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TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
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SUBJECTS: Protests; Foreign investment.

ALLISON LANGDON, HOST: We're joined now by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and Deputy Opposition Leader Richard Marles. Good morning to both of you.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Good morning, Ali.

PETER DUTTON, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS: Good morning, Ali.

LANGDON: So, Peter, this has struck a chord with Indigenous Australians. As a former cop yourself, do you think we have a problem with police brutality in this country?

PETER DUTTON, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS: Well I think the circumstances we saw in the United States were just horrible and you can understand why people are angry. We don't want to see anybody protest in a violent way, because other people get hurt or killed as a result of that. In our country, there have been a number of inquiries over decades looking at black deaths in custody and looking at ways in which all of those systems can be improved, and I think all police, particularly in the modern age, are very conscious of the threats to people, whether it's because of their race, because of mental health conditions, when those people are put into incarceration, and I think we've got a much better system now than we've ever had. And particularly for young people; we don't want to see them incarcerated but if you've got circumstances where they're repeat offenders committing

crimes it's very difficult just to release people back out onto the street.

KARL STEFANOVIC, HOST: Richard, we know that everyone feels very keenly about what is going on in the United States, and want to be a part of it, and to pay their respects, and also, in some cases, to protest. But here's where it gets difficult; in the middle of this pandemic, 20,000 people are expected to turn out in your home town of Melbourne and that puts at risk everything we've been working so hard to achieve in terms of COVID-19.

MARLES: I think it's a really good point, Karl. And the right to protest is obviously a critical part of our democracy and everyone wants to stand up against racism, and that is a cause that we would all commit to and believe in. But the pandemic is affecting our lives in every way and that includes the right to protest. And we do need to be listening to medical advice in this moment. I mean, obviously, if people gathering ended up spreading the disease with the result of somebody dying that would be a very bad outcome. I think it's important to say that, in standing up against racism, protesting tomorrow is not the only way that you can express that. There are other ways in which you can do it, and it is a really important cause, but we've got to be listening to the medical advice as well.

LANGDON: Yeah, I think Karl and I both agree that protests are an incredibly important part of democracy but you look at what's happening at the moment, Peter, it makes a farce of the fact that we have these restrictions of 10 people in public.

DUTTON: Yeah, look Ali, I think all the points Richard made are spot-on. And I mean, there was tragedy in Melbourne with the death of police officers there recently, as we well know, and people were able to express their passion about that issue and their support online, and those people would've desperately wanted to have been out there at a funeral, part of a public gathering, to express their concern at those deaths. And similarly in this situation, as Richard says, there are many online forums where people can express their views, post their concerns, but if we end up with even a hundred people with COVID out of this, let alone thousands, then that is a very, very bad outcome, and we I guess would all encourage everybody that's thinking about the protests to do it from home, and to be safe.

STEFANOVIC: We asked our viewers for their thoughts and have a look at this Facebook poll right now; thousands of people have voted. There it is, 20 per cent saying yes the protests should go ahead while 80 per cent said they shouldn't. My serious concern here is that if people do come out in force to protest, that it breaks down all those regulations and laws- we've been abiding by this for a long, long time. We've done our bit and the moment we step out there in force, into the public, and as Ali said, we have every right to protest but at the moment, all of those restrictions that they want us to abide by, that whole thing can

break down, Richard.

MARLES: Yeah, look, I think that's a fair enough concern. I really do think that people need to have that in the forefront of their minds, and it is possible to give expression against racism in other ways. I think I'd also make the point, and Peter rightly made it before, you know, the police in this country have gone through their own journey in terms of how they relate to the full diversity of Australian society. There are issues of racism in Australia. There is persistent gaps between Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians within our country, and incarceration is an example of that. But I don't think tomorrow should be a protest against the police, and as Peter said, that was only a few weeks ago, we were acknowledging the really fundamental role that police play in our society and, for me, none of that has changed.

STEFANOVIC: Well said.

LANGDON: Hopefully, see how things play out over the weekend, people do the right thing and we don't see a second wave. Now, something else we want to talk to you about this morning; Peter, there will be a major overhaul to the foreign investment regime designed to safeguard national security. I mean, you're really looking for a barney with Beijing, aren't you?!

DUTTON: No, we want to protect our national interests. We've been working on this for a period of time. Josh Frydenberg the Treasurer is going to be out later today, talking a little bit more about the detail. When you consider that so much of our information is stored through the cloud, but ultimately into servers, just by way of one example, we want to make sure that all of that information, whether it's health information, tax information, is properly protected, and if you've got a change of ownership of different assets or you've got concerns about foreign interference, that's the reality of the world in which we live and we need to make sure that we can monitor and exclude some people from ownership if we believe that that data or that information or our national security is going to be compromised.

STEFANOVIC: You are not shying away from this. This is provocative and it is a proper barney with Beijing. And this is only going to heighten those tensions.

DUTTON: Well, Karl, it's not country specific. We're looking at lots of examples at the moment. As we said before, our country at the moment faces more foreign interference than we've seen in decades, and we want to make sure that we put our national interests ahead of anything else. We want to make sure that we expect people to abide by the rule of law, and I think we're in a situation where we just can't tolerate a compromise of

people's personal information or of our national security and the Government's doing the right thing here.

STEFANOVIC: Okay, just before we go fellas, and really quickly - have you ever stood on your neighbour's grass?

LANGDON: I'm glad you didn't ask whether they've ever cut their neighbour's grass.

STEFANOVIC: That is for you to ask, Ali.

MARLES: I don't think I have.

STEFANOVIC: Did you hear what Ali just asked?

DUTTON: Richard, you go first.

MARLES: I have no idea what Ali just asked. No, I don't think I have.

LANGDON: Which question are you answering?

STEFANOVIC: Good answer.

MARLES: I am not sure.

STEFANOVIC: Great stuff, guys. Thank you so much for being with us as always. Appreciate it.

DUTTON: Have a good weekend.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.