



**RICHARD MARLES MP  
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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA  
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***SUBJECTS: The Prime Minister's address to the National Press Club; Belt and Road.***

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LABOR LEADER:** Today's speech by the Prime Minister was an admission of failure. Taken at face value, it's a recognition of seven lost years by a tired Government which has found nothing but old solutions. The Government talks about the importance of resilient manufacturing and yet this is the Government which goaded the car industry offshore and which has presided over a massive reduction in manufacturing. The Government talked about the importance of getting an energy policy right and yet this is a Government which is on its 19<sup>th</sup> energy policy. The Prime Minister spoke about the importance of universities but it's his Government which has been strangling university funding. The Prime Minister talked about the importance of science and research but it's his Government which has cut money to CSIRO hand over fist, and at times has been absolutely anti-science. And this Government is now talking about seeing a salvation and skills and training, skills and training are really important but it is Scott Morrison's Government which has cut \$3 billion dollars from skills and training since it came to office, such that we have 140,000 fewer apprenticeships and traineeships. If it wants to see the future built through skills and training we're unlikely to see it from a Government which has allowed the VET sector to bleed out. And the Government is talking about the importance of industrial relations. We welcome the shelving of the Ensuring Integrity Bill. And sure it's a good thing to get people round the table. But I can tell you there's a lot more to industrial relations than simply booking the room. And the idea that a Liberal Government is about to engage in industrial relations reform will send a chill down the spine of every Australian worker. We do need to be bringing Australian's together at this moment but this is a Government, and a Prime Minister that has been more responsible for pulling Australian's apart than any other. You only need to look at the failed Jobkeeper scheme; the importance of a wage subsidy in the midst of this crisis is something that Labor has been making clear from the outset. And the Prime Minister was opposed to it. He was dragged kicking and

screaming to the plate and when Jobkeeper was finally put in place some, workers got it, some workers didn't- and it was pretty hard to understand the difference between the two. And then just last Friday we discover that there is a \$60 billion failure in the way in which this program had been budgeted. This is the single biggest Budget failure of any Government since Federation. It's more money than the entire Global Financial Crisis stimulus. And it means that just this time last week, the Government imagined that it was spending \$60 billion more on what turns out to be absolutely nothing. A Government which has \$60 billion removed from reality is a Government which has lost any claim whatsoever to economic credibility. And ultimately that's the rub, because the Government is talking about bringing the economy out of ICU- the truth is that the Australian economy barely had a heartbeat before we got into the COVID crisis. Scott Morrison was presiding over an economy in which he had doubled the debt. He was presiding over an economy which had anaemic growth, where underemployment was rife, where we were seeing record low wage growth- and that's the basis upon which we went into the COVID crisis. Today's speech was such a lost opportunity, you know we heard lots of slogans and lots of marketing, Jobseeker, Jobkeeper and Jobmaker, really hope that it doesn't end up being a Jobblunder. But at the end of the day, this is the most significant moment of reconstructing or reimagining the Australian economy that we have seen since the end of the Second World War. And all we got today was tired old leftovers from this Prime Minister and this Government.

**JOURNALIST:** Has Labor essentially been wedged as a result of this Accord 2.0? The Prime Minister apparently has already had discussions with the ACTU Secretary Sally McManus, so they do seem to be talking about some sort of reform agenda?

**MARLES:** I think the remarkable point to make here is that it's taken a crisis of this kind to have the Prime Minister understand that the trade union movement exists- and that the President of the ACTU is a person worth ringing. There should be nothing remarkable about the Government of the day speaking to The Australian Council of Trade Unions and that's all that's happening. And that the Government- the Prime Minister seeks credit for doing something today which he hasn't done for the last seven years seems to me to be astounding.

**JOURNALIST:** Mr. Marles, you said that the Liberal-Coalition Government seeking to go down the path of industrial relations will send a shiver down the spine of workers. When the Prime Minister is putting on the agenda, Greenfields agreements which is what Labor campaigned for at the last election, compliance and enforcement so that businesses pay their employees correctly. What areas are you actually concerned about that would send a shiver down the spine of workers?

**MARLES:** Well there was a lot that was unsaid today in what the Prime Minister remarked. And ultimately all we really got of substance was that the Prime Minister has booked the room. Well that's all well and good and it's fine about getting people around the table but I think the Prime Minister needs to be upfront about what it is that he exactly is talking about in terms of Industrial Relations reform. When he talks about simplifying awards, what does that mean in terms of the security of workers employment? What does that mean about the rights that people have in their workplaces? And what does it mean about getting Australians back to work? You know all of these questions remain very open and when you look at the history of Liberal Governments engaging in Industrial Relations reform, I think every Australian

worker is completely justified in feeling a chill go down their spine.

**JOURNALIST:** What do you make of the timeline, the Government wants the negotiation on these five issues to be conducted over the next four months. Are you expecting to see some legislation, changes to legislation in that period or after that period?

**MARLES:** Well I think it's really important that the Government makes clear what their agenda is. I mean it's fine to get people around the table but what is it that the Government is going to put ultimately in terms of Industrial Relations reform? And, what legislation does it expect to bring to the Parliament? Again, there's not a lot of detail here, there's a lot of slogans and marketing but at the end of the day we actually got to hear from the Government about what their plans are.

**JOURNALIST:** What are the areas of consensus between the Labor Party and the Coalition on industrial relations?

**MARLES:** Well, Labor believes in the importance of workers being able to work together collectively in negotiating their terms and conditions of employment. Labor believes in the significance in that regard of enterprise bargaining. Now these are principles that have not been accepted by Coalition Governments over the years. I think it's really important to understand exactly what is the Government's position when it comes to the rights that employees enjoy in their workplace? What is now going to happen to penalty rates for example? What is the Government's plan in respect of that? And how is the Government going to move issues forward in terms of providing job security in the workplace or are they going to make that worse?

