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## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
LAUNCH OF SUE ROBINSON'S CAMPAIGN, ALP CANDIDATE FOR  
CANBERRA, ERINDALE LEISURE CENTRE, CANBERRA  
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It is a pleasure for me to be here with Sue Robinson, opening this campaign, because we are at - at the most - about a year away from the election. And let me assure you, I am going to make this the hardest year of John Howard's life - I can tell you that. And that shell of an organisation they call the Liberal Party, we are going to put more stresses and strains on that creaky old thing, on that remnant of Australia's failed upper class, that organisation that thought it had its dead hand on Australia - and did for so long - they will need more than a bit of political engineering when we put some stresses and strains on that thing. They will need every technique they have got - push polling, the lot - to try and save their miserable political hides. Because, here we are - John Howard - he's here as the Liberal Party's third choice. John Hewson took them to a poll, lost, and Howard contested an election against him, and they said "no - we don't want you" - because it was only in 1989 that they defeated him for Peacock, and then they had another chance, of course, when John Hewson basically lost his way, and they knew they had to change, and so they had to think long and hard about their future. And they said "no - we're not going back to the past, we can't go back to Howard, he's a man of the past, his views are of the past, his whole mindset is of another age, we've got to make a new break and go for a new team - the Dream Team. Downer and Costello." But they made a conscious decision to reject him. Of course, Downer came to nothing, and they went around looking around, and they have given us John Howard because he is now the only thing they have left. And we're supposed to say "oh here he is - reborn and remade". They have got to be joking.

And I said in the Parliament a week or so ago, if you look at Australia now - an open, competitive, confident, country, much more of an inclusive society than ever, and much more confident I think about itself - I mean, we are coming to terms with our identity, coming to terms with our indigenes, finding a place in Asia, making the leap out there - and you have got to say to

yourself what possible use could Australia have at this time for a man who describes himself as the most conservative leader the conservative parties have ever had. Is this the time in our history - as we come to the next millennium - to in the closing years of this century - to say "well what we need is somebody who, in the 1970s, was comfortable with the policies in the 1950s"? And he was. It's not mis-representing John Howard to say that when he was a minister between 1977 and 1983, he was looking for his guide to the Menzies years and the Menzies Cabinets, and the policies, and the views. And I notice some commentator said last week - which I thought was a terribly pithy line - he said "when John Howard talks about one Australia, he means one Wollstonecraft". And he is right - the Edwardian houses, and the picket fences, and the big off-street alignments, and the old trees, it's an older version of old and central Canberra. That's his view of the world.

And I see him up yesterday - it said it all against him - he said "I'm against anything in politics that's regarded as unacceptable by the Australian community". In other words, "you tell me what you don't want, and that's what I'll give you. You lead and I'll follow". It's a bit like the republic - he said "look, don't ask me about the republic - ask me in 5 years time and I'll tell you what I think about it. If I think the Australian people believe there should be a change, then I will maybe modify my position" - it is really code for "if that Paul Keating will get out there and lead them and convince them, I might follow. If he will lead, I will follow". It's just another version of the same thing - "I'm against anything in politics that is regarded as unacceptable". So, "if push polling is unacceptable - even though I tried it on - if it's unacceptable, I will give it away. If the community don't believe there ought to be a racial basis in the selection of migrants, I'll give that up. If they think our industrial relations policy is too hot, I'll give that away, too". In other words, "I'll dove-tail in - I won't lead, I will follow".

Now, yesterday was an instructive day about Australian politics. We are in the Labor Party because we believe in things, and we get things done. We have a touch with the society, I mean Sue described herself correctly as somebody who likes people, who talks to people, is of the community, talks to the community - she is, as a Labor person, is and should be. We are a Party that is in touch with the community. This is not true of the Coalition. The Coalition has got no community sense. John Hewson walked out of that Parliament the other day - is he going to go away with any sense of sodality with the Liberal Party? Any sense of longevity of his sort-of comradeship with them? Well of course not. They just drift into the thing like a sort of a minor business organisation, and they drift out of it again. In other words, there is only one real political party in this country, and it is the Australian Labor Party. That's right - the other thing is an organisation that picks up the non-Labor party, the non-Labor forces. That's how they always used to describe themselves - the non-Labor party. Always in the negative - they know what they are against, not sure what they are for. Or, as Arthur Calwell said "the Labor Party is a party of conviction, the others are parties of convenience".

