



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, REGENT HOTEL, MELBOURNE, 15 JUNE 1994**

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J: ... (inaudible) ...

PM: Well, in the first day of Parliament I said I thought it was a very disappointing thing that Alexander Downer who said he was going to make a fresh start, started his fresh start by flattening the new person he gave Aboriginal policy to, who dared to say that she would consider the Liberal party's support for the Government's proposed Aboriginal Land Fund. And, I would have thought that any Opposition party looking for a fresh start in society given the obscurantist views which Dr Hewson held on some of these issues, that Mr Downer would have taken them up. He didn't. I was interested to see the Anglican church spokesman today say that they would be critical of an Opposition that voted against the Land Fund because the point I'd made is "what is their objection?" - it is not a fiscal objection. They know that Aboriginal people can secure land from Mabo if they have a traditional connection with the land, but if they have been dispossessed of the land the only way they can benefit is not by the Mabo Native Title legislation, but by an acquisition program under the Land Fund. So, what is the point of objection other than they don't want to give black people land.

J: Opposition spokesperson Chris Gallus said today that any change wouldn't come until just before the next federal election.

PM: Yes, well, I think that is high cynicism for Downer to be around now saying oh, look, I'm opposed to this, the first thing I did as Opposition leader was quash the Land Fund, but I might consider it on the day before the election. We all just should say don't give us that cynical tripe Alexander, don't give us that.

J: Mr Keating, will there be a loosening up of the community rating at all in health?

PM: No, I knocked that on the head yesterday, no.

J: Prime Minister, in your speech-inside you said that it was hoped that by the year 2001, 95 per cent of 19 year olds would have completed Year 12 or post-school qualification. How many of those do you expect will have jobs to go to?

PM: Well, I think as the economy ... what we found in the 1980s, which is our last experience of this, if you get strong aggregate employment, trained people get jobs. I think the lesson of it is, that we want people trained and that's why we've invested so much in higher throughput in education, higher retention rates and a higher transference into tertiary institutions and now, lately, into TAFE.

J: Can you put a figure on how many ...

PM: No, no.

J: ... (inaudible) ...

PM: Well, more broadly what I'd like to see is a better understanding of the Australian constitution, of the elements of our democracy, the ethos of our democracy, these are things which, I think, should be well and truly transmitted in school and we are looking at ways now how we can improve the understanding of these primary things, these primary instruments of our Governments.

J: Mr Keating, you said in your speech that you'd like to strengthen the role of ANTA, how important is that change going to be in achieving the educational goals you set out today?

PM: I think vocational training has been the Cinderella of Australian education and the Government has now got very substantially increased retention rates in secondary school. As I've said, we've created 17 universities since the middle 1980s, but the weak link in Australian education is vocational education and training. This we tried to remedy and it's started to remedy in the *One Nation* statement of 1992 where we put together the Australian National Training Authority and committed over \$1 billion to growth within the sector. What we want to see is that sector working more closely with industries so that the training profile of industry better fits the ... well, put it this way, that TAFE's training profile better fits the profile of industry so that we are getting people trained with accredited certificates which they can use nationally and which really help business in their skills formation.

J: Prime Minister, are you concerned about the recent rise in the Australian dollar and do you believe that it is justified?

- PM: I'm not here to comment on the exchange rate. I did get asked ... do you work for Knight Ridder or something do you? I get all these weirdos who work for Knight Ridder ask me at doorstops about the exchange rates and interest rates.
- J: Mr Keating, with this actual group you are thinking of going to teach students more about ... should that actually involve an education about the republic and about the implications ...
- PM: I think, learning about the constitution apprises people of the fact that we've got a constitution which was designed by the British foreign office to look over the Australian government's shoulder. I mean, that will become very obvious when anyone goes through it. Now, the Statute of Westminster changed a lot of that, but it didn't change a lot of the thinking about the Australian constitution. I don't think a lot of people know about it. For instance, the Australian Cabinet is not mentioned in the Constitution yet, it is the central agency of change in our democratic structures outside of the Parliament. So, just to know about those things, I think, is important. This, I think, will lead to people questioning the structure we have. Now, as you know I'm all for that. That is, I believe that as I said yesterday, I'm sure Australia will become a republic, it is only a matter of time, but Alexander Downer along with Malcolm Fraser, along with Menzies, along with the others of his ilk believe that the Australian nation remodelling itself, resetting itself in the Asia-Pacific should have the head of state of another country as our head of state. As I quoted yesterday the Economist magazine, just in passing in a line which was in a column last week it said only colonies borrow the monarchies of other countries. Now, we are not a colony, but we are still borrowing the monarchy of another country.
- J: What about the flag issue?
- PM: I've said heaps about that.
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