

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
RADIO 3AW
THURSDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2017**

SUBJECT: Malcolm Turnbull's unprecedented \$1.75 million donation to the Liberal Party

NEIL MITCHELL: First though, let's test further this idea that Malcolm Turnbull has somehow done something wrong giving \$1.75 million to the Liberal Party. Now it's declared, as it should be, I don't see a problem. On the line, Shadow Defence Minister, the Member for Corio from the Labor Party, Richard Marles - good morning.

RICHARD MARLES : Good morning, Neil. How are you?

MITCHELL: I'm okay. Now, one of your colleagues says it stinks. Do you agree?

MARLES: I feel pretty uneasy about a donation of that kind-

MITCHELL: -Why?

MARLES: -and of that size.

Well, he'd be the only person in the parliament who could make it, and I think the point that we've always thought of in Australian politics is that getting elected should not be a function of your wealth.

MITCHELL: What's the difference between the CFMEU putting in \$700,000 from lower-paid workers, or United Voice, and Malcolm Turnbull? It's his money.

MARLES: But that's where you've just explained the difference. We're talking about his personal money and that we've always understood that it doesn't matter how wealthy you are, you should be able to be elected to our parliament and represent people in this country.

MITCHELL: So you're saying you bought his seat.

MARLES: What we're saying is he spent \$1.75 million in the dying days of the election campaign. If he had not spent that money would he be the prime minister today? Now, maybe he would-

MITCHELL: -Well, hang on, the unions, the unions spent \$20 million. If they hadn't spent that maybe you would have lost more seats.

MARLES: Sure, and a whole lot of donors to the Liberal Party spent a whole lot of money as well, but we're talking about one individual's personal wealth.

I guess my point to you, Neil, is that question about your wealth, about one's own wealth, and whether or not that has had an impact on you getting elected should not be a part of our politics, and yet that is a question-

MITCHELL: -But I don't think it is.

MARLES: Well, of course it is.

MITCHELL: You're making it that, the sort of politics of envy, 'Mr. Harbourside Mansion.'

MARLES: No, no, no. It's not the politics of envy. Wealthy people have a right to be in the parliament. To be honest, Neil, I wish I was a bit wealthier. Good luck to him.

MITCHELL: Well, Kevin Rudd was almost as wealthy as Malcolm Turnbull. How much should he put in?

MARLES: Well, he did not put in that amount of money.

This is not about a person's wealth. It's not, Neil.

It's about the money he spent on his own election campaign. I think Australians will make their own judgements about why he felt the need to spend that money in the dying days.

It's not us making an issue of this. Malcolm Turnbull made an issue of it when he spent the money, and that's the question.

MITCHELL: If his wealth isn't an issue, why does the party label him 'Mr Harbourside Mansion'? What does that mean?

MARLES: Oh look, Neil, the question here is about how we would all feel, how Australians judge the fact that our Prime Minister spent that amount of money of his own personal wealth in the dying days of a very close-fought election. Now, wealth should not be a factor in terms of whether people get elected-

MITCHELL: -But he clearly wanted to win. He wanted to win and he was Prime Minister, he believes in the Liberal Party and all these things, so he hits his kick and put, as he says, put his money where his mouth is.

This is money he has paid tax on. It's his money. Is there a tax deduction in it? I don't know.

MARLES: And no-one is saying that there is anything wrong with it.

MITCHELL: Well, yes there is. Your very spokesman is saying it stinks.

MARLES: No, what we are saying is we can all now make our own judgment about what he has done, and people will make their judgment about how they feel, how easy or uneasy they feel, about a person making a donation of that size from their own personal wealth, and it is obviously different from donations that are made by others.

Sure, unions make donations to the Labor Party and lots of organizations make donations to the Liberal Party. We think those donations ought to be more transparent and it ought to be clearer and that's why we've got reforms that we're suggesting about all of this and we think that people should know it in, sort of, more real time, closer to where the donations are made.

But I think the issue here, Neil, is we've got an individual who has made an unprecedented personal donation to their own campaign in the dying days of a very closely-fought election. How do people feel about that-

MITCHELL: - How do you feel about hospitality workers, low-paid workers, twenty bucks an hour, donating nearly \$800,000 to the Labor Party through United Voice? Is that okay? Did they approve that?

MARLES: Of course unions have absolutely legitimate right to donate, and that ought to form part of the public record - and it does. And then people can make their own judgment about that, too.

MITCHELL: I agree with you on the public record. Who is Zi Chun Wang?

MARLES: I'm not sure.

MITCHELL: Well, he donated \$850,000 to Labor.

MARLES: Well, I don't know the answer to that question.

MITCHELL: Did Zi Chun Wang get anything for that? That's the most major, apart from Turnbull, who, of course, isn't actually in the reporting period yet. He's just told us about it. That's the biggest single donation to a political party, it was to yours from Zi Chun Wang.

MARLES: Well, again people can do their investigation as to who that individual was-

MITCHELL: -Well, I mean it's your party, it's your money. Any strings attached to the 850?

MARLES: I don't know the answer to that question-

MITCHELL: -So you're accusing Turnbull of strings. What about Zi Chun Wang?

MARLES: No, no, no, it's not about strings Neil. It is about this question: should a person's individual wealth determine whether or not they can participate in Australian politics? Now, obviously the answer to that question should be no.

It shouldn't matter whether you're really wealthy or whether you're not wealthy at all. Everyone has a right to participate in Australian politics.

But a question now exists in respect of Malcolm Turnbull: had he not spent that money would he be the Prime Minister today?

MITCHELL: But that doesn't remove his right to spend it.

MARLES: No-one is talking about his right to spend it.

MITCHELL: Your mate is saying it stinks.

MARLES: And that's fair enough too. He has a right to spend it, Neil, but we have a right to make a judgment about how we feel in terms of him spending it. When my colleague talks about it stinking that is a judgment and that's basically what we're talking about now.

MITCHELL: Do you agree with him?

MARLES: Yes, I do. I feel very uneasy about the idea that an individual would spend that amount of money on their own campaign because there needs to be a really strong principle that it doesn't matter how wealthy you are you can still get elected to the Australian Parliament.

Now, there is a question which is now out there about Malcolm Turnbull's being Prime Minister in the context of him spending that amount of money which is unfortunate question to be in the space.

Did he have a right to do it? Yes. That's not the issue.

We're making a judgment about that expenditure. I feel very uneasy about it.

MITCHELL: OK, I appreciate your time. Zi Chun Wang, by the way, was a 2013 election. I'm surprised you haven't heard of it.

MARLES: Well, look I've done that investigation but it wouldn't be hard to do, Neil, and that's the point of having it on the public record.

MITCHELL: He's entitled to do it as well. That's right.

Thank you very much, Richard Marles, Shadow Defence, Member for Corio, and I thank him for talking to me because none of the others would