



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
INTERVIEW WITH DAVID MARGAN, 7.30 REPORT
SEATTLE, USA, 21 NOVEMBER 1993**

E&OE PROOF COPY

DM: There's been an awful lot of discussion about what APEC should be. And certainly perhaps coming into this conference there were hopes within the Australian contingent, Singapore, South Korea and the United States, that perhaps the institutional basis of APEC may move forward fairly quickly. There was some discussion about whether it should really be a community, and in fact, you were suggesting the idea that the name be changed. None of that though really happened.

PM: Now, some members of the APEC constituency thought the word the big "C" community meant a Brussels style bureaucracy with supra national decision making in one place, that is, a bureaucracy able to make decisions for each of them. Now, none of us has ever envisaged that, this is a much more loose arrangement without any formal treaties. So, it is a small "C" community, but it is definitely a community. But the success of it can only be measured by the fact that all of the leaders of the APEC community met, including China, which is half the world's production, representing half the world's production and 40 per cent of the world's population, and decided to meet again. So, decided to meet next year in Jakarta and adopt a whole range of things in the meantime which will then come up for endorsement at the Jakarta meeting. So, APEC is off and running.

DM: So, what was your reaction to certain elements of the Australian media, particularly in relation to your attempt to have the name changed, when they described that attempt as a failure, that you had been rebuffed?

PM: It is foolishness bordering on what seems to me a sort of negativism and a complete lack of pride in anything Australia does. Some of the nit picking by Australian journalists abroad, I mean, what other country our size would put together a thing this large? When I first started talking about the APEC leaders' meeting, the same people were saying, oh well, it is beyond anyone's imagination, this won't happen,

Australia can't put a thing like this together. When it actually comes together then they say, well you want to get the name changed, so that's a failure too. Here's the rest of the Asia-Pacific basking in this sense of engagement, including and most particularly a US President who had lent all of his prestige to it, and large countries which have got very particular differences like China and Japan, and Japan and the United States all there trying to draw the best from it. So, it really puts, I think, some of the negativism by Australian based journalists abroad in its proper perspective. That is, when are they ever going to say, well this was a great thing Australia put together and it has actually come off, it has actually come off. That Australian diplomacy has again produced another very great change.

- DM: It is said by a number of people looking at this conference before it started that its success will be measured by how many concrete things it comes out with. I am particularly talking about trade liberalisation. There was some criticism of the Eminent Persons Group for having a timetable for discussion that didn't start until 1996, but it seems the conference has even thrown that aside and delayed the idea of trade liberalisation even further, and some would suggest it would be the year 2000 before they have even liberalised trade in snow ploughs.
- PM: Well four years ago APEC didn't exist at all. Four years later it has gone from a mini OECD information policy secretariat in 1989, to an executive Heads of Government body today in four years. But what's not adopted this year is invariably getting adopted the following year, you know what I mean, it takes people a while to warm up to see that there is no hidden punch, there is no catch. You have got a very disparate group of economies. And what happens with some of the simple simons in our media, they are saying, hang on, look you have got this, now you said you were going to do this, but you never got there. I say, but hang on, look, four years ago this didn't exist, I mean this is a grouping of very disparate forces, people have been arraigned against each other for most of the century. Either we keep pushing and pull some of the others behind us, or we stop pushing and wait till they get some natural momentum. Now, if we do that it will be much slower. So, if you are sitting in Australia's seat or the US's seat, but particularly Australia's seat, as we have been the prime movers in this, you keep pushing, and then gather in the things which we have done, including now turning this into an executive body, and rapidly, and then going on as we have this weekend, on to design up a set of investment rules for an investment agreement between now and next year. I mean, who could have thought four years ago we would have had an investment agreement in the Asia-Pacific, it would have been unthinkable.
- DM: In terms though of our sort of immediate concrete results, would perhaps the unified position that this group has taken on the GATT Round be the most significant for the moment?

PM: Has the position they have taken?

DM: In that the APEC leaders have decided to take a unified approach to the GATT Round and have sent therefore a message?

PM: Yes.

DM: To those talks.

PM: We were saying to President Clinton yesterday, you have got to go for the triple whammy, that's NAFTA, APEC and GATT. He said, well I am going for it, I am telling you, I am going to go for it. And the statement we made yesterday about the GATT, I mean, that is coming from half the worlds production, that's representing half the worlds production saying to the French and the Europeans, get this finished, get this done.

DM: On another issue, perhaps the gloss of this event, this pride at the moment was taken away momentarily, perhaps, by the comments of Conrad Black on an ABC television program.

PM: No that is only just an Australian sleeve issue, I mean who cares about those things, they are just ephemeral day to day things. This is the biggest of the big pictures, and the Black business is just, not even a splash of paint on the picture.

DM: But for some it is a very important matter of public policy. Some have thought it was a sleazy inside deal to give a foreigner some rewards, financial rewards.

PM: No, Australian Governments have got to make decisions about equity issues in print and broadcasting and we will make them on the highest motives, and we have. But, you have only got to say Fairfax and the Fairfax journo's go into a tizz, and they play the first stanza and generally the ABC does the second stanza for them.

DM: But so the issue of balance.

PM: Break the mould.

DM: Doesn't it seem a bit strange that we should discover this notion of the Prime Minister's view of balance in an investment matter that involves millions of dollars from a book published by Conrad Black himself. I mean, why wasn't this on the public record before. We have had these conversations, we have told him ...

PM: But all these things were discussed at the time.

- DM: So, deciding, I mean, why did he in the end get 25 per cent?
- PM: I mean, this is just simply dust in the cracks of history. Just forget about it. I mean you are on the APEC picture, that's the picture to stay on, this stuff just slides into nowhere.
- DM: But it is an important matter of public policy, our control of our media, how the deals are done, who gets what.
- PM: Compared to what has been done here, this last weekend it is hardly worth a mention.
- DM: So, you think the Australian public should have no concern about how its broadcasting policy is run?
- PM: Yes, but all in the right frame work, not juxtaposed with haughty subjects like this.
- DM: I am still interested though, in the Prime Minister's notion of balance. Should you be the one who decides that, though?
- PM: Well Prime Ministers have got to decide, I mean, I noticed a bit of comment about this saying, well isn't it unusual that the Prime Minister has had to make a decision about the acceptability or otherwise of a particular set of proprietors. That's one of the things, I am afraid, Prime Ministers have to do. Because we are the ones who have got to take the decisions about who gets what in terms of equity. So, it may be an uncomfortable lot and a burden, but that is part of the job.
- DM: Do you think the next media baron should come to you about questions of balance and objectivity, for your decision?
- PM: If they are foreigners, and if they want to buy a large chunk of Australia, yes.

Ends