, why is that?
- PM: I didn't say that at all.
- J: I thought you said that yesterday.
- PM: I mean I see colleague ministers virtually everyday of the week.
- J: There's a report today saying that she's going to be asked to resign...
- PM: Well, I'm not responding to reports, I mean that's about all I can say. She deserves at least...I mean all these people that believe in process. There has been a House of Representatives committee, and it is going to report, so I think decency demands that we wait till the report. We'll see what they say.
- J: You're talking about the Opposition's Parliamentary tactics. Stephen Martin said today he wanted to push for an independent speaker, and John Howard said that perhaps it's time to consider the British system...
- PM: Look, all this stuff about unctuous indignation by John Howard about speakers and the roles of speakers. I remember the times here when the Opposition would suspend question time to censure people like Jim Cairns, run the debate through the evening, make people sit all through the night and walk out in broad daylight, suspend the next day's question time and keep going. I mean don't you believe even with Coalition speakers it's been anything other than thus on the part of a Coalition with a majority to kick the hell out of the then Opposition

whenever it had a chance. Today politics is nothing like it was. It's a relatively, I'm afraid for the rest of you, more genteel matter than what it was 20 years ago.

J: Any comment on another matter - what has happened in the Middle East?

PM: I am appalled by what has happened there. I can only hope that this doesn't derail what is now beyond a peace process to a reconciliation in the Middle East, but I will be getting a report on that as soon as possible. Thank you.

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