



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF TARGET/TCFUA DEED OF AGREEMENT,
TARGET RETAIL STORE, MARIBYRNONG, MELBOURNE
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This is a milestone - indeed, a landmark - deed of co-operation, signed between a major union and a major retailing organisation. But it is more than that - it is something which is underlining what the whole spirit of co-operation at the workplace is about, about the consensual model that we have in this country in operating industrial relations. That is, a model where we believe that when business and labour come together and decide to run the economy co-operatively on a consensual basis, better things happen. We end up with low inflation, more growth, more employment, and a better environment at the workplace. As you know, we have had - I gave some figures yesterday that this year, we have lost 70 working days per thousand people at work...whereas, under John Howard, in 7 years during the period of Government in which he was Treasurer, they lost 590 working days per thousand. 590 compared to 70. Of course, in those days, the economy was strike-prone, there was no co-operation, there was a conflict model. As a consequence, we're seeing a much more cohesive, industrial scene - a more co-operative workplace, where we have got values of co-operation in the workplace, of consultation with employers, and, of course, under enterprise bargaining, a whole different notion of how the economy should run, how businesses should operate, how the employees can help the businesses be more productive, and how that extra earnings can be split between profits and wages.

Now, that's the model - that's the Accord model. What our opponents are about, basically is back to the conflict model. They are basically back to what they call labour market reform and flexibility, which they really mean flexibility downwards - it means losses in pay and conditions, and that's essentially what they're about. Now, what this is about is something completely different. It's about recognising the fact that there are 300,000 home-based workers in the textile industry, that for every worker that works in the textile industry at work, there are 14 that work at home. And that's an enormous workforce of

outworkers away from work and at home. And these are mostly women - mostly women from non-English speaking backgrounds, and most of them are Asian. And they are set up - classically - to be exploited by unscrupulous employers who will use them in the most unscrupulous ways to get work from them for - essentially - small change. Now, what this landmark deed of co-operation is about, is about one very large and important company - Target - showing what a good corporate citizen means by writing down what the ethics of a good employer should be. And I think Target has proved itself to be one of Australia's best corporate citizens in both the way it's behaved, and in doing this, it has declared that any exploitation of workers is unacceptable. And it has told this to its suppliers, so it's saying to suppliers don't supply us with garments which have been put together with blood money. Don't supply us with garments which have been put together by usury and exploitation of women at home.

Now, this is a big statement, and it says much about the ethical issues in the labour market, and much about the ethics in the way in which the Australian industrial relations are being transformed. Now, Target worked with the TCFUA to develop this agreement, and Target has been recognised by the union as an outwork best practice organisation. And that's going to matter, I think, in terms of the industrial relations that Target has, because I think the whole union movement appreciates this sort of sentiment, as does the Government, and that's why I'm here to mark the event. The execution of the deed of co-operation between Target and the TCFUA will, I think, be a watershed. It will help bring outworkers into the mainstream labour market, into the world of fair wages and decent conditions - into the world of social and economic justice. Now, this is what it means, and it is walking away from the dog-eat-dog kind of labour market that John Howard and Peter Reith want. It's walking away from the dog-eat-dog society that Jeff Kennett wants. It's walking to decency and fairness and equity in the way we live, the way we relate to one another, and we don't pretend we don't know there's 300,000 people working out there in sub-economic conditions. And we don't pretend that they're out of sight and out of mind. Rather, we put them up in lights and say that they are as much a part of the workforce as anybody else, and that they need to be treated properly.

The Agreement, I think, is in line with the spirit and letter of the Accord, and it's in line with the motivating ideal which runs like a seam through our national life, and that is - as I often say, reflecting what I in fact find here in Australia - that we are strongest, all of us, when we work together. When we work together and have regard for one another, we're stronger and we're better. So, I am very glad that the Government has been able to assist in the promotion of this agreement and the protection of outworkers. And in response to a request from the TCFUA, we fronted the National Outworker Campaign through our workplace reform program, which reached into the community. Now, John Howard attacks us giving money to unions. You will often find the Coalition attacking the Government for so-called "giving money to unions". But part of it is something like this - the Workplace Reform Program, and the National Outworker Information Campaign, which finds out about the conditions people are working in at home in these circumstances,

and then tries to find out the truth about their conditions, to educate workers about their entitlements, and employers about their responsibilities. In other words, it's money well-spent, and money properly spent.