And, here they are, now out of office for a very long period of time, no sense of binding, no sense of cohesion, no touch with the community, and definitely

not a national party. Isn't it ironic, here's John Howard wandering around Canberra in the shopping centre trying to address himself as a national leader, but he leads a party which is not a national party. It is a party of six state complexions. And when they are always talking - and every one of them does the same - a new deal for the States means a bad deal for the nation. That's the flip side of that coin - a new deal for the States is just code for saying a bad deal for the nation - for the federation. And then we get all this stuff - federation was a set of arrangements to protect the States. It was no such thing - federation was an act of creation of the nation. That's what it was. And this notion that we then fracture a nation of 18 million - who have been given the great good fortune of inheriting a continent - of giving us this unique place in the world, as one nation in a continent, to ourselves - they said "oh no - we are not going to take that advantage - we will slice it up like a big sponge cake - you know, cut it into 6 pieces, and they will all have their taxing powers, and they will all run their provincial governments" - why? Because they know the national character of the country, and the national parliament, moves the common weal forward - moves the society on - and that's what they are against. They are against these progressive changes - that's why they describe themselves as conservatives, and John Howard an arch-conservative. So, it is ironic that here they are in the national capital - the seat of the nation - campaigning for an important constituency, when their policy is basically to try and fracture the place, and hand back powers to the States, and remove that sense of nation, which we have all fought for, and which we now have. And of course Canberra...if you look at the difference with their icon Menzies - who never gave taxing powers back to the States and thought that one of his achievements was the building of Canberra - this mob actually want to smash Canberra. And if people think now they are running through a sort of a down-property cycle, well they have seen nothing yet if the Liberals got hold of the national Parliament - they would flatten this place like a flap-jack. By the time they hop into the public service, and push people onto individual wage contracts, and then cut the numbers, and cut the Government spending - while this is a more complex economy than it used to be, and it has got now a private sector of some substance, give the public sector a very large hit and the ricochet through this community - I think - would be very obvious.

And just don't ask John Howard what he might do, look at what he did. Between 1977 and 1983, the only building in this city under construction was Parliament House. The construction sector was absolutely dead - dormant. There was no building, the housing sector had dried up, the business community was shrivelling away and moving back to Sydney and Melbourne - this is what they did between 1977 and 1983. Now, this Government is a growth government - we believe in growth. And that growth has, in a very full measure in the nation, attached itself to the ACT. And over these years - 1983 til now - there has been a lot of growth in the ACT, a lot of employment growth, and a lot of prosperity - and that is what this Government will continue to provide. We are sort of going through a reality by-pass at the moment - we have got 5.5% GDP growth, and 2.5% inflation. But you have these little pumped up Tories running around saying "oh, the mess in the economy" - a mess? 5.5% growth and 2.5% inflation - they have never seen

numbers like that in their history. 4.5% productivity growth, 500,000 jobs since the last election, 4% employment growth a year - we are the fastest growing country in terms of employment in the Western world. In terms of growth and inflation, we are on the top of the league table of the 27 member states of the OECD. But, all this doom-saying they go around with - John Hewson was telling us at the end of the last election campaign that we were going into a double-dip recession, then a depression. And John Howard endorsed his remarks about the recession.

