



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
INTERVIEW WITH SALLY BEGBIE, 7.30 REPORT  
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He believes himself as passionate, thinks the recession was unfortunate and sees the arts spiritually uplifting. You might be forgiven for confusing the identity of this person, it's Prime Minister Paul Keating. And this is the line he is now adopting. And our arts reporter, Sally Begby, talked with Paul Keating during his visit to the Adelaide Arts Festival.

PM: A few of the troops back home, back in Canberra query the wisdom of coming among arty types. Well, I have done it before. And they said, 'are you sure you know the protocols, make sure you put your arm around everyone'. So I decided to risk it, I decided that one cannot stay forever in the conformity in.... of the Parliamentary burrow.

'The result is that by 5 to 4 majority, they have awarded the 1991-92 Archibald Prize to Brian Westwood for his portrait entitled, The Prime Minister'.

He prefers the sound of the classics to the thard of leather on willow. Less than 3 months into office, the Bankstown boy with a VFL ticket is tailoring his image on the Arts wicket.

PM: I think that the Arts always gives any society that chance to push out the boundaries of the temperal, grasping for the spiritual and it's important for our souls, it is important for our inner being. So the Arts not only helped define who you are and what you are, but they also spiritually uplift you, and I think it is terribly important for a country to, and for Governments of countries to sort of understand that.

J: The Arts are also about passion. Do you see yourself as a passionate man?

- PM: I absolutely run on passion. That's why makes me tick. That's what makes me tick. Absolutely, I mean, if you are not passionate about things, I don't think you can enjoy life to the fullest. And I am very passionate about things.
- J: Keating's affair with the Arts has been long-standing. As Treasurer he implemented the most lucrative Arts awards in the country, possibly in the world. The creative fellowships, affectionately known as 'The Keatings', give established artists between \$150 - \$200,000 over a three to four year period to pursue their ideas.
- J: Will the Arts get a higher priority in your Government?
- PM: Well, I thought about taking the Arts portfolio myself actually. But the problem you have with it is that then every element of the Arts believes they should have access to the Minister and be able talk to him or her, as the case may be. And in the job I am doing, you don't really have the time to do that. So it has to be with another Minister, I think. But I am keeping an interest in it and I am now thinking about what, in the longer run, what our Arts policy should be.
- J: Do you think that as we move towards a republic that the place for the Arts will have increasing importance and therefore deserve more funding?
- PM: Well, the Arts are part of the reason why people are even thinking about it, I think. So it's a case of the chicken and the egg. I think, the Arts will be first, and if there is further political change in this country, it will be part due to the sort of ambience in the national psyche of the national debate that's come from, in part, the Arts.
- J: The Australia Council, the major body for the Arts, has seen it's funding cut by \$20 million since 1974. During the last decade of Labor it has had no increase in real terms. Still, Paul Keating is promising, only, to look at funding levels.
- PM: It's how you spend it, and whether the policy of thinning the butter on to the bread or dropping it on in dollops or lumps. Whether you actually make one area of the Arts more significantly funded, better, or whether you spread the joy widely, I think that's a question, a real question for policy.
- J: Do you think it's a bit dangerous for you hanging your hat on the Arts banner and moving away maybe from the sports banner? I mean, Mr Hawke was seen at yacht races and you are seen at writers festivals.

- PM: I used to sail an 18-footer in Sydney Harbour and I will stay up for a good fight, or a good tennis match, so it is not as if I am sort of one or the other. I am interested in sport and I think sport is very good. But I am also interested in the Arts, I think the Arts are terribly important and the crowds that now come to the Adelaide Arts Festival or the major galleries and museums, theatre, dance, speaks for itself I think, does it not?
- J: It's ironic that Paul Keating who loves the music of Mahler and the art of Turner, finds himself leading a land a hemisphere away from Europe, a country he stopped short of saying, is pushing towards a republic.
- PM: Well, it's changing and it's part of that. I think the political system has had the sense to let that change percolate through the nation over time. And that is a sensible position to take.
- J: But you have enjoyed a great momentum on this debate in the last couple of weeks. Do you think that we will be...
- PM: I think one is entitled to say that we have an identity of our own and ought to be confident about ourselves and independent of people who wish to keep us tied to another Apoc. You can say those things and be entitled to say them. It is entirely another matter to be saying, now we ought to move therefore from this point to that, in sort of constitutional terms.
- J: But do you see that perhaps we will have a referendum before the turn of the century?
- PM: I don't know, I don't know. It just depends how this debate goes. It is a feeling, it is not a debate is it? It is a feeling.
- J: But it is a growing feeling Prime Minister?
- PM: I think it is.
- J: Paul Keating denies that his tilt towards republicanism as John Hewson describes it, is just the reaction of an Irish Catholic larrikin.
- PM: Be clear about the fact that not only can we do it, but we will do it, will be doing it, will be controlling our own affairs, will be making our own place in the world and saying, here we are, we are Australians, take us as we are, we are different, we are from certainly a country with European origins, but we are not European, we're Australian. And I think if the country feels that, we will make the economic change more quickly and better. We've had the misfortune of the recession but it will be simply a period and a longer run, I think, period of success and change. And I know that change

is occurring. I know that cultural change is in, in commence and in trade, and I think it is in in societal terms as well. So I think one has every reason to be confident about Australia.

J: Where do you get your confidence from? You are talking that it's important for Australia to have confidence. Where have you gained your confidence? Some people said you got off to a shaky start as Prime Minister, you're clearly confident now?

PM: No, but I always like the sort of, I was reconnoitring for a couple of weeks, you see.

J: Did you have a good look around?

PM: ... working out where all the bits were. And once I worked that out, away we went.

J: Just two months ago he was Mr 25 per cent, but there were moments in Adelaide where you could sense that even an undertaker can find a heartland.

Do you think that there will be more votes for you if you fixed up the Australian Cricket Team than if you fixed up funding to the Arts in Australia?

PM: Well, I don't know. One does not think in those terms. I know that this may come as a great shock and surprise, but there is still some substantial altruism in a way in which a Government functions. And to do what is right and best is what's important, and I think it is important to get the Arts right, to get the policy about the Arts right.

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