

Australian  
**Labor**



**TRANSCRIPT**

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**E&EO TRANSCRIPT  
DOORSTOP  
SYDNEY  
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***SUBJECT/S: Asylum seekers; Tony Abbott's royal commission.***

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:** This morning we have witnessed an extraordinary interview from the Prime Minister where he refused to rule out paying people smugglers, this is astounding. This comes from the same Prime Minister who was willing to provide blank cheques to buy Indonesian fishing vessels, who now has the cheque book open again and seems willing to pay people smugglers. We need to be reducing the pull factors in this journey. What kind of a pull factor is it to a people smuggler knowing that if they encounter an Australian Navy vessel they will receive an Australian taxpayer funded cheque? Now I acknowledge that both the Immigration Minister and the Foreign Minister have said that this did not happen, so we have a discrepancy here and it is absolutely incumbent on the Government to tell the Australian people where the truth lies. But this is again a problem in the fact that this whole area of policy is being conducted under a shroud of secrecy which has no national security element to it but is merely a media strategy and denies the Australian people the opportunity to scrutinise policy which is most certainly in the public interest. Now I understand that this afternoon the Prime Minister will be holding another press conference, if he confirms what he has said this morning then every Australian should be concerned. But if he alters his position then it is incumbent on the Prime Minister to explain to the Australian people since this morning what has changed. Are there any questions?

**JOURNALIST:** Do you think that money was paid to the people smugglers by the Australian Government?

**MARLES:** Well we've had a Prime Minister this morning who has refused to rule that out and so it is utterly imperative that the Government clarifies what it has done

in relation to this today. The Australian people need to know whether or not our government is paying people smugglers because if they are that is a very dangerous development indeed.

**JOURNALIST:** Would it be illegal?

**MARLES:** Well, whatever it is it creates a pull factor that we should not have in this situation. I mean to create a situation where people smugglers, I mean people smugglers there place should be facing prosecution with the full force of the law, not be put in a situation that when they turn up beside an Australian navy vessel they are in effect next to a floating ATM.

**JOURNALIST:** Would that, do you think it would attract more boats?

**MARLES:** Well what sort of a pull factor is it when people smugglers know that if they encounter the Australian Navy they are a chance to receive an Australian taxpayer funded cheque that is an enormous problem it is a dangerous development and we need to hear some clarity from this Government today about whether that is the practice they are engaging in.

**JOURNALIST:** Would it not save taxpayers money because we don't have to look after the asylum seekers for two years in Nauru?

**MARLES:** I think to create a situation where there is an encouragement for people smugglers to encounter Australian Navy vessels so they can get an Australian taxpayer funded cheque is not going to save the taxpayer any money at all it creates a pull factor which I think most Australians would be utterly amazed to know actually exists, if it does.

**JOURNALIST:** Do you think Bill Shorten has still got some questions to answer about his time at the AWU? I mean this morning there are reports that one hundred and sixty eight jockeys were signed up to the union without their knowledge, do you think that's acceptable?

**MARLES:** Let me say this in relation to Bill Shorten, I've known Bill Shorten obviously for a very long period of time, I knew him throughout his time as a union official and through much of that time I myself was an official at the ACTU. Bill Shorten and everything he has done through his union career has stood for defending the interests of working people and working to improve their conditions. If you want to look at all the industrial agreements that Bill Shorten was a party to negotiating and ultimately signing, what was at the heart of every one of those was improving the conditions of employment for the workers that they covered and doing so in a broad sense making sure that was good for the enterprises as well. I mean Bill Shorten was an exemplary union official and if what this ultimately boils down to is a trial of Bill Shorten's union career I am sure that Bill and the Labor Party welcomes that because what you will see is one of the stellar union careers that we have had in recent times. Bill Shorten's reputation was for concluding quality industrial agreements and that is, I think we are all very happy and Bill himself will be very happy to answer for that and stand for that.

**JOURNALIST:** If that's the case then do you think he, it's incumbent on him to break it down and answer any questions that relate to his time in the union?

**MARLES:** Well I mean there have been all sorts of allegations that have been raised about a range of people and I'm not about to go into all of those and I think to be frank a whole lot of those allegations are beneath contempt. The fact of the matter is when you look at Bill Shorten's conduct as a union official and I say this having witnessed that up close. Bill Shorten's career as a union official has been exemplary and the agreements to which he has been a party have been quality industrial agreements in the interests of the workers that were covered by them.

**JOURNALIST:** Do you think it's proper or acceptable for companies to pay union fees on behalf of them, just what's your opinion?

**MARLES:** Well again there are a whole lot of allegations that have been made here and I am not going to go down the path of seeking to answer a whole lot of allegations which are frankly beneath contempt. What is being sought to do here is to impeach the credibility of a person who has had an exemplary union career, one that he should feel very proud about and one that absolutely will stand the test of any scrutiny.

**JOURNALIST:** That then asking your opinion as a former senior union official do you think it's acceptable –

**MARLES:** I am not about to get into the business of answering every allegation which is out there in relation to this royal commission, I'm just not going to do it.

**JOURNALIST:** I'm just asking a question about one matter -

**MARLES:** The question, the question, yeah well the question at the moment is what is being said in relation to Bill Shorten and what I'm making absolutely clear to you is this; the agreements that Bill Shorten was party to were absolutely quality industrial agreements.

**JOURNALIST:** Well forget about Bill Shorten for a minute are you aware that sometimes companies pay union members membership fees on behalf of them and what do you think about it?

**MARLES:** Well again I am not about to entertain questions which go to all the allegations which have been put in place in this royal commission, I'm not going to walk down that path. The question at hand here is people seeking to impeach the credibility of Bill Shorten and his union career I can absolutely say with the authority of having seen that career up close, the agreements that Bill Shorten negotiated were quality industrial agreements which were done with the interests of the workers involved in them at heart and did one thing and that is improve their conditions. Thank you.

**ENDS**