And here we are now growing as we have been so strongly, and the challenge for us is to make this growth sustainable - and to keep inflation in its place, after having put it there after so much effort - and we all know what that's about - it's about wages, it's about having a relationship with the trade unions, it's about our Accord, it's about our whole co-operative model - these are the things we can do and these are things which are now happening. But the Current Account Deficit is high for the moment - it is absolutely laden with capital goods. We are a country of 18 million - we don't produce capital goods, we don't produce mainframe computers, we don't produce the big pneumatic or digitally operated machine tools which come from countries like the United States and Germany, so whenever we start adding to that capital stock after a few years of paucity of investment, of course this will reflect in the Current Account. But are we going to build our capacity and keep on growing, or do we lay dead in the water? So they are saying "oh hang on, let's chop that off", and we say "all right, chop it off - but you chop off all the equipment that lets you fight the battle". And it's just worth reminding people - as I did in the House yesterday - of a few things: 10 years ago we were exporting 14% of our product, this year it is 22%, which puts us right in the middle of the OECD league in proportion of exports to GDP. Our capacity to service our debt has fallen - that is, the proportion of our exports which we devote to paying the interest and outgoings on external liabilities - was 21% of our exports, and is now 11%. In fact the numbers were out today - they confirm it again at 11%. In other words, that growth in exports and our capacity to service our debt and pay our way - like anyone's capacity to service a mortgage - you know, you say "well, I have got a mortgage of \$150,000 - that's pretty big". But if you earn \$150,000 a year, then you are fine. So it all depends on your income. And our income has risen. In other words, if you are in a problem, you fight your way out of it - you invest and work your way out of it. But they want to close it down - "the growth is too much", they say. Their charge against us in the election was "not enough growth and not enough employment", so the Government earnestly and honestly said "OK, that will be our priority - growth and employment". We were re-hired by the country to get the place growing, and to get employment going again, and we have done that. They said, "oh no, that wasn't the trick at all - we didn't really mean that, what we really meant was that we need really a pool of unemployment around to keep downward pressure on wages, and we don't want to see the Current Account moving up". This is Howard - this is a person who presided over the industrial archaeology of the 1970s, when the factories closed, when that other great economic genius John Stone was saying "you can't have a competitive manufacturing sector sitting beside an internationally competitive primary export sector. If you want minerals and

agriculture, you can't have manufacturing". Now this was the creed - this was around - he signed Howard up to this.

So, here we are, with a burgeoning primary export sector, and a burgeoning manufacturing sector - manufacturing exports have tripled in the last 10 years. The fastest growing component of our exports are elaborately transformed goods, and we now have a very large internationally traded sector in services which didn't exist when John Howard was the Treasurer. It has all happened because of us. And yet here we are, with 5.5% growth and 2.5% inflation, and he's saying "No good. No good", and in Europe you say "what is the average growth rate in the European Union?" "1.75%, and maybe 2.25% next year." And you say "is that right?" "Oh yeah". "What's your employment growth rate like?" "0.75% - 1% - what's Australia's?" "4%". They have got to be joking. Now, I know all new leaders get a free ride for a while, but faced up to a bit of fact and argument - other than rhetoric - does anybody think there is a better substitute than these sorts of policies? Of closing the place down to a low growth economy again - because a low growth economy simply means those who are doing well stay doing well, and those not doing so well do less well. And that sort of unfairness is what we don't need.

