



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH DEAN BANKS/ROSS STEVENSON, RADIO 3AW
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- J: We are joined this morning by the Prime Minister.
- PM: Good morning, Dean.
- J: You are largely known to be nocturnal, as opposed to this early...
- PM: And I am largely that. But some invitations I can't resist.
- J: I was going to say, you're a week late, you know, the Grand Final was last week. The real one.
- PM: I know. Well, - for us - there's a Grand Final every 3 years.
- J: Oh - so we're in election mode now, are we.
- PM: No, no - you said the real one, and that's next year the way we're going.
- J: Sort of seems like we're in election mode.
- PM: Well, I suppose it does. I mean, but people have been saying this now for 18 months. You might remember John Hewson was still Opposition leader during this Parliament, and he said we were going to an election, and then Aléxander Downer said the same, and Mr Howard. But I, well, we're now into October, so it's not going to be early.
- J: Is it true you don't like travelling?
- PM: I don't like travelling?

- J: Yeah - I read something in one of the papers the other day.
- PM: No, no. I like travelling - I like getting about. I was in South Australia the day before yesterday, and Melbourne yesterday and today.
- J: We don't seem to see you down here much, though.
- PM: I come here lots - often. But I'm in and out, you know. I do things, and I generally shoot back home.
- J: But it's not really a public performance when you come to Melbourne?
- PM: Well, it depends how much coverage I get, I suppose. But I come here very often - I'm here every couple of weeks.
- J: Tell us, we do get reported comments of yours from time to time that sort of seep out of - they seem to seep out of - dinner parties to the effect that you say things like in Australia if you are not living in Sydney, you're camping out?
- PM: No - somebody falsely attributed those words to me. I, love Melbourne - the garden city of Australia.
- J: Tell us in your heart of hearts - when you get with your mates - your real mates, the ones where confidentiality is at a premium....
- PM: There's no such thing as confidentiality.
- J: But even when you get with them at a dinner party behind closed doors, do you ever give Melbourne a nice old bucketing?
- PM: No. I'm a great fan of Melbourne's. And I have tried to do some things here - particularly when things were low a couple of years ago - and they have basically happened, I think, a few of the things we have been involved with. And I have been very keen to see Victoria, you know, get its act together and to move on. Because this is a lovely city - the Treasury building for instance, is one thing that I was involved with. We did that in *One Nation* - cleaned it up, and provided the funding to turn that into, again, another building of important status that could be used for public purposes. And we have also been great supporters of Southbank...
- J: Home of the new casino?
- PM: Well, home of the new Casino, but a good development. The value in the city jumped the River. I have been vocal about Melbourne's skyline, about its architecture, about its town planning, I'm opposed to 100 storey buildings...

J: You've convinced me now that you are the greatest fan that Melbourne has in the world!

J: In fact, that's where that quote came from, wasn't it those years ago, that you said the disappointing thing about Melbourne now is that there aren't a lot of buildings that you can have a good perve at?

PM: Oh, I could have said something like that, but it's a bit crass for me, that, isn't it? But Melbourne has got a great architectural heritage about it. It's taken the sort of...the people have taken the natural topography and made something of it. If I look at Sydney - where I'm from - where there has always been that great advantage of the Harbour, which is the natural asset the city had, Sydney has never done as much with the rest of the place as the people of Melbourne have done with Melbourne. I mean, I think this is...you can see vista upon vista here of city-scapes, and really particularly suburb development, and suburb and views, they are - by and large - superior to most of Australia's cities.

J: You mention that word "election" a little bit earlier on - do you get a sense that, these days, with the parties being so close, that this next election may be an election without issues?

PM: Oh, it will be an election with issues. I said the other day, it will be a referendum on ideas.

J: But that's big picture stuff, isn't it?

PM: Well, I don't think so. I mean, ideas matter for the future, they matter for the sort of world and the country our children will live in. I mean, my children are now just becoming teenagers - it wasn't so long ago they were just little kids, and in 10 years' time, they will be well and truly into their adult lives, so we have got to think now about what sort of country we are going to be...

J: Is that sort of creating the issues for when the election runs?

PM: No, I think, but, say, some of the things we have been speaking about or I have been involved with - such as APEC [where] I'll be going up to Osaka in November - threading together a free-trade area in the Pacific to give Australia a place in the big markets for the first time ever, and a seat at a very big table. Now, some people might think it's a bit abstract, but it isn't. It matters to us now, but it will matter more to our children in a decade. I mean, these sorts of issues are the sort of country that we live in, the view we have of ourselves, the values we have - all these things I think are important.

J: They might be just a bit too big to be able to convey in 30 second sound grabs, though?

PM: I don't know - if you look at the OJ Simpson trial yesterday - what you saw yesterday was...

J: Do you think he's guilty?

PM: Well, what you saw there was a division of opinion around a division of values. Now, I think in this country we...this is a multi-cultural country - and I made this point last night - we're certainly not...we are doing the opposite to homogenising the culture, but we are certainly homogenising the values. And I think it is very important that we have a set of core values as a community where we mean something to each other, and we mean something to one another, and we don't take that sort of view which is very typified now of America that the strong take the best, and the devil takes the hindmost. And I think that is sort of a callous view of the world - that the strong prosper and the weak fall off the back of the truck - is something that the Labor Party, and I in particular, have always resisted. And a lot of this coming election will be about those sorts of things - about whether you do have a safety net for wages, whether you do have a social wage, whether you do keep Medicare.