The result of the campaign was the TCFUA's report "The Hidden Cost of fashion", which shed considerable light on the vulnerability of workers. Now, in our Budget of 95-96, the Government announced a new \$33 million development package for the TCF industries, which includes funding for a new Outworker Information Campaign, and research into contracting out in the clothing sector. And Accord Mark VIII recognises special needs of home-base workers, and committed the Accord partners - including the Government, of course - to work towards ensuring that minimum standards apply to outworkers as much as to other workers.

Now, can I also say we have acted on the social security front as well. Employers have been known to force out workers to take the dole illegally, saying get out there and take the dole, stay at home and make work, and we will give you something for the piece work at home, in order to drive down their wage bill. This is the sleaziest kind of exploitation. And they threaten to expose their employees if they speak out, so that there are a lot of people - particularly women - frightened about the fact that they might have been on the dole, but at the same time earning some piece work income from an employer. Now, because the situation for outworkers has been so difficult, and because without special assistance many of them would remain outside the mainstream, the Government has now amended the social security legislation to provide an amnesty for affected workers. This means that the social security debts of outworkers in the clothing and textile industries will be waived if DSS is advised of undisclosed income between the 1st of December 1995, and the 31st of May 1996. So, we should say to all those people out there - especially, and in the main, women - who might have picked up the dole, who may have picked up the dole, but who have been doing piece work for an unscrupulous employer, and even perhaps been threatened by an unscrupulous employer with being exposed, don't be afraid any longer. You can tell DSS about it, and you will qualify under the amnesty. So, we are very proud as a Government to have played a role in buttressing the protection extended to home-based workers, and I think the deed of co-operation will be good for Australian workers, and it will be good for Australia.

It's the sort of thing - let me say unambiguously - that the Labor Party stands for. I'm very pleased to see Bob Sercombe and Kelvin Thomson with us today, our Candidates in the next Federal election. And these are the sort of values that we stand for. I mean, the Labor Party is a community-based party. It represents no vested interests - it represents just the broad mass of the people, and these are the things - the thing we're doing today - is the sort of the thing that only Labor Governments stand for, that you will never see from the Tories. I made this point yesterday about Jeff Kennett - I mean here, he is making the run for the bottom line of the Budget, but he never knows when to stop. He never knows what is important to a civilised society. And when someone has had a heart attack, or a child is threatened, there should

be an ambulance there to pick them up. There should be a hospital to receive them. And getting to the point where we are putting chains on railway station toilet blocks is about the bottom of the pack. And now, of course, herding vehicles - herding vehicles, funnelling vehicles, siphoning vehicles - into roads which are just a common right.

I mean, there is a thing called the social contract. And the social contract means that you have the right of free movement, the right to do things. Sure, we obey the laws of the nation and the state, we're all part of the contract providing one partner doesn't squeeze it too much. But in Victoria it is being squeezed too much - the social contract is being put under threat. And when they brazenly stare down the parliament and say things that are not true, Mr Kennett chides journalists "well, what are you going to do about it?". Meanwhile, the flags are hanging at 45 degrees outside the Reichstag over there in Treasury Place. And he's for labour market flexibility, like John Howard and Peter Reith - they're for labour market flexibility. Which means they will all see the executives taking very strong increases in pay, they all think they should enjoy a lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. But they would be very happy to have migrant women, from non-English speaking backgrounds, working away at home on sub-economic rates of pay and saying to them if you happen to be on the dole at any stage, we will threaten you with exposure. I mean, this is the sort of ethic that comes from the sort of "greed is good" mentality. So, there is something important being done here today, about the values of this country - the ideals of Australia, about the egalitarianism, about the fairness. And when a big company like Target stands up, and a big union stands up, and join hands together, in national terms, it is entirely noteworthy. It's entirely noteworthy, and it is an important change to the fabric of our society, and the sort of country we have become, and I hope we will always be. So I'm very happy indeed to formally present copies of this Deed of Co-operation to Target and the TCFUA for execution, and with all the hopes and expectations for a better deal for workers. And can I again extend my very sincere congratulations to John Irish, to Tony Woolgar, to Brendan Soraghan who have been involved in the negotiation, to the TCFUA in the broad, to Kevin Boyd as President, and just say how different, and how nice it is, to be at a function like this, instead of some grasping, greedy little outfit that wants to rip off ordinary Australian people to line their pockets and make their corporate earnings just a little bit bigger. Thank you very much indeed.

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