**JOURNALIST:** So, you have outlined some differences, what are the similarities?

**MARLES:** Well I mean it's for the Government to try and outline that. But at the end of the day you know we see a lot of hollow words from the Government about where it's going. But we actually need to hear what are the Government's plans and give an assurance to Australian workers that their rights at work won't be changed, that their job security won't be made worse and that their take home pay won't be made worse.

**JOURNALIST:** The Government's overall aim it has said is to find a consensus. I guess my point is, are you hopeful that that is a possibility? Do you think that there are any common points between the parties in that a consensus can be found?

**MARLES:** Well I think a consensus is absolutely admirable as an aspiration but you've actually got to bring some substance to the table around which you can build a consensus, and right now we haven't seen a lot of that from this Government.

**JOURNALIST:** It's admirable, but is it possible?

**MARLES:** Well I mean these are matters for the Government-

**JOURNALIST:** But it's also a matter for the Labor Party.

**MARLES:** Well the point that I'm making is there is nothing that I've seen so far, from this Government which suggests any goodwill or bona fides on their part. That they're going to walk down a path which will provide greater security at work, which will increase people's pay. Bear in mind, this is the Government which has cut people's penalty rate, that's where, that's who this proposition is coming from. And so I think the Government's got to be upfront about what its plans are when it talks about award simplification, what exactly does it mean there, what does it mean in terms of the impact that will have on job security and people's rights at work.

**JOURNALIST:** Are you in favour of the idea award simplification though? Given there are so many awards across so many sectors, isn't this not sensible?

**MARLES:** Well it depends completely on what's being proposed here. But I'll tell you what I'm in favour of, I'm in favour of security in the workplace, I'm in favour of employees enjoying their penalty rates, I'm in favour of employees being able to have rights in their workplace and awards provide that. And so we need to get an assurance from the Government that those are not going to be under attack.

**JOURNALIST:** Can I just ask you about Victoria's Belt and Road Agreement. Do you think it's appropriate for Victorian Labor to be out today essentially bragging about ignoring national security and DFAT advice, in winning in three key marginal seats at the 2018 election, is that appropriate for the party to be doing?

**MARLES:** Look ultimately I'll let Victoria speak for themselves, but let me make this clear. A future Labor Government would not be signing a Belt and Road Agreement with China. When it comes to Chinese investment in infrastructure projects that's a matter which we think should be taken on a case-by-case basis and we should proceed down that path with some caution. For example, we would not have sold the Port of Darwin to a Chinese State owned company which is what this Government has done. So our position has been, Victorian can speak for themselves, but from the point of view of Federal Labor our position has been very clear from the outset; we would not be signing a Belt and Road Agreement. We would be taking Chinese investment in infrastructure projects on a case-by-case basis and doing so with caution.

**JOURNALIST:** With all due respect, you're a member of the Victorian Labor Party, the former Deputy Campaign Director Kosmos Samaras has today in the papers said that it won us three Coalition seats, I am asking as a member of the Victorian Labor Party is that appropriate to be bragging about that and playing politics with national security?

**MARLES:** Well ultimately I'll let the Victorians speak for themselves. But what I think what is really important; when we engage in diplomacy and foreign policy, particularly when we're talking about a relationship as complex as that which we have with China, it's really important that it's done on its own terms. That it's not a function of domestic politics but rather that we engage in it on its own terms because so much is at stake there and too often it seems to me that we've seen particularly from this Federal Government that the relationship with China ending up being a side issue to whatever has been the domestic agenda. We've seen that happen in the past, this is a relationship which needs to be dealt with very seriously, very soberly and it needs to be dealt with by our Foreign Minister and our

Prime Minister and not left to the fringe dwellers of the Government.

**JOURNALIST:** And not left to the State Government?

**MARLES:** Well I'm making the point; Victorian Labor can speak for themselves. I've made the position clear about where Federal Labor is at. But I'm also making the point that in terms of, our job is to hold the Federal Government to account, and in terms of the relationship with China, it is really important that we have enough ballast in this relationship that we can articulate Australia's national interest particularly when it differs from Chinese action. It's really important that there be an independent inquiry into the origins of the Coronavirus. But this is not a relationship which should be left to the fringe dwellers of the Government.

**JOURNALIST:** Would a future Labor Government review the Darwin Port sale? Would it actually give the money back and say, we are taking it back?

**MARLES:** I mean that's a matter that we have to assess-

**JOURNALIST:** You've assessed it, you've already said you wouldn't have signed up to it, so-

**MARLES:** But obviously water goes under the bridge and so the terms of the sale and what legal obligations are there, you know impact here. A Future Labor Government is not about getting involved in sovereign risk. But we make this point; we make this point. We would not have sold the Port of Darwin to a State owned Chinese company.

**JOURNALIST:** The Chinese Commerce Minister last night has leaked the barley tariffs on previous disputes. Do you think that's a de-escalation of diplomatic discussion? What do you make of Simon Birmingham comments that he doesn't want to engage in a kind of tit-for-tat on a tally of disputes?

**MARLES:** Well, I think it's really important that we're not doing that. And obviously we want to see a de-escalation in relation to this. And it's important that we get the trading relationship onto a better footing. But again I make the point that you know this is a relationship which has been going in the wrong direction well before the COVID crisis and well before Australia called for an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus. It's a relationship which has been going through difficulty for the last three years. And so you know this is a relationship which demands the attention of this Government and ultimately you can talk about what State Governments do but our foreign relations are determined by our national Government. And the Prime Minister needs to show leadership in respect of the relationship with China, as does the Foreign Minister and not leave this space to the fringe dwellers of the Government.

**ENDS**

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.