



**PRIME MINISTER**

30 April 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN**

E&OE.....

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister thanks for your time. In the bear pit of politics, is Pauline Hanson untouchable?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, nobody's untouchable in politics.

**MARTIN:**

Well, when are you going to take the gloves off?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I take gloves off to real opponents. I think in the long run people will see Pauline Hanson as one of those transitory phenomena. They come along with glib criticism, they don't offer any solutions, they look appealing for a while, because when a nation is going through a lot of change and peoples' lives are going through a lot of change it is always easy to sort of draw on discontent, but when people see that the people drawing on the discontent don't have any real answers, they lose interest.

**MARTIN:**

But John you told me last September last year, you called her a one day wonder. She hasn't disappeared, in fact it appears she is getting stronger.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I believe that by the time of the next election, which is what really counts in political terms, people will see that like other people in the past they've looked appealing to a section of the population for a short period of time, and she will have disappeared. But look there isn't really an alternative policy, an alternative solution, a helpful idea that has come from her over the last few months. Now, if there were I'd be very willing to talk about it. Now...

**MARTIN:**

It's been suggested that what she's done is taken all that ground that you took from Paul Keating on jobs and Aborigines and immigration?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I don't think that for a moment. We've seen this before. I remember when Don Chipp's party got 19 - 20% in an opinion poll in the House of Representatives. Joh Bjelke-Petersen once got 25%.

**MARTIN:**

But you could well say he lost you the election in 1987, and he also lost you the leadership.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

He was 25... the point I'm making Ray is that it is very easy for a populist without power to score points off the misery and discontent of sections of the community without offering any tangible solutions.

**MARTIN:**

Could you lose, could the Coalition, could the National Party specifically lose Queensland because of Pauline Hanson?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, the National Party can only lose in Queensland if it is on the nose as a Queensland Government. Now, my responsibility is to deal with day to day realities such as trying to get certainty into the land system of this country through tackling the problems of Wik.

**MARTIN:**

Where is your proposal at....where are these 10 points?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, they've been exhaustively discussed with Aboriginal leaders and Premiers. I'm talking to my backbench committee tomorrow and after I've discussed it with my backbench committee I will make it publicly available.

**MARTIN:**

Are the 10 points now fixed or are they malleable...?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well the principles of them are fixed. I mean I'm not going to get hung up on a word here or there but it is a comprehensive integrated plan, it will work. It has the ...

**MARTIN:**

But the Aborigines don't say that. Mr Borbidge doesn't say that.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, the Aboriginal leaders have to understand that there is no way that the position that was delivered by the High Court in the Wik Case can be fully maintained, because that decision was way beyond the original understanding...

**MARTIN:**

Aboriginal leaders and ATSIC are saying to you today as you know that your scheme will divide the nation.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I think the sort of language that was used yesterday when some Aboriginal leaders called for a boycott on primary produce, when they called for disruption to the Olympic Games, when they called for overseas people to criticise Australia, that was divisive. And can I say directly to the Aboriginal leaders of Australia, you do your cause immense damage and disservice by those kind of calls because those kinds of calls are against Australia's national interest. And at the end of the day what Australians want is a solution that will bind this country together. I'm the bloke who's trying to do that. I'm the person who from day one has tried to get an honest, fair agreement. This country...

**MARTIN:**

But why is it taking you so long?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Because it is...can I tell you Ray, this is about the hardest thing I've had in politics. You have very high expectations from the Aboriginal community; you have an entrenched position from a section on the other side, and trying to get them to me in the middle in a way that's fair to both sides is horrendously difficult.

**MARTIN:**

All right. BHP, a boardroom betrayal of the working class Mr Carr called it. Would you agree what they did yesterday was that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I'm very sorry on a number of counts. Firstly, I'm very sorry for the people of Newcastle. I hope to go to that city soon.

**MARTIN:**

Do they have any obligation to workers who've been loyal and productive?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes they do. They have an obligation to consider their future when they take commercial decisions. They also have an obligation to have a long lead time when retrenchments are involved. And I will go to Newcastle myself...

**MARTIN:**

Is that enough - I mean, I mean to be fair on this - is that enough for you to go and say you're sorry?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well look, on its own it is at this stage all I can do. Ray, it is the antithesis of good government for me, a day after the announcement, without having been there, without having listened to people, without being properly advised to sort of off the top of my head make a whole string of promises. I can't deliver miracles. I can't reverse BHP's decision. Bob Carr says it's not the fault of the Federal Government.

**MARTIN:**

Can I come back to where we started John and the suggestion that today in the press that, in fact, Newcastle, because of what's happened there, is a perfect spot for a Hanson candidate to come along. People are so disillusioned with jobs and with unemployment and other things. Does that trouble you?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well what troubles me is that people lose their jobs. At the end of the day that's far more important to me than anything else, far more important.

**MARTIN:**

Well thank you for talking to me as always.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Thank you.