



24

PRIME MINISTER

31 October 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
TELEVISION INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM
NIGHTLINE, CHANNEL NINE**

E&OE.....

LYNEHAM:

Prime Minister welcome again to the program.

PRIME MINISTER:

Pleasure.

LYNEHAM:

I assume you have joined us tonight to announce the details of your Government's new attack on the drug problem?

PRIME MINISTER:

I will be doing that on Sunday but I can say it will be very comprehensive, it will cover health aspects, education aspects and law enforcement aspects. And one of the things that it will be designed to do is to encourage school children that drug taking is diabolically harmful to them and to remove any semblance of fashionability or coolness or acceptability in relation to drug taking. I think there is a lot more that can be done in that area.

LYNEHAM:

Some would say the best way to change the drug culture among teenagers would be to give them real jobs, a sense of hope and belonging?

PRIME MINISTER:

That will obviously help, yes. And unemployment is a cause of drug dependency but it is overwhelmingly not the only cause. Anybody who says that misunderstands the nature of it.

LYNEHAM:

But do you think you can change the culture with an advertising campaign or leaflets in schools?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, no you can't. But you can make an impact over a period of years through a combination of programs. Look at the change in social attitudes towards smoking.

LYNEHAM:

You mentioned law enforcement too. The Premiers and Chief Ministers today have called on you to restore the cuts to funding to customs and to Federal Police. You won't look fair-dinkum if those cuts stay will you?

PRIME MINISTER:

None of the cuts we made had any significant impact on the law enforcement operations of the customs people or the Federal Police.

LYNEHAM:

The Federal Police Association says it has had a major impact on it?

PRIME MINISTER:

That is not correct. But in any event have a look at the announcement that is made at the weekend and I think you will see that right across the board there is a very comprehensive program and I think a very effective one.

LYNEHAM:

And there will be bucks backing it up, real bucks?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh there will be real bucks, real bucks, big bucks.

LYNEHAM:

Because the bottom line in the end, isn't it, is stopping the damn stuff getting into the country?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is that, but it is also encouraging people to believe that it is harmful to them to take it. And it is also helping people who have become addicted to recover.

LYNEHAM:

Now they have been talking about cuts to customs and the Federal Police and there has been a lot of controversy over nursing homes, which has cost your Government fairly dearly among the grey power constituency, and yet in the midst of all this we can try and save a billion dollars to loan to Indonesia. Many people don't understand that.

PRIME MINISTER:

Let me say that it is a loan repayable with interest. It is in Australia's national interest to ensure that the Indonesian economy doesn't fall over. We have a \$1.4 billion dollar trade surplus with Indonesia. That's Australian jobs at risk if the Indonesian economy is affected. Now we sell 60 per cent of our goods and services to Asia now. The idea that jobs wouldn't be lost if the Asian economies fell over is quite fanciful.

LYNEHAM:

But is it a safe one? The talk of economies falling over makes you wonder if it is a good bet.

PRIME MINISTER:

It will be a very good bet and we'll be working and acting in consort, with the IMF. There will be very stringent conditions imposed on Indonesia.

LYNEHAM:

But what about when people say, now why doesn't President Soeharto and his family and all their rich cronies just ring up their Swiss Bankers., they've got millions, it is their country?

PRIME MINISTER:

This action of Australia's is designed to help the Indonesian people it is not designed to help President Soeharto.

LYNEHAM:

It won't hurt him though will it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, none of it will go to him.

LYNEHAM:

Ten days ago, your home in Sydney was the target of Greenpeace activists. They got up on the roof with their banners and some solar panels. How did you feel about that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I was concerned about my children.

LYNEHAM:

Two of them were there at the time.

PRIME MINISTER:

They were, yes.

LYNEHAM:

Were they upset? Were they frightened?

PRIME MINISTER:

No they handled the thing with very great maturity and I was very proud of that fact but I don't want to..

LYNEHAM:

Some of the reports said that you were very very angry?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Paul, I had a little dilemma on something like this. I'd basically rather have no security at all. I'd far rather wander the streets of Sydney without any police, without any kind of security and so would my children. You are caught in a real dilemma if you try and live a fairly normal existence as Prime Minister, with your family, you do expose yourself to that sort of thing. The Greenpeace people were harmless but others may not be.

On the other hand, if you were to stop it entirely you would have to turn the place into an armed camp and I will never do that.

LYNEHAM:

Were you surprised by Labor's surge in the polls and for Cheryl Kernot to join them?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

LYNEHAM:

Its held up pretty well though. They have still got 6 points ahead in news poll on Tuesday and your personal rating at an all time low. Is this just mid-term blues?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Paul, no politician likes the polls to go the other way but the best antidote to any poll is to just do the job, get on with the process of decision making and providing good Government and I have always accepted that Governments will, in these more volatile, detribalised political times, Governments will always go through peaks and troughs more so than in earlier years.

LYNEHAM:

But a couple of months ago, Labor people were saying, oh look Howard is almost guaranteed a second term. Its a 3 term Government?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've never held the views in politics.

LYNEHAM:

Well they don't hold that now.

PRIME MINISTER:

Good luck to them if that's their view. Politics is a very competitive game.

LYNEHAM:

You do accept now that you do have a fight on your hands at the next election?

PRIME MINISTER:

I have always thought I'd have a fight on my hands. I have never had any different view.

LYNEHAM:

You never thought privately well there is two terms in this. You have got such a big majority?

PRIME MINISTER:

I have always taken the view that politics is very volatile. I believe that we will get re-elected. I really do. But I don't take the Australian people for granted.

[Ends]