



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH GREG GARY, RADIO 4BC, BRISBANE,
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GC: The Prime Minister, Paul Keating, visiting our city and joins us for a few minutes. Nice to see you.

PM: Good, nice to be here.

GC: You've been out at Stafford school today talking about all kinds of things. It went well, good to see the kids?

PM: It was a really nice day and the Premier and I got such a nice welcome from the kids and we were delighted. The cause of going was that Wayne Goss promoted, at the Council of Australian Governments, the Premiers meeting, the notion of a national Asian languages strategy which we were happy to join the states with and to join Wayne with and it will mean that we will be focussing on Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian in the first instance in schools in Australia. And, out there at Stafford today there was a Chinese class which really did tremendous ... it is very interesting to see a bunch of Australian kids speaking Chinese with a very enthusiastic teacher of Chinese.

GC: You wouldn't have thought it a few years ago would you?

PM: No. And, Wayne tells me there are 100,000 kids in Queensland studying Asian languages right now. So, Queensland has been the leader on this and I took the opportunity to congratulate the Premier on his initiative in this respect because for Australia joining the world ... I mean, when I grew up all we knew was basically that Australia belonged to the Commonwealth and that sort of thing, that we were part of Europe and North America and wouldn't have known that much about the

region, you certainly couldn't have spoken the languages. So, to be able to do that is going to be a tremendous fillip for this country.

GC: So, when you were out there with the children and you were looking at their young shiny faces full of potential and prospect and the rest, do you allow yourself ever to think about our country 40 or 50 years down the road when they in turn are having their children. And I wonder if you allow yourself that thought, what kind of county it will be at that time?

PM: I do and much of what I do is about that. That's what motivates me and, I think, that kids will have a much more interesting life than we had. Not that we didn't have good lives, but were they as interesting as they'll have? And the answer is, no they weren't. Theirs will be far more interesting and I was just making the point to them today, talking about, particularly young children, the messages have got to be ones that they can digest. You know, the 747 jumbo jets changed all of our lives. When I was a teenager the only destinations from Australia were all met by sea. They were not met by you know, when in half a day being in North Asia or South-east Asia. And, given that mass transportation is going to change the opportunities for people to move around this area of the world are going to be tremendous and in employment and in incomes. So, it gets back to what I said in the Budget. We want this to be a high wage, high productivity, culture and the way to get it is through training - education and training.

GC: Just talking about the schools for a moment. We've had several calls this afternoon, Prime Minister, concerned about the story about the republican kits going into schools.

PM: This is a story in today's Sydney Morning Herald. Somebody has given a journalist a lead in Canberra, but the Government didn't actually adopt these proposals. It was for the development of an enhanced understanding in our educational institutions of the Constitution, because the Republican Advisory Committee, which was chaired by Malcolm Turnbull, that Committee discovered that to their chagrin one of the problems we had was people understanding the Constitution and, in fact, that is understandable when even an institution like the federal Cabinet is not mentioned in the Constitution. It mentions, in terms of the Executive Council, the thing that advises the Governor-General. So, there is all this code in the Constitution that people don't understand and a lot of the kids today are disillusioned about public life and politics and if we can't at least communicate to them things about the Constitution, well, where are we going to begin.

So, it was a proposal to do that, but the Government didn't adopt it. We might in the future, but we haven't yet.

GC: Does that relate, some of the things you just said then, to that wonderful line you dropped with John Laws last week on this radio station, when you talked about a culture of criticism. Can you expand on that a little?

PM: Well, I think, that the culture of criticism in Australia has got to the point that instead of the media standing back saying, look, there are some good and important things happening here and my point was, that Australians had earned the recovery, that they had earned the right to be accredited with meeting the challenge of economic transformation which they have in the last ten years. We have gone from an inward looking, shut little place to an open, aggressive trading country. And here we are now teaching languages in schools and the whole culture is changing. Yet, instead of that positive compilation being presented to the public of a nation which is at the leading edge of change, certainly in western world terms, growing faster than any substantial western economy, low inflation, big shift in education, big shift in the productive culture, this is not getting through to the public. It is all niggardly stuff. Journalists are in the position now where if they present the positive things, their peer group pressure is such, that somebody says, hang on, you're going soft on the Government or soft on this Minister or soft on that. Which, I think, is a pity because the public are looking for, listening for the value. They are listening through the screen of noise to find the bits they know have got some value to them.

One of the values of doing radio interviews like this is that you can talk about these things. But, by the time it gets filtered through the media ...