J: Talking of Medicare, are you going to revamp it, according to a report in *The Australian* this morning it seems you are?

PM: Well, we're constantly looking at it, because it is constantly changing, because the quality of health services have changed, I think, for the better in a decade. The main thing is that we are getting any outcomes, I mean....

J: Is that a yes? You are going to give us a revamp...?

PM: We'll be doing some things with it, but again, I have said the other day, and I have just said to you here - this will be a referendum of ideas, and the Government has got plenty of ideas in the market place, and that Cabinet of mine is always brimming over with ideas - we have always got more things there than we can use. And I think this is the same in health. But, it is important that we keep the tone on Medicare so that it does serve the community well.

J: Do you think, Prime Minister, that you made a mistake some years ago when you were Treasurer to accept the advice of John Howard, and when Mr Howard told you that you should live in Canberra, instead of commuting all over the place? In other words, you have been stuck there for such a long, long time - do you feel that you're away from the Australian people? There's so many retired politicians say to us that, you know, that's cloud cuckoo-land up there?

PM: Well, I'm in Sydney or Melbourne virtually every week - if I'm in Sydney one week, I'll be in Melbourne the next, or Adelaide the next. I mean, I get around this country all time - all the time. And the other

thing is, we're not just sitting in a cell in Canberra - people come through the door, I mean, business people, community groups - you are constantly seeing a range of people. As well as, of course, dealing with the media. So, I love getting around Australia - I mean, I love the country, and I love looking at it, seeing it, talking to people, and I think I'm as in touch with it as any Prime Minister could have ever have been.

J: Have you cast your eyes to what you might do after politics - it occurred to me, I wonder whether having to make these repeated protests to the French is cruelling your post-Prime Ministerial job prospects in Paris?

PM: You mean for the Paris Option?

J: Yes.

PM: No, well, I think I have got a bit of time to do here, before I do any of that.

J: Well, having won the last one - which was described as the impossible win - is the next win optional for you?

PM: Oh no - they are never optional. No, you have got to go in hard after them - no-one gives you these things on a plate, you have got to earn them. The public are quite smart about all this - they say look, we make these characters earn our support - we get value from them that way. And when they see a tug-of-war going on, they say this is good - we are going to get some value here. So they like the contest - they like, you know - they like to hear the ideas. I mean, one of the strikes I am making against John Howard is Andrew Robb says he has got 98% of their policies finished. To which I say, well, why are you hiding them from the Australian people?

J: Because it's good politics?

PM: No it's not. I don't think it is good politics. I think the public are entitled for their leaders to give them the directions which the country ought go. To give them the shape of the sort of Government they would lead.

J: But you get a situation like Martin Ferguson bashing up the Coalition about the privatisation, and yet you have flogged off Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank and ANL and so on - or attempted to?

PM: Yes, but we have still put our policies in the market place. And I think that if you do that, you say to people well, this is what we stand for, but saying ha ha, look, we are going to be tricky here [and] we are now just going to give you a glimpse of them, like a sort of a dirty postcard, and pull it out of the sleeve, and give you a quick look at it

before you go and vote, this is the Howard view of the world. It's a view without integrity, in my opinion. I think honesty and credibility in public life is only about policies - it certainly starts with policies. And you know, they should be in the market place, and in getting them there, people can make a judgement. And they see where the value is, and they can make a decision.

J: Just the very thought of John Howard pulling a dirty postcard out of his jacket.

PM: Well, a policy postcard...(inaudible)...

J: Do you ever look at some of your former colleagues who have now retired and envy them their position - you know, you pick up *The Bulletin* every week, presumably you read Richo's article you know, where he is getting paid \$400,000 by Kerry Packer to churn out that stuff?

PM: I know, but they're all trying to get back in the game, aren't they? I mean, they're all victims for a microphone or a television camera.

J: Do you read Richo's column every week in *The Bulletin*?

PM: No. I don't read *The Bulletin*, much. *The Bulletin* has died as a magazine - years ago, I think. I mean, *The Bulletin* was a must-read thing 10-15 years ago, but it's a must-forget magazine these days.

J: What do you read?

PM: I read the newspapers, in the main.

J: Yep. Preferred paper?

PM: No, I read the Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Australian and The Financial review most mornings, and then when I get to work, I pick up the Courier Mail, and the Adelaide Advertiser and West Australian.

J: What do you expect from the Packer outlets whenever this next election is called? What do you anticipate from the Packer organs?

PM: Oh, well, I don't think it ends up being much different, whatever they think about you - what ever the proprietor's view is.

J: But do you think that the proprietor's view is going to, at some stage, filter through one of his outlets?

PM: In some respects. I mean, they will do the...60 Minutes will sort of get the message to do a softie on Howard, or something like that. But again, they're one segment. Proprietors are very...it's very hard for a

proprietor to program the news. It's like the proprietors of this station saying to you guys look, this is what you should be asking the Prime Minister. You would say oh come off it, wouldn't you?