And I'll tell you this about Howard - he stands for nothing. He was a weak Treasurer, and he was a weak Leader, and he has no policies. And we saw it yesterday with the Aboriginal Land Fund. They said...he had a chance - he was out putting the spin all around the galleries, on every radio station, doing that sort of Jiminy Cricket number, bouncing up all over the place - "yabba yabba yabba yabba yabba, yabba yabba yabba yabba" everywhere. As if the glib, clever line will...he reckons he can say "yes" but mean "no" and someone reading the transcript can't quite work out what he means...he was trained in the John Carrick school of cynical politics. This is where push polling came from, and all those other sorts of things - in his days, he had the big red arrows from China, and they were coming to get us in the sampans, and remember all that? And he was Howard's mentor. And this is the sort of cynicism that you get from this guy - he had a chance to say to the Senate and to his party - "look, you selected me because you have got nobody else, and these are my terms - I want to make a new start with Aboriginal Australia, I don't believe we can be an inclusive society without that happening. So I am out of all these amendments that my predecessor was going to consider in the Senate", trying to suggest - for instance - that we can make judgements about the degrees of dispossession, or try to invest individuals with the land and then give them the right to sell it, so that they actually leech away any fabric of an inheritance in land. All these mangy tricks that they wanted to write into the Bill. He could have said 'look, I am a lucky fellow, I have been given a second chance in public life simply by dint of hanging around long enough, and at least I am going to do the right thing and start clean.' And what does he do? He sends the Bill back from the Senate full of all of these compromising provisions. And some people said to us, 'well, look, maybe you better take the Bill as it is, at least it is a Land Fund Bill.' To which we said 'well, do the Aboriginals really ... I mean we have got the Native Title Act and Mabo, but it is really available to people who still have a traditional

association with the land. For those dispossessed, the Land Fund was a central ingredient to justice in land for Aboriginal people. So, if we let this through it is just another shabby compromise, so we said 'no, no we won't'. So we put the second Bill, the new Bill back into the House on Tuesday, our original Bill with some of the procedural amendments we were able to accept from the Senate rejecting all of the tawdry ones and said to Howard 'knock this over and we have got a double dissolution trigger and we will propose at an election that this issue be resolved by a joint sitting of both Houses there after, giving the Labor Party the option of a double dissolution. He went straight to water. He goes around saying 'oh, I'll have an election any time'. Pigs he will. And, all this puffery in the polls he knows it is just like a little helium balloon, you stick a pin in it and away it goes. He knows in the hard tack of an election that we are going to be right on his tail, so he didn't want to be fighting any elections now.

So, he dropped off. But, instead of dropping off saying 'well, look, I will let the Government's Bill through', trying to suggest he did turn over a new leaf with Aboriginal Australia, what did he say 'I'll let it through, but if we become the Government we will put all the bad amendments back into it'. Because they don't want to give black people land. That is the long and short of it. You can take all the science out of this and in the end what sits underneath it is a deeply seated prejudice against them.

So, don't doubt this Government's strength or its principles or its resolve or its sense of purpose or its capacity because we will, as we have, take on all of these big block problems in Australia. Be it Australian competitiveness, be it opening Australia up, be it the rights and prerogatives of Aboriginal people, be it the status of women, you name it, we are the ones that have been doing it and those opposed to us still stand for the same old tripe, the same old conservative nonsense that they have always stood for.

I said in Caucus the other day, think of some issues in the last 15 years. On the environment Howard said when he was Leader that the states would be left to decide the future of forests and wilderness areas. On Aborigines, you can't think of one positive thing he has ever said or done for them. On the republic he is the Colonel Blimp of the Liberal Party, the staunch monarchist. On Asia his only position was that he thought too many Asians were coming to Australia and that there would be a social backlash against them. On South Africa he corrected me the other day by saying 'no, it is not true that Nelson Mandela would still be in goal if it were left to my view. I called for his release in 1986'. That is 25 years after he was goaled. He opposed the ANC and he opposed the sanctions. I mean, this guy is from another age and here they have this obscurantist being proposed as the leader that can take this modern, confident country of ours into the next century. Well, of course, it would be a terrible shame for Australia and an unjust thing to do to the place.

I want to make a couple of extra points about the ACT and the labour market. I made this point yesterday about their industrial relations policies. A week ago Peter Reith said we now believe in an evolutionary policy. We believe in gradualism and incrementalism. That's so, the average person says 'oh, well,

they have changed their tune a bit. Before they had individual wage contracts and they were going to slot us all, now they are just going to move on something and they believe in minimums.' But, when John Hewson resigned the other day and the speech that John Howard made following his departure he said 'well, there has been great changes in Australia' said Howard and he gave the Government credit for them - in opening up the financial markets, in opening up the product markets with lower tariffs, he said 'but, the great reform yet to be done is in the labour market'. So, the week earlier Reith is saying 'don't worry, it is incrementalism and gradualism.' Howard is saying 'we have got the big block buster policy change for you.' Now, it is one or the other and we all know what it is. It is the big one.

