

18 March 1997



**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
NIGHTLINE WITH PAUL LYNEHAM**

E & OE

LYNEHAM:

Prime Minister welcome to *Nightline*.

PRIME MINISTER:

Pleasure.

LYNEHAM:

Do you think the situation in PNG has eased now?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's eased. And I'm pleased that the authority of the elected government has been inserted and it obviously still remains quite a tense situation but I welcome the fact that the authority of a duly elected democratic government has been established.

LYNEHAM:

Do you expect Sir Julius Chan to persist with his plan to use the mercenaries now or is that less tenable?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that's really a matter for him to judge. I mean, all I can do, respecting the sovereignty of Papua New Guinea, is to make very clear that if he does there will be significant consequences to the relationship between Australia and his country.

LYNEHAM:

Are you talking about our \$320 million of aid?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm not going to go into the detail of it. I've told him...

LYNEHAM:

That's your biggest stick, isn't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

I've told him what our response will be - he's in no doubt. And I repeated that position in Parliament today and I repeat it on your programme tonight.

LYNEHAM:

Along with that stick there's also the carrot, isn't there? Does that involve perhaps more military assistance...(inaudible)...peace talks in Bougainville?

PRIME MINISTER:

What we have done is to put some appropriate alternatives on the table to the use of the mercenaries. I had four-and-a-half hours talks with him in Sydney the weekend before last and he has a very clear view of what we are willing to do and what we intend to do if certain circumstances lapse.

LYNEHAM:

On the 'work for the dole' scheme, legislation goes to the Parliament tomorrow.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

LYNEHAM:

Will the Government resist attempts to amend it to try to put more training into it to make it more a pathway to real jobs?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we have other programmes dealing with that. This is a 'work for the dole' programme and we won't want to amend it in a way that robs it of its efficacy. We'll have a look at any amendments that are put up but...

LYNEHAM:

So how will you benchmark the success or failure of this scheme?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that's the whole purpose of the pilots - to establish benchmarks, see how these schemes work...

LYNEHAM:

Well what will you be looking for?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we'll be looking for community response and if the early signs are any guide it's fantastic. It's talked about very widely, particularly in regional Australia...

LYNEHAM:

Jeff Kennett's been talking about it too.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes he has, I noticed that. Our members are very keen about it and, most importantly, the public sees it as working out the principle of mutual obligation in our community. We have an obligation to look after people who can't get a job. They, in return, have an obligation to respond to any reasonable request to work out the value of the unemployment benefit.

LYNEHAM:

Well Jeff Kennett says that it's crazy to exclude work in industries. He says that's where youngsters will pick up the sort of experience that will help them get into work.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes but you have training schemes for that. And you can't ask people to work five days a week for the dole because that would amount to paying them two or three dollars an hour.

LYNEHAM:

The first report on Senator Colston's travel claims was not tabled as promised in the Senate today. Is he getting special treatment from the Government?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

LYNEHAM:

Well he requests and then receives extra time to explain, then he'll put a published...

PRIME MINISTER:

Well hang on a moment. He made that request to the President of the Senate. I've got no control over the President of the Senate.

LYNEHAM:

There's nothing going on behind the scenes?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh look, break it down. Look, he's not getting any special treatment. If you want to ask about the circumstances of that extension of time, go and ask the President of the Senate.

LYNEHAM:

From your long Parliamentary career, have you ever heard anyone before claiming travel allowance for 265 days in one year?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes I have actually.

LYNEHAM:

Oh, Paul Keating?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, well, well look, I don't carry around a recollection. But I have actually, I do recall some claims being made for numbers of days that were equal to or in excess of that, yes.

LYNEHAM:

And what about doing committee work on an Easter Sunday?

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't, I don't have access...

LYNEHAM:

These documents were put out today. These are Senators' travel claims over the last five years and I would have thought that Howard's battlers would look at this and say this is like a license to print money, this is offensive.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I would have thought Howard's battlers, if people have rorted the system, are entitled to be angry. That applies to anybody who's rorted the system. Now I haven't gone through those. I've had a few other things on my plate today...

LYNEHAM:

There's not much of a plot but it's very interesting reading.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it may be interesting reading. But Paul my position is very simple, that there are privileges attached to being a member of Parliament and I have no time for any member of Parliament on either side who abuses privileges. Where they are abused people deserve everything they get. Equally, everybody's entitled to a fair hearing and/or presumption of innocence.

LYNEHAM:

So let the cards fall where they may?

PRIME MINISTER:

Indeed, where they may, no matter who is involved.

LYNEHAM:

Prime Minister thanks for your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

Pleasure.