



**PRIME MINISTER**

25 September 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN**

E&OE.....

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister thanks for your time.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Very nice to be here Ray.

**MARTIN:**

Now why are you meddling wantonly in the internal affairs of China?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I'm not.

**MARTIN:**

It's what they say you are doing.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I think they've created a problem out of nothing. I mean, it was never on for the Prime Minister of Australia not to meet the Dalai Lama. I am going to meet him and, he is a religious leader of some consequence....

**MARTIN:**

He's also a political leader.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes, well that's not, you know, it is not uncommon for religious leaders to also be a bit political on occasions.

**MARTIN:**

The Chinese see him as a traitor and a troublemaker.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't see him in those terms and what I simply say is that there is no reason why my extending the normal courtesy of meeting him should effect the relationship between Australia and China. I've made that clear to the Chinese.

**MARTIN:**

But they've made it clear that they will, that there is a price to pay.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I hope they don't carry through with that threat but I don't bow to threats. No self-respecting Prime Minister of this country will ever bow to that kind of threat.

**MARTIN:**

Is it worth it though PM?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes it is.

**MARTIN:**

In terms of a short meeting with the Dalai Lama that you may freeze out Australian banks and business for a year?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't believe it will be that bad, but yes... well, the answer is yes it is worth it because the upholding of the principles on which this country is built is always more important than the possibility of some transient commercial difficulty, always more important.

**MARTIN:**

All right, now should Jewish Australians be protected from the words of people like historian David Irving?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, whether he is here or overseas, his words reach... let me say, I think David Irving is, to put it bluntly, a crack-pot historian. Anybody who says that the holocaust didn't occur is a nutter.

**MARTIN:**

But beyond that, if you were a Jewish Australian and you lost loved ones and family and Mum and Dad etc... it is more than just a nutter, it's hurtful and hateful.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Of course it is. Now, look, you are asking me whether if he applies again will we admit him. The answer is that will be considered according to the criteria and I'm not going to pre-empt what that decision will be. He hasn't even made the application yet. There was an element of opportunism and gimmickry in his jumping on the television yesterday and I'm not going to play his game of opportunism and gimmickry.

**MARTIN:**

All right don't play that, but did you support him being banned before, personally, did John Howard support that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I wasn't the Leader of the Opposition at that time. I don't know if I was asked. I don't know that I... I think it is one of those things that is always a difficult choice between on the one hand upholding the principle of Voltaire that I don't agree with what he says but I'll defend his right to say it, and also recognising that a significant section of the community can be offended by words. They are always difficult calls those. I'm not going to debate the merits of an application that's yet to be lodged. It will be lodged, so he says, and it will be dealt with but...

**MARTIN:**

What are the merits John?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

What are what merits?

**MARTIN:**

What are the merits of him coming here and talking in Australia? You said (inaudible)...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, the merits of his application.

**MARTIN:**

What are the merits? What are the merits to someone coming here and saying the sorts of things he says?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Ray, I'm not going to debate an application that hasn't been lodged. Now come on, I've said that.

**MARTIN:**

All right. Should Australians, other Australians - Aborigines and Asians - be protected from people like Pauline Hanson?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, are you saying that somebody shouldn't be allowed to say what she said? I would say in a country such as Australia people should be allowed to say that. I'm not going to respond specifically to what she said because I don't announce the policies of my Government by reference to the speech of another. If you want to ask me questions about my Government's policy on immigration or Aboriginal Affairs or anything like that, I'm very happy to answer your question.

**MARTIN:**

All right. Is Australia in danger of being swamped by Asians?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I don't believe that. We have a non-discriminatory immigration policy in this country. The level of that immigration in the composition of it between skilled and family reunion is always something that can be altered according to the national interest, but...

**MARTIN:**

Well, should we stop immigration as she says?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well we reduced immigration only a couple of months ago.

**MARTIN:**

Should we stop until we get unemployed fixed?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Ray, we, by definition, have said that it shouldn't be stopped altogether, but we've said it should be less and we've reduced it. I do believe there is a link between the high level of unemployment amongst certain groups in Australia and some past immigration levels in the composition of our programme in the past.

**MARTIN:**

Would you blame Asian immigration for our unemployment levels?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I'm not blaming immigration from any particular source. I think I do blame the composition. I think it got out of whack and I think there's been too great an emphasis which we have addressed...

**MARTIN:**

What is that, too many Asians?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, no, too big a composition in the family reunion component and too little in the skills area where people find it easier to get employment.

**MARTIN:**

Should we abandon, as she says, multiculturalism?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I believe in a diverse society and I think this country has been enriched by that diversity. I also believe that overriding people's individual ethnic commitments should be a commitment to Australia and the core values of this country. Now, that's my view.

**MARTIN:**

So you're in favour of the current policy?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I'm in favour of what I've just said. See different people ascribe different meanings to things like multiculturalism and that's the problem with one of these debates.

**MARTIN:**

All right, your speech at the weekend, you said that since the Howard Government came into office, effectively for six months, the pall of censorship has been lifted. What censorship did we have?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

If you disagreed with the former Government you were punished. I mean, I know lots of people who felt intimidated out of expressing their views on certain things because they felt that to do so was to have yourself branded as a racist or a bigot or somebody who was prejudiced.

**MARTIN:**

In today's paper Jeff Kennett disagrees with ....

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Jeff and I periodically, we periodically disagree on some things.

**MARTIN:**

He says we always have had great debate and free talk.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, we disagree occasionally on things but that shows what a tolerant party the Liberal Party is.

**MARTIN:**

The Liberal Party wasn't so tolerant of Pauline Hanson before the election. Did you agree with kicking her out?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes.

**MARTIN:**

Would you have her back in the party now with what she said?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, she's not interested in coming back and I don't think the issue arises.

**MARTIN:**

Well, isn't that hypocritical as it has been accused?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well how's it hypocritical?

**MARTIN:**

Well you said something about free speech and you kicked her out of the party.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

But we had a right to do that because we disagreed with what she said.

**MARTIN:**

But wasn't that free speech?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes, but it was also a free exercise of our authority to withdraw an endorsement.

**MARTIN:**

Some people have said that your speech at the weekend was an endorsement of Mrs Hanson's comments, was it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That speech had nothing to do with Pauline Hanson. People know that the views that I expressed on free speech and political correctness were expressed long before, long before Pauline Hanson made her maiden speech in Parliament. She had a right to say what she thought. I will say what I believe, I'm not going to say what I believe through the prism of responding to what somebody else has said.

**MARTIN:**

But you do it almost everyday in Parliament. If it's Kim Beazley or Paul Keating you do it. Why don't you...?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, Kim Beazley is the alternative Prime Minister of Australia and Paul Keating's the former Prime Minister. I think they are in a different situation than an Independent member of Parliament.

**MARTIN:**

All right John Howard, thanks for your time.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Pleasure.