

RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO

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TELEVISION INTERVIEW
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SUBJECT/S: *Live export ship docked in Fremantle with confirmed cases of coronavirus; the Prime Minister's address to the National Press Club; State Borders*

PATRICIA KARVELAS, HOST: The Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles joins me now. Richard welcome.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LABOR LEADER: Good afternoon Patricia how are you?

KARVELAS: I want to start with this WA cluster. Is this another Ruby Princess in the making?

MARLES: Well it's really important that it's not and it's critical we hear from Peter Dutton, literally right now about how this was allowed to happen and what is the plan. I mean, I think there is an understandable degree of anger in Western Australia- which have done so well in respect of the control of this disease, to see this ship be allowed to make port in circumstances where there are infections on board. It's absolutely critical that we get an explanation from Peter Dutton about how this happened and what the plan is from here.

KARVELAS: As we've been reporting, six crew members on that live export ship in Fremantle have tested positive for the virus, and the Premier Mark McGowan says the Federal Department of Agriculture knew crew members on board had elevated temperatures but they did not tell the Fremantle Port Authority. You say Peter Dutton needs to answer, but it's the Agriculture Department, isn't it, that's actually in David Littleproud's area?

MARLES: It may well be that there are other departments involved, ultimately Australian Border Force is responsible for our borders. If it turns out that there is a Commonwealth Department which had the heads-up that there was an issue here, then that only further raises the need for us to hear from the Federal Government right now about how

in has been allowed to happen. I mean, we've all seen what happened with Ruby Princess, and the contribution that it ultimately made to the total number of cases throughout the country. It is critically important that this not be another Ruby Princess. The Government- the Federal Government must actually stand up and answer what happened here, what they knew, before they allowed this ship to make port. And what the plan is from here.

KARVELAS: The WA Premier did say he doesn't want to point fingers at this time, that he is concerned but is to a degree disappointed with his language. Does this demonstrate, if we zoom out, Ruby Princess, now this story that's breaking and of course more details will emerge in the next couple of hours and days- does it demonstrate that there is a fundamental problem between the State authorities and the Federal authorities and there needs to be substantial changes made?

MARLES: I think there just needs to be responsibility taken by Peter Dutton, by the Federal Government, by Australian Border Force, for their policy that it's responsible for; and that is our nation's border. There's no question that they're responsible for the country's border. You can't contract that out to a State. What we've seen is a ducking and weaving on the part of the Federal Government in all these matters. They actually need to take responsibility, explain what has happened, what they knew, the basis on which they allowed these decisions to be made and what the plan is from here. This is squarely in the Federal Government's domain. And we need to be hearing from them straight away. It's fine to hear from Government Ministers on the good days, but when there is a difficult issue- such as this- you often see them go missing in action. Now is a time we need an explanation. I can understand the sense of disappointment, if not anger which is being felt by those in Western Australia.

KARVELAS: Let's move to the Prime Minister's huge speech today and what he had to say. Scott Morrison revealed that the Government will dump the Ensuring Integrity Bill. Do you accept that this is an action of good will towards consensus politics on this key area?

MARLES: Well firstly, I don't think there was a lot of life left in the Ensuring Integrity Bill to begin with. But it's a good thing that the Government have said they're going to shelve this. I think it would be good if they made that official and remove it from the notice paper. But we didn't hear a lot of detail from the Government about what their intent is, in relation to industrial relations. It's fine to go and book the room, but there's more to industrial relations than simply doing that. If you take award simplification for example, that can mean a whole lot of different things, in a whole lot of different context and we didn't hear detail from this Government. I think Australian workers will want to know whether or not their workplaces are going to remain, whether they will become more secure in terms of their employment, whether their rights at work are safe, whether they can expect to continue to have the take-home pay that they do and whether they can expect to get wage increases in the future. These are the normal basics of life in an employment setting. That's what people want to hear. And we didn't hear anything about that from Scott Morrison today.

KARVELAS: Isn't that fair enough to a certain extent, because what's going to happen is the Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter is going to establish working groups, employers and unions, to look at the five areas - enterprise agreement-making, casuals, compliance, Greenfields agreements, so they're starting from a position of not telling us the outcome

because it's about negotiation, isn't that fair enough?