The thing you have got to know about the labour market is that it is not like a pool, it is more like a river. There are people changing their jobs every year. Last year 1.7 million Australians changed their jobs or entered the workforce out of eight million. When they do, they lose all of the award protections, they lose overtime, penalty rates, and it means that a lot of people in society are going to lose \$100-\$150 a week on low and middle incomes by losing those capacities and they will take either the contract or they won't be employed. So, if you look at that policy after four or five years, most Australians would be on contracts and they would be out of any enterprise bargaining framework or any set of award minimum protections which have got, of course, adjustments there for cost of living or protection for cost of living and the maintenance of these other things like overtime et cetera.

Now, interestingly, in the ACT, 15 per cent of the labour force - about 25 to 30,000 people - change their jobs each year or people join the labour market from school. So, give that over the life of one Parliament, you are talking about 75,000-90,000 people. Now, they will have the guts cut away from their working conditions and that will mean, of course, that if you start putting pressure on the whole industrial relations system it starts to degrade in that respect. Couple that with, of course, the fact that they are going to cut government spending and cut aggregate employment and you can see how quickly that would change the society here. Yet, they are running around saying to what is a very large public service town 'look, basically our policy is to cut you to ribbons and to put you on contracts'. And people are supposed to say 'oh, thanks for that, we will give you a vote, thanks a million.'

We saw Kennett do it with the Victorian public service and we would see Reith and Howard do the same.

So, the thing is, I think, that in looking at this election ... I mean, here we are standing on the very platform that we said we would in 1993 at the election - growth with employment, with productivity, with the country growing. And, we have done all the things we have said. We said we would do justice to the Mabo decision, we have done it with the Native Title legislation, yesterday we did it with the Land Fund legislation.

They are out there now on the environment trying to represent themselves as being in some way, I mean, they have opposed ... as I said the Gordon below

Franklin would have been flooded had it been left to John Howard and the Coalition. All the great changes in the environment we have made they have opposed and McLachlan came out as their environment spokesman saying he is opposed to clear felling of trees in this country and immediately Fischer came out and said we won't have a bar of that policy, in fact that will not be our policy, he said, very firmly.

So, they have no credentials and, I think, it is very important for people in this country to know that the only party that has the interest, the commitment and the strength to protect the environment is the Australian Labor Party - there is no other. Now, we have seen the two Greens from Western Australia up to their chicanery on the Land Fund Bill as they were in the Native Title legislation. They are not going to be doing anything for the environment and Bob Brown and the Wilderness Society, there are some good people in the Wilderness Society, but Bob Brown is now running for a seat in the Senate because he thinks he can play corner politics with the continuing low quotas that the Senate is offering under the proportional representation system.

So, people have got to put a big discount through the things he says. He try's to misrepresent my position and he knows that without my support the Daintree reservation which Graham Richardson put together wouldn't be there. In the last year, just in the last year, this Government has put aside for ever, for this country, Shoalwater Bay - one of the most attractive areas on the Australian east coast, one of the most attractive areas in the world - Jervis Bay in New South Wales, by spending \$30 million locating the armaments depot to Victoria so that we could leave that pristine. And, we put \$25 million in the Budget to buy back the hole in the heart of the Daintree that disgraceful subdivision Bjelke Petersen let through which is sitting there now in the forest, but all cut up into quarter acre lots, to buy that back. No credit did we get from that - none - and we have got this year's quota of logs and we are now seeking to establish the coupes and the quality in the stands and we have had a deluge of attacks on us by people who, frankly, should know better and who want to reach the same position we want to reach and that is to see that we are preserving our best stands of trees, our pristine forests, but at the same time having a sustainable forest products industry.

