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PRIME MINISTER

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

PM: Thank you, Paul.

PL: John Howard says that you didn't stare him down on the Land Fund Bill - indeed, he would welcome a double dissolution tomorrow.

PM: I put the weights right on him. He had a chance....we have been saying "when will the real John Howard stand up?". It has taken only four weeks to show he is the same person he was in the 80s. He had the opportunity to say "I'm going to get rid of this Downer nonsense about the Aboriginal Land Fund, I'll clean it out, I'll support the Government's amendments - the Government's Bill - and we will have a principled Land Fund for Aboriginal people". Instead of that, he adopted all the Downer nonsense - all the Downer amendments - brought it to the House, and I said "no - we will have a principled Bill, and if we don't, we will have the option of presenting it after a double dissolution". And he went immediately to water.

PL: You could call his bluff pretty easily - Yarralumla is just down the road.

PM: I called his bluff, and as a result, this is going to be a great day for Aboriginal people. They will now have the twin parts: that is, the two bits - the Native Title Legislation for those who still have a traditional association with the land, and for those dispossessed of the land, they will have the opportunity to buy land through a cogent, coherent Aboriginal Land Fund.

- PL: And he says if and when he becomes the Prime Minister, he will change it, and he will have the mandate to do so.
- PM: In other words, *(he will say)* "I won't give black people land - I will do everything I can in the Senate to stop them, and even though this Prime Minister has bailed me up for the moment, if I get back into office, I will undo all of these things, and deny them this opportunity". You see, Howard never learns - he never wipes the slate clean, he is the same person as he has always been. This is the point - he is out of his age.
- PL: But if he goes to an election saying clearly to voters that he wants to make this change, and if he were to win, then he will have such a mandate, won't he?
- PM: To what? Strip the most dispossessed of Australians of the land the Commonwealth Government - Labor Government - has given them? I mean, what an ambition.
- PL: Well he says that one of the changes he wants is to make sure that the most dispossessed get the land.
- PM: And he knows, and I know, where that sort of putrid cynicism...as if we could have courts saying "are you more dispossessed than another person?", so land is given away - an Aboriginal person - then challenges that other Aboriginal person's right in the courts, and we have a debate in the courts about whether one is more dispossessed than the other. It's appalling.
- PL: He says such judgements are made all the time in public life.
- PM: They are not. He had a chance to cut a new cloth - John Howard - that was to come clean and say 'I want a better relationship with Aboriginal Australia, we can't have an inclusive society without the first Australians being part of it'. But no, he has picked up the old right-wing Tory reactionary agenda which Mr Downer was powerless to stop and he is powerless to stop and has supported it. It came to the House and the Government said 'no, no we won't have it'.
- PL: What of the Coalition's desire to enable individuals to have an entitlement to land and if they so wish be able to sell it. He says by not doing so, the Government is being patronising and ignoring the needs of urban Aborigines.
- PM: That is another slick argument from a slick person without principle. An Aboriginal person has the same right that you and I have to buy a piece of land this very day. But, what this Bill is about is the Commonwealth Government, the Parliament, conferring on an Aboriginal person and communities land which is paid for by the public

for the express purpose of giving them that right to land. You can't talk about Aboriginal health or Aboriginal welfare without talking about land, because when Aboriginal people are living a traditional lifestyle on their land their morale improves, their health improves, their whole style of life improves and to be saying that we are denying an individual a rightness, they want it in this Bill. One of their other amendments was to say to an Aboriginal individual person you can sell the land to someone else and keep the money. Well, the Parliament is conferring on Aboriginal communities these funds. The very point of it is for community land.

PL: On another matter Prime Minister, Mr Howard says push polling is un-Australian and should not be used here, do you accept his statement?

PM: I have been saying that and he was condoning or was seen to condone it by not pulling Andrew Robb up. I mean, this is the most sinister development I have seen in 20 odd years in public life.

PL: But, he has now publicly rejected it.

PM: Well, I saw today someone asked him 'Does Mr Robb still have your confidence?' 'Yes'. 'Are you opposed to push polling?' 'Well, I'm opposed to anything that I think the Australian people regard as undesirable.' In other words, I won't get out there in front, I'll hang around behind and see what the reaction is to this. This is the worst elements of right-wing America. Insidiously saying to 400 people in a supposed poll, trafficking defamations which are completely untrue to try to spoil the candidate's reputation and chances. I mean, he should have just completely wiped his hands of it the moment it arose, but the cynicism, again, the real John Howard did stand up. He hasn't changed ... that Mr 18% at the end of 1989 and we saw him today. He had his worst day in Parliament today, his worst week in Parliament since he has become Leader and this honeymoon is ending very rapidly.

PL: Prime Minister, thank you for your time.

PM: Thank you, Paul.

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