GC: Maybe it is media driven, but I wonder if it is wider than the media in that Lee Kuan Yew comes to Australia and wants to tell us how to run our race when, in terms of any country on the planet, we are doing all right. Is there an underlying lack of confidence perhaps still residing in our country, that we are prepared to accept that critical assessment all the time?

PM: I think, it's not so much that we are prepared to accept, we politely accept it. There is a difference between being polite and uncritical acceptance by us. One of the things I was pleased to say a week or two after Mr Lee's visit was that productivity per person in Australia was much higher, say, than Singapore, much higher. That's productivity per person. The only measure that is really worth, if you are talking about the productive quality of the countries, the only measure worth having. The thing is, Australians have got faith in themselves and they believe that Australia can do, as a nation, good and important things and we have done them. I mean, in the last ten years Australia has been through a most profound transformation and it's still going on. Ten years ago, only three kids in ten were completing school. This year it's eight in ten. It will soon be nine in ten and by the White Paper changes we're going to make sure that no kid who drops out of school isn't

picked up, that the transition from school to work is a good one. All of those sorts of changes which are primary to a culture which is about productivity, innovative products, research and development, exports, it is a shift we've made and the public are entitled to get a tick for it.

GC: We only have four minutes ahead of the news. Two questions I want to put to you. One, our listeners have talked at great length this afternoon about what's happening in Rwanda. There is much confusion and people hear you talking about the prospect of us being involved in the UN force. Is that on the cards and if it is, why?

PM: We have been asked by the United Nations if we would be willing to provide military assistance to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Rwanda. No formal security council decision about the operation has yet been made, so we don't really know what the character of such an operation would be. Now, in the past we have given sympathetic consideration to what we might usefully do to help with difficult humanitarian problems. In this place there have been 200,000 deaths already. Well, it is inconceivable in Australian terms, but the first thing we need to do is to see the shape of the proposed operation before we make any decision. But, essentially we expect the UN operation to be aimed at assisting relief operations and not separating the warring parties. So, we wouldn't be in there trying to say, hang on, we're going to be the referee here, but rather assisting in the humanitarian operation. So, we don't know what the UN is proposing and at this stage we haven't made a decision about it, although we have responded to the UN in similar situations around the world.

GC: There remains a risk none the less doesn't there. We had a caller a little earlier about to go to Rwanda in a couple of weeks from now, said he had been in Somalia and elsewhere and whilst our motives can be applauded, when you get on the ground over there the bottom line question, is it worth risking one Australian life to help these people who seem not too keen to help themselves?

PM: Well, we either subscribe to the notion that we have an international order and the governing body is the United Nations and support that body or we don't. As you know, the same argument could have been mounted in the mid-west of the United States when some mother said of her child, why should I send him to the South-Pacific? Why should they fight in the Solomon Islands or anywhere else?

GC: But we knew who the good guys and the bad guys were.

PM: I know, it was a more obvious thing. But I mean, in these things, I think, there has to be a view about Australia's role in the world and we are very careful about the conditions under which we commit people as were in Somalia, as we've been in the Middle East. But, good things do

happen. We've been involved with UN operations as part of peace keeping forces in the Middle East, we've done that long enough now to see the Israelis and the Palastinians come to a peace accord which will change the character of that area. So, we are either in the business of helping and seeing better world outcomes or we're not. But, again, these are on-balance judgements and we look, at each time, the nature of the operation.

GC: We are a better and larger and more decent country than sometimes we take the time to think of ourselves aren't we?

PM: Well, we play a larger role in the world. Always, I think, we have played a role in the world larger than our relative size and that is a compliment to Australians - I think, the fact that we can take it. I mean, look at the settlement in Cambodia as a case in point in our own area.

GC: South Africa. Just talking about South Africa I was faxed a, I think, a head line from the New Zealand Herald today and it ran this story '... the former Deputy of white supremacist Dr Juan Smith in the church of the creator organisation, is understood to be leaving South Africa for Australia. South African sources said yesterday that Mr Youhan Grieff? had applied for residency in Australia and that we might be already on his way here having left South Africa ...' Should we be letting people like this into our country?

PM: I don't know whether he's applied or he hasn't, but we don't, generally, try and import into this country extreme views and, I think, that is a pretty good policy.

GC: So, if it was likely this fellow turned up on the front door?

PM: I can't say. I'd have to find out all about it.

GC: OK, in the meantime your Canterbury Bulldogs sit atop the premiership ladder. They are looking good.

PM: That's right, they are doing really well and the other side I support - Collingwood in Victoria - are in the middle of the field and rising. So, I'm going for the yearly double, annual double.

GC: It's good to see you. Next time you visit come by and we'll talk some more.

PM: OK, Greg and thanks very much.

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