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# PRIME MINISTER

19 August 1996

## TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP DOORSTOP - PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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### PRIME MINISTER:

Ladies and gentlemen, I want on behalf of the Government, and I'm sure the people of Australia to condemn utterly the violence that occurred today - the attack on Parliament House. I want to make it very clear to those who were involved in that violence and to the Australian people, that never under any circumstances will my Government buckle to threats of physical violence or behaviour of that kind.

If anybody imagines that behaviour of that kind is going to get the Howard Government to change its mind on anything, then those people are completely mistaken. We will always listen to reason. We will always listen to sensible argument. We will always talk to people who have a point of view to express.

But what occurred here today was un-Australian, it was ugly, it endangered the physical well-being of men and women in the Australian Federal Police, Parliament House staff and the protective services, who were forced in pursuit of their duties to subject themselves to insults, physical attack, and all sorts of abuse.

It is a very sad and unhappy day in the life of the Australian parliament and those responsible for today's demonstration should feel utterly ashamed of themselves, but more importantly they should take a message from me on behalf of the Government and I know the people of Australia, that violence will get nowhere in Australia.

Lawful assembly to put a point of view, a lawfully held demonstration, a robust demonstration is part and parcel of the Australian tradition and no politician can ever object to that, or ever object to what is said at it. But what occurred this afternoon was utterly beyond that, and I want also - before I take your questions - I want also to express to you the thanks that I have already personally conveyed to all members of the Australian Federal Police, the Parliament House staff and the Protective Services who acted as they did in a very fine and professional way to protect Parliament House and I've personally thanked all of them, and through the vehicle of this news conference I express to the Australian people, my thanks also to the tremendous work of the police and the Parliament House staff.

**JOURNALIST:**

Where do you believe the responsibility does lie, Prime Minister?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Those people who were responsible for the violence I can't make a judgment. I didn't organise it. It was organised by the ACTU. You can go to them. Obviously it got out of hand and those people who were responsible for it getting out of hand, I hope are properly brought to account by those who can bring influence to bear upon them. And I would hope incidentally, that Mr Beazley, the Leader of the Opposition will join me unreservedly in condemning what occurred today, that he will utterly dissociate himself from what occurred today, and that he will speak in equally strong terms of the unacceptability of physical violence as a means of getting across a political point of view.

**JOURNALIST:**

Do you believe the ACTU leadership should also disassociate themselves from it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look, I won't say.... the ACTU leadership should certainly dissociate itself, yes, absolutely. I have no quarrel with the lawful assembly of people who put a hostile point of view to my political values. I have no argument with that at all. But I have every argument with the sort of behaviour this afternoon and I have to say again to remind all of you and to remind the ACTU and everybody who took part in that demonstration this afternoon, that five months ago the Australian people voted for the Workplace Relations Bill. It hasn't been enacted by the Parliament. It is before the Parliament in a form, ....(inaudible)... with what we put to the Australian people in March. We are yet to bring down our first Budget, it will be a fair budget although a strong one and in those circumstances what the ACTU is saying is politically unsustainable, but what happened this afternoon at the entrance to Parliament House was morally unacceptable.

**JOURNALIST:**

... storm Parliament House could in fact be charged and if so will you be taking action to ensure that they are charged?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, anybody who breaks the law should be charged.

**JOURNALIST:**

Will you be taking action?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look, I don't charge people, that is left to the police. The ordinary law will run its ordinary course. I won't be seeking any special application of that law, nor will I be encouraging any dispensation of that law.

**JOURNALIST:**

Are you surprised by the level of anger and violence that was here today, or do you see that as a direct reflection of some elements of the community's feeling about the signs they've seen of your budget, or is it something else?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I don't believe for a moment that those people who smashed their way into Parliament House in any way represent the feelings of mainstream Australia. I think what they did this afternoon will be greeted with revulsion by mainstream Australia.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister you've said the Australian people voted in the Industrial Relations reforms. They didn't vote for a rise in the Medicare levy though did they? Why are you doing that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Tomorrow night is Budget night. Good afternoon.