MARLES: Patricia, what they have said in relation to compliance, for example, is that people should get paid what they're entitled to and people should comply with the law. That is completely appropriate, that is spot on and the Government finds itself able to say that. I would have thought, when we are experiencing one of the highest rates of casualisation in the developed world, when we have seen employment become less secure during the period of this Government, that it would equally be easy for the Government to say they want employment to be more secure in the future, not less, but they haven't said any of that. So my point here is that things have been put on the table but there are a lot of questions that need to be asked about what is the Government's intent when it comes to pursuing industrial relations reform. It's one thing to book a room, but you actually have to see what the Government comes to the table with-

KARVELAS: Sure, but previously Labor said the Government just wants to be ideological. Didn't we hear today from the Prime Minister, an indication that he doesn't want to pursue ideology. He says everyone needs to put down their weapons, including clearly business and the Coalition itself.

MARLES: Yes, but it's one thing to say words. In terms of backing it up with what that means and whether the Government now is going to be for employees having rights at work, whether they are going to be for casual employees having more security, whether they are going to support the collective right of working people to negotiate agreements. These are the fundamental questions the Government avoided. It is one thing to use kind of glib phrases like, we need to put weapons down, and let's get around the same table, but ultimately what is it the Government will bring to the table? They've set the bar here and we will see what actually plays out over the next few months, in the time frame they set themselves in terms of making real progress. But I didn't hear a lot of substance in what the Government said today about what it actually means or intends to do in relation to industrial relations reform. And given the history of Liberal Governments in this space, I think it's not unfair that most Australian workers will feel a chill down their spine at the thought of it.

KARVELAS: But I just spoke to a union leader who said he didn't feel a chill going down his spine, he said he was happy to be invited to the table- that's the head of the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Clearly the union movement is happy to have a seat on the table.

MARLES: And it is fine to be talking. The question is; what does the Government bring to the table. Let's be clear here as well; this is a government which barely recognised the trade union movement before this crisis happened. You know, it's a very sad thing that it's taken a crisis of this kind for the Government to acknowledge the significance of the trade union movement and to think that is a group of people worth talking to. Okay, it is good that that is now happening. The question really is; what is the Government going to bring to that table and exactly what reform will occur?

KARVELAS: And does Labor want to be at the table?

MARLES: Well, it's a matter for the Government of the day to be having a conversation with

trade unions. We speak to trade unions all the time about what-

KARVELAS: No but I mean, as the Government negotiates all of this with these working groups, does Labor want an invite?

MARLES: That's a matter for the Government about how they do that. But let's be clear; we will be very clear in our voice in terms of advocating for the rights of working people. That's central to our DNA and what we're about as a Party and as a movement- and we're not going to be shy about that, whether we're at the table or not.

KARVELAS: Just finally, Pauline Hanson is trying to raise money on her Facebook page for a challenge, a legal challenge, to close borders domestically, saying that they're causing economic and social damage. Do you accept that they are causing economic damage?

MARLES: The borders being closed is an act of physical distancing which obviously has an economic impact, but obviously also has been critically important in terms of dealing with the disease that we have been in a way that we've avoided the kinds of scenes-

KARVELAS: But it does causes economic damage, in your view?

MARLES: Well, all the social, physical, distancing measures have. We all understand that. The closing of the borders is simply a function of that. The real point here is, as physical distancing measures are eased, they need to be done so in a way where we are cautious, not just from a health point of view, but from an economic point of view, because if we walk down this path too quickly and coronavirus takes off again, it would be economically devastating to have to go into some form of second lockdown. So we want to make sure from an economic point of view that we are walking this road very carefully. But you would expect, or at least I would, that the Federal Government is leading the way in terms of a question around the borders within our country. And instead what we have got is the States and the Federal Government all having a massive argument with each other, rather than the cooperative federalism which would see us easing this particular physical distancing measure, in a way which is agreed by all the States and the Commonwealth as they are concerned. The Government speaks a big game when it talks about cooperative federalism. I mean, at the end of the day; renaming the Council of Australian Governments, the National Cabinet is not the greatest contribution to cooperative federalism we've seen. When the reality is that something as fundamental as this actually ends up being litigated in the courts, I think it speaks to the failure of leadership on the part of Scott Morrison when it comes to leading a national response here.

KARVELAS: Richard Marles, thanks for coming on.

MARLES: Thanks Patricia.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.