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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
INTERVIEW - BBC TELEVISION, CENTRAL LONDON**

**E&OE**.....

**JOURNALIST:**

John Howard has been described as an old fashioned monarchist. He sees no reason to break his country's historic links with Britain. His predecessor, Paul Keating's view of the monarchy was well documented. He caused outrage when he put his arm around the Queen on a State visit and he once said, whilst on a visit to Balmoral, he would like to replace the Queen with an Australian head of state.

But John Howard's election victory over Paul Keating last year had more to do with a disenchanted electorate rather than a rejection of the Republican cause. Recent opinion polls suggest that a majority of Australians do want a Republic. Mr Howard's other major area of policy which he would rather have left at home is rebuilding race relations with the Aborigine community.

At a recent reconciliation conference, Mr Howard offered his personal apology for any wrong-doings to Australia's indigenous people. But he refused to offer a formal government apology saying this could trigger a rash of compensation claims. But one of Mr Howard's biggest domestic headaches is the growing popularity of the right-wing MP, Pauline Hanson, whose policies are built entirely on anti-immigration rhetoric. Her One Nation Party now commands 9 percent of the vote. Any further growth could threaten to de-stabilise Mr Howard's shaky Coalition Government.

John Howard is in our central London studio. Mr Howard a very good morning to you.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Good morning. Very nice to be here.

**JOURNALIST:**

You are having lunch today with the Queen, how difficult is that going to be? You support the monarchy, but back in Australia the majority seems to be against it.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't think that at all. It is the normal thing for an Australian Prime Minister to call on the Queen. The republican issue will be resolved by the Australian people in Australia in our own way on our own terms. It is a matter that is entirely within the ...of the Australian people. We are having what could loosely be described as an ongoing low-key debate. The issue won't go away and I do not pretend that any attempt should be made to make it go away. It is just something that will work its way through. Obviously, the role of the monarchy in Australia now is quite different to what it was 30 or 40 years ago. Equally, there are many Australian's who believe that we have a particularly stable, workable, open, democratic system of government in our country. And before they make any change, they want to be satisfied that what they are changing to will be as good as if not better. Now that really is what the debate is about.

**JOURNALIST:**

But Mr Howard, if during the footings, at lunch the Queen says will I still be Queen in Australia in the year 2000 what will you tell her?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I think you know as well as I do that it is not customary to speculate about what you talk about in those circumstances and I don't intend to break from the time -honoured tradition of Australian and intend British Prime Ministers on both sides of the political fence so perhaps we ought to go on to the next subject.

**JOURNALIST:**

All right. Prompted by you, we will move on to the next subject which is the race problem you're facing back at home. A government commission found that there had been a breach of human rights over the treatment of Aborigines. You offered a personal apology, but there has been no official apology. Is it going to be quite difficult to rebuild relations with the Aborigines.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I don't believe so. Australia does not have a race problem as such. Australia is a very open, tolerant society and I would be happy to compare our race credentials with that of any nation in the world. The Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people are as a group the most disadvantaged Australians. And it is a policy of my government to address current disadvantages to build a better future for that section of the population rather than having an agonised debate about what is said in relation to the past. There have obviously been blemishes in Australia's history and many of the things that were done to the indigenous people constitute one of the biggest blemishes in our history and I have not denied that but you have got to look at the totality of what we have done, particularly over

the last 30 years, and there is a determination in Australia to focus on the present and the future rather than some kind of agonised debate about the past. Things were done in the past at the time in the belief that they were right, that they were of benefit to the people to whom those policies were directed and you cannot superimpose on the actions of the past the mores and the attitudes and the principles of current generations.

**JOURNALIST:**

Indeed, Mr Howard. Can we just go finally to a subject which you may not want to raise but I would like to and that is cricket.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I am delighted to raise cricket particularly on a day that.. the eve if you might say of the Lords Test.

**JOURNALIST:**

You must be quite pleased, aren't you, that it has actually rained?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well not if you look at the history of England at Lords, no. You have not won since 1934.

**JOURNALIST:**

I was thinking of more recent history - three one day defeats and a test defeat.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I think we have developed a new philosophy in Australia in recent weeks and that is that the first one does not count. I think it is shaping up to be a marvellous Ashes series. Mark Taylor's return to form has been a tremendous tonic to him and to the rest of the team and in the interests of a great game a tough contest is something to be welcomed and I know the Australian team have that frame of mind when I spoke to them in the dressing room yesterday.

**JOURNALIST:**

Mr Howard, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Pleasure.