



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, MELBOURNE
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PM: ... and the States can't do it alone, and that's why we've had a co-operative discussion with the Premier of the State of Victoria and the other States to try and get Victoria going. And it won't happen by taxing your bread and milk and clothes and your dry-cleaning. That will only happen with money. That will only happen with government money brought to where it can be most effective, rationalisation of facilities like this, to make Australia a more efficient place. So, can I just say this, that what I put to our opponents is, do they oppose these sorts of changes? Do they want reform? Do they want change of this variety? Are they going to be in the partnership with Australians, with business to change? Are they going to be whole-hearted Australians or only half-hearted Australians? Are they going to be confident Australians? Are they going to make Australia different and better? Are we going to get on with making this an efficient country? Because if they are, they have got to pass our legislation. They have got to agree to it, and they have got to agree, that these are the basic first order issues for Australia - to get a container through a port quickly, to trade of the world, and of course the world in which we live - the Asia-Pacific.

So, this is a very graphic example of Governments working together. Joan (Kirner) and I have been working on this for some time now, and she has with her Government for a quite a long time now, as we have with the Governments of the other States, and with business which can make these things work.

J: Prime Minister, aren't you backing a loser - the Kirner Government?

PM: I'm backing progress, change for Australians, a stimulus for the Victorian economy, and a lift in confidence in Victoria and in other states of Australia. And if I might say, the Premier has been able to get more done in a short period in these vacant areas and get an agenda running which can really make a great difference and provide to the city of Melbourne and the State of Victoria a new industry, a new service industry, a modern efficient freight industry for Victoria.

J: Is this going to be enough to win the Wills by-election?

PM: Well, leave that to one side. The real question is, what have we got to do make Australia better? What have we got to do to make Australia more competitive? These are the things that have to be done. Equipment which is 20 years old, running at 40 per cent capacity, it's got to go. Roadways which take a circuitous route to try to load a container train, it's got to change. And it can only change with Government support. These are Government facilities basically. They are not going to be privately invested in, they will only be changed if Government spent money on these things. They will not be changed by taxing some low income earners' bread and milk.

J: ...Mr Keating, what measure will you have ... what will you say to the ACTU about the real cut in wages? What can you say to them?

PM: Well, the ACTU know about these things and they are part of the process of change. On the waterfront this year, by the end of this year, waterfront employment will have fallen by nearly 50 per cent in the last two years. Enormous rationalisation, but now we have got to rationalise the businesses that those people work in. So the ACTU is right up to speed on efficiency and it's up to speed on the other great objectives, the national inflation rate - keeping it low, and keeping wage claims competitive, so we can run and keep that core issue in competitiveness, that is a low inflation rate.

J: ... can you tell us exactly what is in ... regarding the wage claim this year then?

PM: I think, this afternoon, they probably will.

J: not just the tabloid press... what you said about British ... Do you regret the intensity to which you made your point?

PM: No. The fact of the matter is, this country does over three quarters of its trade, both in imports and exports, with the Asia-Pacific area. We are no longer tied to Europe, and we're certainly not tied to Britain. Britain gave Australia up when it joined the European Community. And Ministers got a polite "I'm sorry" and "no thanks" in the 1960s and the 1970s. I'm just simply making that point. And I'm making the point to Australian politicians on the conservative side who I say are half-heartedly Australian, who want to keep doffing their lid to an old apparatus which we have shaken off. We signed the Australia Act in 1986 which cut all of the links with Britain. And while they will always remain friends of ours, and I'm sure British people in the Government today don't share the views, and understand really the world as it is, don't share the views of Dr Hewson and Mr Howard and all these other people who want to trek back to the 1950s. The fact of the matter is, for us the way is clear. We have to be aggressively Australian, whole-heartedly Australian, proud of it, and go and trade with our part of the world and forget this stuff about tugging the forelock, and be more than about MBEs and Knighthoods.

J: They say you've got history wrong.

PM: Don't worry about ... I noticed some Englishman said oh, Australia wasn't attacked. I noticed that was an interesting bit of history.

J: Bruce Ruxton calls himself Australian and he says you're a, in his words, a 'ratbag'.

PM: Well maybe Bruce is still looking for an MBE or a Knighthood, I don't know.

J: So no apologies, Mr Keating?

PM: Just understand this simple point. This is about Australia calling its own shots in the Asia-Pacific running its race, living its life, and not having Australians proposing themselves as leaders of the '90s - Dr Hewson and Mr Howard - looking back with melancholy to the 1950s and all of the imperial bits and pieces that came with it. It's all over.

J: No apologies?

PM: Absolutely not.

J: (inaudible)

PM: I'm talking about the old links with Britain, the Britain of the '50s and '60s, the thing which Menzies and the other people tied them to in the past. I'm not criticising the British Government or modern Britain.

J: You said they sold Australia out during the War.

PM: Well, I'm not going over the history. The fact of the matter is we were left to defend this place for ourselves.

J: ... real issue?

PM: Look, there's only one real issue in Australia - to get a recovery going. To get a recovery going. To do the things which have to be done, Government and business together, to get a recovery going. And that's what this is about, it's about getting a recovery going, it's about changing the basic infrastructure of the place, and it's about Australians being whole-heartedly Australians and coming together - one nation - to make the place tick. It's not about regressive policies, taxing low income people, the food they put in their mouth and the clothes they put on their backs, calling it reform. It's not reform, it's savage regressive taxation. The reform has to be in these places, in the cranes, in the wharves, in the facilities, in the airlines, the electricity grids, in the technical and further education, in the inflation rate. These are the first order issues, not a consumption tax.

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