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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P. J. KEATING, MP
WOMEN, POWER AND THE 21ST CENTURY CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE
FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER, 1993**

J: Prime Minister, the issue of the day – do you believe you will manage to make peace with Malaysia having written to Dr Mahathir overnight and indeed, have you heard anything back from him?

PM: No, I haven't. I have written to Dr Mahathir, and that and what we have said, I think, is to say enough about the issue now so we can get on with the rest of the business of the country which is important. And, I noticed today that a bit of real news did squeeze its way on to the front page of the Australian press. A rarity I know but there it was, "GATT, the final historic chapter", and, of course the GATT means so much to Australia. And, also, "Job ads soar as recovery gathers pace". So, we are starting to see the economy start to pick up. We're starting to see the response in the job vacancies and job ads, we've had 70,000 employment growth over the past two months. And that and the environment where we are on the precipice now, on the cusp of making a very large international change in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the GATT, which promises to set the world up for a period of growth which would be unprecedented given the range of the issues under discussion.

So, these are very good portents for the country and that, coupled with APEC – a meeting we've just completed – which is an Asia-Pacific area organisation to look at growth, trade and investment, these things, I think, augur well for the country..... particularly for 1994 as we start to see the recovery here gather pace.

J: Prime Minister, are you saying that the Malaysia row wasn't news?

- PM: Well, it's certainly not news as this is news. I mean, Australia has had a recession, we've now been out of it for about nine quarters, I think, from memory and we're starting to see it gather some real strength. We saw it in the national accounts the other day, the economy is now growing at about three and a quarter percent - as fast as any in the western world. And, of course, we're being tugged along by growth in the Asia-Pacific area which is growing faster than the OECD. So, these are the real issues, I think.
- J: Do you think relations are smoothed over enough... Inaudible...?
- PM: Well, I've said all I think I need to say about it.
- J: Prime Minister, on GATT, do you support the principle of last minute concessions to France to clinch a deal?
- PM: If there are elements of the current, draft final Act which, in their application, don't actually tear away at the structure but which would make this more palatable to get a general agreement, then I think that's worth considering. But, that doesn't mean wholesale changes to the Blair House Accord or substantial changes to it.
- J: It seems that the base is being moved - that the base from which GATT's agreement on agricultural products will be a lot softer than originally planned. Does that matter?
- PM: No, that's not apparent at this stage, I don't think. The United States has held pretty firm. The Blair House Accord is an accord between the European Community and the United States Government and the United States has held very firmly to that. The fact that it was negotiated by a previous French administration is, in a sense, beside the point. Now, no doubt the French are trying to find wriggle room in their domestic society on this and that we understand. That's what negotiation is all about. But let's hope everybody sees the opportunity of extending the Kennedy Round in the sixties on a general agreement on goods, to intellectual property rights, to services and to agriculture. Because, to do that when these very large societies are re-emerging in the world economy really, for the first time since - in the case of Russia, the first world war and in the case of China the second world war - to see these large nations returning to the world economy with the cold war now finished, we need a good backdrop in rules on trade to really kick the world along and GATT is the name of that.

J: Have you discussed with either Joan Kirner or Carmen Lawrence your desire to see them in Federal Parliament?

PM: Well, I have at odd times discussed it with both of them but for various reasons they have seen fit to stay in the jurisdictions they are in, in the states. But, there is no doubt that we need more women in the federal parliament. We need more women of their calibre in the federal parliament and the more representative the parliament is of the Australian community, the better the parliament will be. It's under-represented now, with women and it needs to have a higher representation amongst women.

J: Your job's cut out for you though isn't it? Even here in Victoria the new leader, Mr Brumby has been trying to implement strategies and procedures for increasing the number of women and been rolled by the factions.

PM: Well, I can't attest, cheek by jowl, of all the factional movements in Victoria but I think the big principle is the Australian Labor Party is genuinely interested in the affairs of Australian women, we appreciated their support at the last election, we have done many, many things to improve the lot of Australian women. More recently, with the generalised child care rebate and the home child care allowance, on top of many other things which we've done in the 1980s which I recounted this morning. And I think it is that notion that Labor is the party which cares most, I believe, in a practical way about women and women's issues, that we really need to reinforce that with a higher representation of women in our parliamentary parties. So, this has got to be a state of mind thing in the Labor Party and it's got to be a state of mind thing in our national politics. And, I think, the state of mind thing matters more than any sort of factional arrangement about who should get what, where. Rather, the state of mind that women must be a larger part of the national body politic.

J: Prime Minister, can we expect to see more women in Cabinet before the next election and would you expect to see more women in Cabinet if you win the next election, afterwards.

PM: Well, I'd like to see more women in Cabinet. It's a matter of, again, finding the opportunities and seeing the portfolios that particular people can hold or would do justice to. But, part of that is to lift the general stock, the numbers and we just don't have that there now. That is, there just aren't enough women in the federal Labor Party and therefore, if you like, the

- 4 -

area from which ministers are drawn is just not as large as it would otherwise be. Let's hope that improves after the next election.

J: Is this concept of half by 2000 realistic under those circumstances?

PM: Well, I think it's a good objective and it gets the focus on the issue and I think that... I mean, let's make the simple point; the more the parliament is representative of the general population, the better off it will be. Therefore, the more women that are in parliament, the better, generally, will the nation's policies be.

Ends.