



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP AND THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE UK, THE RIGHT HON TONY BLAIR MP, DOORSTOP, CAIRNS PORT AUTHORITY, 16 JULY 1995

E&OE PROOF COPY

PJK: Can I say what a pleasure it is to have Tony Blair in Australia. We are both in the same business and that has been modernising Labor parties which is a pretty tough thing to be doing at the best of times and I like to think, and I have said in this country and am happy to repeat it here, that one of the great structural changes in Australia in the last 12 years was actually the change to the Labor Party itself. Turning the Labor Party into a party of government has been a matter of enduring benefit to this country because most countries don't have the opportunity of modernising their political parties. This I am doing and this, of course, Tony Blair is doing. Beyond that, can I say that there is a very strong modern relationship with Britain. Britain is the largest investor in Australia. We are the second largest investor in Britain. We have long traditional links and I am delighted to see the Leader of the British Labour Party in this country renewing those linkages and giving us a chance to compare notes about how we see both our domestic and our international policy outlooks and again to talk about the things we have in common and to listen to each others experiences and to know that we are on a very interesting and rewarding endeavour in the things we are doing.

So, I'd like to say how glad I am to have Tony in Australia and it may not look to the travelling British press like winter, but it is. It is a strange sort of winter I know, but up here it is warmer than it is down south as you know and I am sure that a change of climate as it is will give us a chance to get to understand the Labour Party in Britain better and Tony we are pleased to have you here.

TB: Thanks very much Paul.

- J: Mr Blair, what can you take back from your consultations with Mr Keating and the Australian government back to Britain?
- TB: Well, obviously, the fact that the Australian Labor Party has won, is it five elections in a row? It seems to us a rather good record to take into account and emulate if we possibly can. But there are also, I think, very powerful lessons in the way that the Australian Labor government has delivered greater economic efficiency, very high rates of growth at the same time as keeping true to strong social values and the good social wage. Also, the Australian Labor Party and the British Labour Party have links going back over a long period of time. I was saying earlier this morning, although it has been the case that we have often looked to Left to Centre parties in Europe with which we have dialogue, in many ways the ties between the British Labour Party and the Australian Labor Party are even closer.
- J: Has Mr Keating passed his recipe for electoral success at a national level onto Mr Blair and if so what's in it?
- PJK: You have got to keep changing the recipe, this is the problem. We have talked about our electoral success, but I think, Tony has in a sense, summed up what we have been about. That is turning Australia into a modern, a sophisticated market economy, but in the context of a set of social policies which have underlined the premium we put on inclusion. That is, we have tried to, by a process of strong employment growth and equitable policies in such things as access and equity in education, in health, the whole training agenda, employment of course the great liberator of all, in these things, I think, we have produced a much more equitable and fair society, yet we have had faster rates of growth - double the rates of economic growth - of our conservative predecessors. If there has been any formula for why Labor has won five elections I would say that was it, that is we made a point of wanting to take the country along together. That there is no underclass and that we think together we are stronger. If we are together we are better, we are stronger, we are more cohesive and I think, this has been well appreciated by our community.
- TB: If I could add just one thing to that, I think, to me the record of the Australian Labor government is one of combining economic efficiency with a just and fair society. But it has also been one about giving a very clear sense of direction and purpose to government and having a very clear and profound understanding of Australia's place in the world and, I think, those are all things that obviously have a resonance in British politics too.
- J: You are at the head of a resurgent Labour Party in Britain, what do you think you might have to offer to a Labor Party here?

- TB:** I think the Labor Party here has resurged and the length of time it has been in government shows that. }But, obviously, what we have been trying to do with British Labour Party is not just update how we apply our values to the modern world, but in particular our key message and the message I will be delivering in the speech that I will be making tomorrow is that we live now in a world of massive economic, technological and social change and it is the Left to Centre parties that are best able to cope with that world of change because we are willing to plan and invest and organise our societies in order to cope with that. And if we fail to do that, the result is massive insecurity and it is providing security through a process of change which is what the modern agenda for the Left of Centre is all about.
- J:** Would that be the reason for what happened in Queensland this weekend, a massive insecurity in the community, they want to see a differentiation between Labor and the Coalition ...
- TB:** I like the link, but I really don't know that that is for me to comment upon.
- J:** You seem to be widely regarded as almost a certainty for the next Prime Minister of Britain and yet we have seen here on the weekend once again, a very unpredicted result, an unpredicted bad result for Labor in Queensland, does that sort of thing make you nervous?
- TB:** As people back home know, I am the eternal warrior against complacency and I don't take anything for granted at all. It is very nice when people tell me about opinion polls and all the rest of it, but the only things that decide general elections are general elections and that is why the British Labour Party carries on working to deepen that bond of trust that it is establishing. But we take nothing for granted and we work from now right until election day.
- J:** You are both going onto Rupert Murdoch's conference, one of the things you have in common unusually for Leaders of the Left is that Mr Murdoch seems to like you both.
- PJK:** Once you get to know us you can't help but like us.
- J:** How important was his endorsement for you as a factor of your winning the last general election? Can I also then ask, how important is it for Tony Blair to try to get a similar sort of endorsement for Labour at the next election in Britain?
- PJK:** I think all Labor parties ever ask for and I'm sure this is the case for the British Labour Party is equality of treatment. The chance to disseminate one's message - nothing more, nothing less. No one needs preference or asks for it. We have never had it and we were not endorsed by the News Corporation at the last election. In fact the majority of their papers came

