

E&OE TRANSCRIPT

RADIO INTERVIEW

3AW MORNINGS WITH NEIL MITCHELL

MONDAY, 27 MAY 2018

SUBJECT: Australian Labor Party

HOST: Labor will officially have a new leadership team by the end of the week. Last week I spoke to Anthony Albanese, who will be leader, if nobody opposes him he becomes leader at 10 o'clock, and nobody will you oppose him. I believe that by Thursday we will have a Victorian in the deputy leadership, the Shadow Defence Minister, the Member for Corio, Richard Marles. We've spoken to him on the program before. He may not, he probably won't be challenged either, but we won't know that definitely until Thursday. Richard Marles, good morning.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Good morning, Neil. How are you?

HOST: Deal done, not challenged?

MARLES: Look, I'll leave the process to play out. Ultimately this is a matter for the caucus on Thursday and my colleagues, but I'm certainly nominating.

HOST: You know the saying about a pig: you put lipstick on a pig and it's still a pig. You've got the Labor Party. You gonna put lipstick on it?

MARLES: We've got a lot of challenges going forward, Neil, and we need to have a very clear-eyed view of what occurred to us a week ago-

HOST: -Have you got that yet?

MARLES: No. Obviously we don't. We're eight days in and it's to do justice, I think, to what the voters said a week ago to actually take the time to work this through, but the fact of the matter is - and you've got no idea how much I want to sugar coat the statement I'm about to make - but the fact of the matter is that the propositions that we were putting to the Australian people a week ago got rejected and that is just a statement of fact and we've got to understand that we've got to work it through

properly.

We've got to do it in a way which is not about individual blame. Politics is a team sport and there is shared-

HOST: -Politics is a team sport?

MARLES: Politics is team sport.

HOST: Tell Kevin Rudd, Julia, Kevin Rudd about that.

MARLES: Well, actually, they're the best examples of it, in a sense, Neil, because if you don't work as a team it doesn't work, and successful parties operate as a team and we need to be trying to make ourselves a successful team and that means you share in the success but it's shared responsibility for failure as well.

HOST: Well, I've heard a lot of your people blaming Clive Palmer and the campaign he wrote, blaming Rupert Murdoch and the campaign and some of his newspapers, and blaming the Australian people for being stupid and not understanding it. Now, do you think Palmer and Murdoch had anything to do with it?

MARLES: Well, let me say firstly the Australian people get it right every time and we've got to acknowledge that and that's the starting point. They're our boss and we have to answer to them.

Look, I'm not really worried about Clive Palmer and Rupert Murdoch. At the end of the day I believe in controlling the things that you can, and that's ourselves. We've got to get ourselves in a position where we're competitive three years from now and that actually means being very clear-eyed, being kind of ruthless in the way in which we examine what occurred and what we put to the Australian people and what happened with this election. To do that we've got to take the time to do it and we will and we have to have a completely thorough review. You know, you have initial impressions and reactions, of course, but almost eight days after by definition they're going to be knee jerk. What we need to do is work this thing through and work out what went wrong and put ourselves in a position to reconnect with our base, working people, and enable ourselves to contest the next election.

HOST: Do you think the franking credits policy and the negative gearing policy were the keys?

MARLES: Again, you know, I'm worried about pre-empting particular policies in terms of looking specifically at them. What is clear is that, in terms of franking credits, I think all of us felt that that was an issue that was being raised with us in street stalls while we were talking with voters. There's no doubt about that, but exactly what we do in relation to any specific policy we've got to work through.

It was a really significant body of work to put that policy agenda together, but we've just got to be courageous enough, I guess, to have a thorough review of everything that we've done, and be sensible enough and clear-eyed enough to work out what was right, what was wrong, and how we go forward, and I think it's really important

we take the time to do that.

HOST: I sensed a bit of class warfare in there about at the top end of town, generational warfare against the baby boomers.

MARLES: Certainly we need to be connecting with the broadest range of Australians that we can. To start with we need to make sure that we're connecting with our base: people who put on overalls, go to work, get dirty, come home. They have to know that we are their party and that's the first thing, but it's really important as well that we connect with people who have aspiration and that that's something that for people who are in that situation that they see us as being a party for them.

I think it actually goes broader than that, Neil. As I've been talking with a whole lot of people around Australia over the last week, people of faith need to know that we're a party that can be theirs too, so it's looking at how we can make sure that we're connecting with our base on the one hand but connecting with the broadest range of Australians on the other. That's what we've got to be looking at how we do.

HOST: So, you've been accused of alienating the base personally in Queensland by saying that it was a good thing that the coal market was slumping. In fact, one of the organizers of campaign up there said 'Mr Marles has to retract what he said. He's got to perform the greatest act of contrition since the Last Supper.' You absolutely wrecked the agenda in Capricornia for the Labor Party.

MARLES: Well, the comments I made earlier this year were tone deaf and I regret them and I was apologising for them within a couple of days of making them, and partly why they were tone deaf is because it failed to acknowledge the significance of every person's job. I really know this. You know, I represent an electorate, in Corio, which is Geelong, where we've seen Alcoa and Ford go out of business in the last five or so years. For me that's not a theoretical thing. That's actually personal because I know the people who have lost their jobs and I know what they're now doing and I know what that meant to them and their families.

