



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, BERLEI FACTORY, RYDALMERE, SYDNEY, 8 AUGUST 1995**

E&OE PROOF COPY

PM: I wanted to make the contrast for you today, here is the Labor Party launching the largest private savings initiative the country has ever had - national superannuation - something John Howard should have done in the 1970s when he received the Hancock Report and didn't, as always, indecisive as always. Here we are today launching this report and here he is with his party rent by divisions, where in Western Australia we are seeing a 1950 style Labor split. This is not simply an argument in the Western Australian Liberal Party, it is a 1950 style split. It is a major division inside the one state of the National/Liberal parties. John Howard would have you believe that he has acted to deal with the problem. In fact he was over at the State Conference and you might know that Dr Honey and the Crichton-Browne Court forces won by four or five votes out of 500. So, if John Howard had had any courage in standing to support the people who have supported him, the Rochers and the Filings of this world, he could have been completely decisive in the result over a week ago. He didn't. Not only did he not do that, he actually spoke about the successes of the Western Australia Liberal Party. In other words, he actually supported the incumbents. As a consequence of all this, of course, he then scurried back to Sydney, he turned up next to me at Miss Saigon in a dinner suit at 7:30pm and he said he was three minutes late. I thought more like 30 years late, but nevertheless we'll let it pass. And I said, you must have had Clark Kent standing behind a curtain to get you out of there that quickly. I mean, he scurried away from the argument so quickly and he has, as always, showed no leadership, no strength, always the vacillator and that is what has happened on this occasion. Here is Mr Rocher now resigned, coming after Mr Filing. You have got Mr Cameron's position still in doubt and yet Noel Crichton-Browne will be as powerful in the WA Liberal Party today as he was a week ago because whether he attends caucus meetings of the Liberal Party in Canberra matters nought if he is still the power broker in the Western Australian Liberal Party.

In other words, as one journalist in Canberra said this week, Mr Howard's story that he has dealt with Mr Crichton-Browne was the great whopper of the week and, of course, whopper of the week it was.

So, what we have got here is John Howard showing us two things. The first is that he is weak and always indecisive. Secondly, that his party is not a national party. It is a collection of state parties and while he and Mr Staley and others talk about a national executive power, the fact is they don't have a national party and it never functions like a national party. The West Australian Liberal Party is introspective, reactionary and vicious and there is no way without leadership is it going to change. John Howard has not provided that leadership and what a pathetic situation he is in with Mr Rocher saying I think I can support John Howard and he is a supporter of his, I think I can support John Howard better as an independent than as a Liberal party member.

So, again, I give you the point, here is the Labor Party today launching proudly one of the great national schemes of our time in superannuation. Where is he? Scurrying around in a party rent by divisions, a complexion of state parties where he won't even support the people who have supported him for the leadership and have supported him in the federal parliamentary Labor Party. I am quite happy to take questions about it.

J: Doesn't the Labor Party have its own problems in the West. Carmen Lawrence is a political liability and Graeme Campbell is an embarrassment?

PM: All parties have problems from time to time. In Western Australian the Liberal Party has a civil war to use Mr Withers words - a civil war. In the Liberal Party in Western Australia is a major split, it is of the variety the Labor Party used to have in the 1950s. This is a major fractious division that has occurred over there and that is why again, what it shows I say of Mr Howard, he'll never make a decision, he always vacillates, he is always weak. What this shows again, remember how he was slipping and sliding on the republic, he didn't know what to say for three or four days. I mean, you name it, he is always slipping and sliding. When it comes to even supporting his own supporters, his own party, he can't say a word in their favour, yet they lose by four votes in 500.

J: Has Carmen Lawrence become a political liability?

PM: There is a Royal Commission in Western Australia which will run its course and she will have her chance to put her views in the right form.

J: Are you talking tactics with Carmen Lawrence at the moment?

PM: No, I haven't any need to.

- J: Does she have your support Prime Minister?
- PM: She has always had my support.
- J: At what point will Dr Lawrence have a need to put the Party ahead of her own vindication?
- PM: Well, she has got rights, obviously. They are not to be put asunder by people wishing to truncate her rights to put her views at this Commission.
- J: Did she offer to resign last week?
- PM: She didn't and I don't reveal the course of private conversations I have with Carmen Lawrence. She has always put the Party ahead of her of her own position, always.
- J: Would you support a ban on the French group bidding for the NSW helicopter tender?
- PM: Well, when the Prime Minister of Australia has got to worry about the NSW helicopter tender we are really at a low ebb.
- J: Would you accept a resignation if she offers?
- PM: I'm not discussing it any further, I gave you an answer.
- J: Prime Minister, is it time for Theo Theophanous to pull out of the race for Batman?
- PM: Martin Ferguson is the President of the ACTU and you know the history of this in Australia. We have always encouraged the ACTU President if they wish to move to the federal parliamentary Labor Party for that to happen. It happened, of course, with Bob Hawke my predecessor. It happened with Simon Crean. Simon Crean wants to make it happen again. There will be a lot of support in the Labor Party for him and over time this matter will be resolved.
- J: ... New Zealand decided to take France to the International Court - a move Australia supports?
- PM: We have looked at that, but we doubt very much whether there is a possibility of reopening the old case, because by the time any new case was started the tests would be over. So again, these things have got to be real rather than cosmetic. We have examined the options and we don't think that the Court, as much as we would like to use the Court, really presents an option for us.
- J: Has the Australian Government done enough to pressure France?

PM: I think you can see the reaction from the French Government. The withdrawal of their Ambassador the other day, the general mutterings from Paris indicates, I think, that we have had an impact and, I think, we are having an impact in Western Europe as well and I think a lot of opinion in Germany for instance is in part coming from the campaign which Australia has been leading.

ends