out against us. But, I think, parties which are better win if they are able to transmit their message. And, I think, the very things that Tony Blair has mentioned about economic efficiency and social equity, these things make our country stronger and having a set of values which the public can identify with once they know what the policy structure is and the policy mix is, they can make their mind up. Let me say about this country, what we look for here most is - dare I say it - news. Our papers are too loaded with opinions and what we need here is a straight recitation of the news. If we can get that, then on that sort of wicket we can win. As News Corporation goes we are seeing, both of us, the News Corporation executives from around the world who meet every three years mostly in North America or in Europe, it happens to be here on this occasion. You are talking to people who are running media organisations in three continents, probably four soon, and it is a good opportunity to say, in our case where Australia is, where it is going, how we see the Asia Pacific, why we think News Corporation has done well to have its head quarters here and to generally pick up some of their views too about the way international telecommunications are going, the way the information highway is developing. I think it will be an interesting occasion.

- J: Mr Blair, will you be laying down any base lines as far as the media is concerned?
- TB: In the speech tomorrow, we will be setting out how we believe the Left of Centre can best respond to the massive economic, social and technological change and, of course, part of that is media and communications. But that is not all and what is absolutely essential is to show how we can provide the best security and stability - economically and socially - during this era of change. And that includes the media, but is not limited to it.
- J: But will you set up principles if you like, when you say this is what I believe in as far as the media is concerned?
- TB: Of course, and we will be doing that but we will be doing many other things as well. I think what is absolutely essential, the great task of all modern governments and why I believe that today's Labour Party is best able to achieve this is that we have to show how in this era of change, revolutionary change, that is sweeping the world - in technology, in media, in communications, in terms of economic challenge - we have got to show how we can best meet that challenge and guide our people through it and that can only be done by a government that understands the importance of allying a strong and prosperous economy with a fair and decent society.
- J: And regulating the market or not?
- TB: Of course, but that is only part of what is a much, much bigger picture.

- J: Mr Keating, do you think that the columnists in newspapers are inherently conservative?
- PJK: No, it is just that they are full of views and I am one of those old fashioned people who was brought up on newspapers where journalists actually reported news and that is what I think is the best sort of journalism. But we have now got around to, of course, where journalists interview other journalists on radio and television programs.
- J: When you were a young back bencher in 1972, there was a similar ... of the Labor Party then which is occurring ... what advice would you offer in the way of ...
- PJK: I don't think Mr Blair needs my advice on these things. Again, I repeat my point and I would be surprised if it wasn't his, that is without a handicap - that is being able to disseminate one's message - Labor parties can look after themselves very nicely thank you very much. Labor parties don't need preference or bias, they just need a straight go, but one of things which gives us a better go - all of us - is, of course, the diversity in the media. This is true in Australia where we now have much greater diversity than 10 years or so ago and the information highway itself holds out the prospect of much greater diversity than we have ever had, allowing people to take their news where they want it and not to have it wholesale or filtered for them. I think, this diversity of information in media is a very democratic process and must be good for parties like ours.
- J: Can I ask Mr Blair the message he has got for British people living in Australia who are on the other side of the world when changes take place in Britain.
- TB: There are really three reasons for me being here. First, it is important to build that relationship between Australia and Britain which is of immense importance both to trade and to foreign policy links between us. Second, of course, it gives me the opportunity to address possibly the largest media organisation in the world and put the Labour Party's case there. Thirdly, there are in some estimates, as many as a quarter of a million people living here who have the right to vote in a British general election. Now, that is a pretty important constituency and we want to make sure our message gets through to them. Thank you.
- PJK: Thank you very much indeed.
- ends