These are things governments have to do. A lot of noisy people on the outside think they can do other things, but governments have to do serious things and we can do it. So, our environmental credentials won't be found wanting and I don't think ... can you imagine any year when the Liberal's put away something like Shoalwater Bay and Jervis Bay or protected Daintree, just in one year. This Government has got a long and, I think, proud environmental record and one of the things that we have never really had adequate credit for is the saving of Antarctica. Let me just say one little thing because Bob Brown runs around saying 'I saved the Gordon below Franklin'. Well, I was principally involved in securing the protection of Antarctica. Let me just tell you a little story.

In 1988 I went to see Michel Rocard, who had become a friend of mine over the years and he had just become Prime Minister of France and I called on



him six weeks after he became Prime Minister and we discussed the Matignon Accords in New Caledonia. At the end of it he said President Mitterand and I want to do something next year of an international flavour to celebrate the bicentenary of the French Revolution. Not something simply French, but something international. He talked about an environmental protection agency and I said to him 'look, it is a good idea, but we will be both old men before we ever see it, you know, getting a world environmental protection agency together.' He said 'well, as a fraternal party you might think about what we might do'. I said 'well, I have got an idea right now, but I must tell you that I am in a minority of two in my Cabinet about it', and my sole supporter was Peter Cook and he said 'what's that?' I said 'it is not to sign the Minerals Convention in Antarctica'. So, he asked his officials when they were going to sign this and they were to sign it in seven days from the time of our conversation. This came from the OPEC oil price rises when they decided to put a Minerals Convention into Antarctica to go drilling for oil, but since the oil pressure had gone, the foreign affairs departments of the world kept grinding away with the Minerals Convention. And, I said 'they will make a mess of Antarctica and were you to join us we have a reasonable chance of stopping it and put Antarctica away for 50 years as a wilderness park'. Now, I said 'I would have to convince Bob (Hawke) about this, but if you give him a suitably flattering letter, I'm sure I could get him into it'. He did and then it was the Bob and Michel show from there on, but we gradually worked on the Japanese and the Americans and we saved Antarctica from being ripped to pieces.

So, when Bob Brown says he saved the Gordon below Franklin, we say 'yes, and we saved a continent'. Don't worry, we will have the political amalgam back together, all the people in this country that have got some ticker. I noticed at the Australian Creative Fellowship Awards recently, John Olson said 'look, there is only two kinds of people - lovers and others', and we all know what to think of the others don't we'. Now, the lovers are the people that have got an interest in this country, that have got good will towards their fellows, a sense of compassion, a sense of inclusion, a sense of commitment. That is where we are. We are on the lovers side of Australian politics and we know where the others are.

So, let's kick off a long hard year for John Howard with this campaign opening today. And, say to Sue Robinson that with courage and decency and style she has washed off all this dreadful unAustralian behaviour with push polling and that the worst instincts of the Liberal party won't get the better of her. And, they won't get the better of the people of the seat of Canberra either and let them know that if the Liberals get up that this won't be the city that it is now and it won't be the country that it is now and that there can be no substitute to continuing the great reformation of Australia - its economy, its society, its place in the world. And, while the going gets a bit hard on occasions and it gets a bit complex we must, we owe it to ourself to press on and we don't want to go back down the time tunnel to reactionary politics and one Australia and one Wollstonecraft and one Menzies and one dead hand, we want to keep this progressive change coming through.

I am happy to begin this fight for this election with Sue Robinson and a victory here in Canberra because the thing we must know in this country, you get social progress by victories, like we did in the Land Fund Bill yesterday. You get social progress by wins, you don't get it by unseemly compromises. So, let's not compromise here in the ACT and lets have an unambiguous victory for the lovers in Australian politics and we will leave the others to their miserable brand of politics and their miserable approach to this country.

Best wishes to you, Sue, and the campaign.

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