J: Absolutely.

PM: Absolutely.

J: Peter Nixon asked me if I could ask you...

PM: He's an old mate of mine.

J: Nicko said...it's interesting you raised that 60 Minutes thing - that was about the closest we got to learn a little bit about this fella called Paul Keating. You have been in public life for what 26 years, yet we have had your sister sitting in that chair where you're sitting - we probably learned more about you from Annie than we have ever found out from you yourself?

PM: Well, I have had so many of these so-called colour pieces written about me....

J: You don't like any of those, do you?

PM: No. Basically, if I could do the job completely privately, I would. I don't really like the razzamatazz. That is, the so-called celebrity status of it. But, there's nothing about me that isn't written there somewhere, or said in some television program, or in some profile. I mean, there's been so many written over the years, that when someone comes and says look, we would like to do a profile on you, we say oh cut it out - cut it out, we have done so many.

J: Do you feel the Australian community knows you, though?

PM: I think they know me, back to front.

J: You puzzle me in that sense, because I remember Ros Kelly saying for example there are two of you - the one the public knows, and the one that she knows.

PM: Well, they certainly know the public me - I think they have seen me for a long time, now. Privately, we are all different privately I think probably - I mean, you're different privately than you are on radio, I'm sure of that.

J: Like you wouldn't believe.

PM: That's right. Well, I think we all are. We all are. We're a bit...we are different. And, of course, you're not in that sort of competitive environment, and so you behave differently. And I suppose it would

be good of the community saw more of that, but how do you do that? You can hardly invite the TV camera's in for brekkie, can you?

J: No. Here's a question for you I have been dieing to ask, Prime Minister. Is there any danger of getting Laurie Brereton to get the time of an air flight from Melbourne to Sydney down under about a day and a half?

PM: Well, I don't know. I mean, certainly if John Howard shuts that Third Runway down, it will be two and a half days.

J: But it is, I mean...

PM: You would grow old on the trip.

J: But I know just talking to people who travel from Melbourne from Sydney on an aeroplane, but it's just getting longer and longer.

PM: Well, just imagine if you cut 35% of Sydney's capacity out. I mean, this is what this thing with Howard was about last week. It wasn't so much about the runway, or about the travel time, it was to say this - he's been at me and others saying "we have got to take Australia to the next phase of micro-economic reform. The Labor Party can't do this - we're the blokes that will crack the tough nuts of the waterfront, and the airlines and the labour market. Okay, the government's done not a bad job, but they have come about as far as they can go, you had better give it to us". The greatest micro-economic change in Civil Aviation infrastructure in the last 20 years is the 3rd runway at Mascot in Sydney. And first whiff of grapeshot, first bit of pressure, and Mr Howard is about buckling under and cutting its capacity back. So what would he do on all the really hard things, like ports, wharves and the labour market? And the answer is buckle. That's the point - it wasn't a discussion about the airport so much, but the airport is still central. It's been the gateway to Australia, Mascot. It has the most international flights, and just to get the East Coast group working properly at Brisbane-Sydney-Melbourne.

J: It was working properly, though wasn't it?

PM: To get it working properly, you have got at least to have the capacity. See, a few years ago the Government de-regulated the airline system - we took away the 2-airline agreement. As a result, air fares dropped 25% - roughly 25%....

J: Yeah - am I right in saying we wound up with 2 airlines?

PM: But you have got a competitive system. A 25% fall in airfares, and 60% plus increase in traffic - 60%. In the last 3 years, 60% more people are travelling. Now, what that has done is put huge pressure on Sydney and Melbourne, but particularly on Sydney. And without

that 3rd runway, without those parallel operations, we would....I mean, God knows how long it would take you to get everywhere else.

J: Let me ask you a question - are you going to come to the Melbourne Grand Prix at Albert Park, which I remind you is on March 10, or have you got something else planned for that weekend?

PM: Well, Jeff has not invited me. He's keeping this one to himself.

J: We got a couple of tickets, if you want to come?

PM: Maybe you will let me have one?

J: Yeah, you're more than welcome. Score our Premier out of 10 for us?

J: Is he the biggest ally you have got in your hopes for re-election?

PM: Well, he is...yes, he is a complex character, is our Jeffery. He will do some things - that's what the public like about him, he'll get in and do some things. That's what I like about him. What I don't like about him is the sort of ideological cast of the Government -it's still basically the hard-hearted view, and if you see it writ large in the Federal arena, that means, you know, cuts in Government spending, it means cuts in payments to families, it means all those sorts of things.

J: A 6 maybe?

PM: Hmmm?

J: A 6?

PM: Oh yes, I'll give him a 6.

J: You pass him. And one word -we're out of time - we're out of time, one word answer - OJ Simpson, do you think he is guilty or not?

PM: Well, I think what is guilty is the circus which it was has meant that justice could never have really been done, one way or the other.

J: Prime Minister, thank you for joining us - maybe every 2 weeks, now, given your frequency in Melbourne.

PM: (inaudible)

ends.