



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP,  
DOORSTOP, CANBERRA, 2 FEBRUARY 1992

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J: Prime Minister, is it a body blow to Labor - the overwhelming defeat of the Field Government?

PM: I don't think that it is any more, to Federal Labor, any more than the near loss of the New South Wales election was a body blow to the Federal Liberal Party. We nearly won the New South Wales election and that result was confirmed in a by-election two weekends ago and we won't at pains be drawing Federal implications from that. I don't think you can from this. I think the important thing to say about Tasmania is that, most Governments are defeated doing the wrong thing. This one's being defeated doing the right thing. If ever there was a Government which deserves, I think, to have its work recognised, it was the Field Government. He took on a State which was nearly bankrupt and radically altered its finances where the Gray Government just threw the fight for quite a long number of years and he was two thirds of the way through it. So I think history will judge Michael Field and his Government perhaps better than the Tasmania public. But Field accepts the result of the Tasmanian people as all democrats have to and do.

J: But that doesn't say much about the maturity of the Australian voters, does it?

PM: At least the Government did what it had to do. It did not shirk the fight. I don't know of any Premier in the years I was Treasurer who took on a more difficult financial landscape and actually made a very great headway through it.

J: Had Michael Field been able to advertise on TV and radio, he would of had a better chance?

PM: Well that's a matter for judgement, but I'm sure these things will be ragged over by the rest of you.

J: Are you worried about the threats by some MPs in South Australia to resign, and the fact that there could be an election there as well?

PM: I have not heard of those.

J: They are calling for Federal intervention in South Australia. Would you be interested?

PM: Over what though?

J: Faction brawling.

PM: Well these things happen whenever pre-selections are on. You can't be a wide-eyed innocent about these things.

J: ... unemployment had nothing to do with the result in Tasmania?

PM: I think it has got a fair bit to do. I think it is very difficult for Governments in recessions to win elections. It is difficult and I think it has been part of the difficulty in Tasmania. The other part of the difficulty, I think, for the Field Government was that there's a great polarity developed between the Liberals who have developed or say they would develop anything, and the Greens who won't develop nothing and the Labor Party is sort of sitting in between trying to get the right balance. Often getting the right balance is not appreciated, and I don't think it was on this occasion.

J: Mr Keating have you any dates for your talks with the ACTU about wages and any further thinking on the wage/tax trade-off issue?

PM: No, we have not set any timetable as yet.

J: What do you think of the New South Wales Government's offer to Bob Hawke ....

PM: I thought it might have been speculation. I don't know whether it is true or not.

J: Well they have confirmed it.

PM: Have they? Well I'm sure Bob will do a good job.

J: Do you have any more detail as to his plans since you've spoken to him in the ...?

PM: None whatsoever. No.

- J: Mr Keating there are a lot of reports at the moment of the possibility that Nissan might close its car manufacturing plant in Australia. How keen is the Government to see Nissan stay here and what might it do by way of convincing them that they should stay here?
- PM: That's a matter for the company I think. I saw that report today, I don't know that it's correct. But it is a matter for the company to decide, the Government's laid down a plan over a long period of years and made out that the downturn of the cycle for car manufacturing would not have helped any of the manufacturers, including Nissan, but in the end Nissan's future is basically up to Nissan.
- J: ... to adjusting the car ..
- PM: I don't think the company has been in touch with the Government at this stage.
- J: But in general terms given the severity of the recession difficulties they are having and the number of people they employ, are you giving any thought to altering the schedule for tariff cuts to the car industry?
- PM: No, we hadn't been. But again we have had put to us by a number of car manufacturers what they see as shorter term remedies for the current cyclical downturn. And we have been considering those.
- J: Is it possible that having fewer car makers in Australia will eventually leave an industry in better shape for the '90s?
- PM: Well, the aim of the plan in the '80s was to arrive at a number of competitive models in Australia. Time alone will tell if that's to be achieved.
- J: Mr Keating, resource security was one that you should talk about in Tasmania, you were very critical of the resource security legislation when you were still in the Cabinet as Treasurer. What's your view now and will any changes be made?
- PM: Well we have got a Bill in the Parliament and that's the fact of the matter and if that Bill passes, well then the legislation will be established.
- J: Would you think to be making any amendments to that as it goes through?
- PM: Not at this stage, no.
- J: If the Bill fails will you be seeking to put any ...?

PM: Let's wait and see. I think the best thing is to wait and see.

J: Does the Tasmanian result show that there is a need for you and your Government to redress the perception that the Greens are against all development, and that Labor's been a supporter of them?

PM: Well we won the election on our policies in 1990, and in 1987 Green issues were part and parcel of the campaign. So I think the balance we brought to the environment in the context of growth has been an appropriate one. This is an election which has got many state complexions about it. I notice Dr Hewson who has always marketed himself as a wide-eyed political innocent saying, well Government should just do the right thing and things will look after themselves. Well this Government did do the rights things and things didn't look after themselves, so I don't know if Dr Hewson can take any comfort from this result.

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