HOST: So where do you stand on coal? Where do you stand on Adani?

MARLES: Coal clearly is going to play a significant part of the future energy mix in Australia and it's clearly going to be a significant part of our economy and it's really important that we acknowledge that people who work in the coal industry need to be valued by us and that we thank and celebrate their work. That's important. Can I say, Neil, I was saying that within 48 hours, I think, of making those comments-

HOST: -So this bloke's being a bit rough saying you've cost them any chance in Capricornia?

MARLES: Look, people can make their own judgment, but just let me say he's not being rough in the sense that those comments were tone deaf and I was guilty of it. I think what's really important going forward is that the Party as a whole is making sure that we value working people. I do know that personally from the experiences that we've had in Geelong and the job losses that we've seen in Geelong.

HOST: Working people are valued even if they're making \$300,000 a year?

MARLES: Sure.

HOST: Like the tradie who fronted Bill.

MARLES: Yeah. Look, I think there's nothing wrong with making money, and if you are aspirational that's fine and you've got to know that the Labor Party values that, acknowledges what you're doing and that you can see in us a party that will represent you. I think our job going forward is about reconnecting with our base, and there's a lot of really vulnerable and poor people in my electorate, and I think very much about them and they occupy a lot of my thought space, as you would imagine they would, but it's also important that there's nothing wrong with going out there and making money and we support that too.

HOST: Adani?

MARLES: It's an issue which has become a flashpoint for a number of causes here. Firstly, what we've just been talking about, it became the flashpoint issue for how we saw work and working people and valuing their work, and as I've said it's so important that we make sure that we are the party that stands up for people who work in coal mines, as well as who work across our industrial base.

HOST: But does it go ahead or not?

MARLES: I don't know. I'm not in a position to, obviously, answer all of that. It is a difficult question where we need to work it through as a party, but what's clear is that in working it through we need to understand that we've got to value people who do work in this space, and obviously there is the question of climate change and transitioning our economy away from being a carbon-based economy. That's an important agenda as well and we need to be true to that, and in all of that we've got to work through this difficult issue and navigate a path forward.

HOST: I was always intrigued by the arguments about Clive Palmer and Murdoch and everything because I look at the GetUp! campaign and the unions campaign. Did they push it a bit too hard? Did they actually harm you in the end?

MARLES: I don't think it's about others, is the answer to that question, Neil. I think we've got to be focusing on the roles that we played, and so I've watched what players like GetUp! have done but I'm less concerned about their actions in this and I'm less concerned about Clive Palmer's actions in this as I am about how we're going about presenting ourselves, because at the end of the day we can't control what GetUp! or what Clive does at the next election. What we can control is ourselves and we've just got to make sure that we are putting ourselves in the most competitive place possible come the next election.

HOST: Should Bill Shorten be on the shadow frontbench?

MARLES: That is, in my view, that's a matter for Bill. Bill has done a fantastic job as the leader of our party, and we need to acknowledge that.

HOST: That's a big call. He's lost the unlosable election. How has he done a fantastic job?

MARLES: Well, I'll tell you how he's done a fantastic job. We went through just the most difficult period '10 through '13-

HOST: -Which he engineered, most of it.

MARLES: Well, that's not fair.

HOST: Well, hang on, he got rid of Rudd and then he got rid of Gillard, or led the way.

MARLES: Neil, none of that is fair.

HOST: It's true, though.

MARLES: I think what happened during that period is that what we were saying earlier: a team broke down and there's collective responsibility in the failure of teamwork during that period. What I know is it was horrendous. It was horrendous to live through as a member of that team, as such.

In the aftermath of that Bill has given us six years of stability and he has brought us together and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. He's led us to two elections. He has worked tirelessly each and every day to do that, and as a leader of our Party over that period of time from my point of view he becomes a giant.

HOST: Look, he would have been prime minister first time round if it wasn't for Daniel Andrews, wouldn't he? CFA.

MARLES: I think you can leap to conclusions like that which I'm not prepared to do.

HOST: I'd ask him.

MARLES: I ultimately I think Bill has done a wonderful job over the last six years and I'm very grateful to what Bill has done.

HOST: So if he wants to be on the frontbench he should be?

MARLES: It's completely a matter for him, exactly.

HOST: Have you spoken to him?

MARLES: Yeah, I have.

HOST: How is he?

MARLES: Oh look, he's fine, but this is a huge shock for him as it is for all of us, and we're all working through it. What I'd say about Bill is – and I've known Bill a long

time. He and I have been friends since we were teenagers. If I have a personal sadness which overwhelms everything else in relation to this it's for Bill, because-

HOST: -Do you think he'll stay in Parliament?

MARLES: He's indicated to me that he wants to, but again ultimately these are all questions for Bill.

HOST: He wouldn't talk to me when he was leader. There's no hope he's going to talk to me now.

MARLES: All I would say is Bill is the toughest and most resilient politician I've met, so if Bill wants a future in politics I'm sure there's one there for him, but this is all, you know, we're eight days on and Bill's working through this as we all are. I just know that he put every ounce of his being into the leadership of the Labor Party and being the Leader of the Opposition, and irrespective of the result on Saturday - and it was clearly devastating for all of us - I feel thankful to Bill Shorten.

HOST: Still grieving?

MARLES: Am I still grieving? Yes, absolutely I'm still grieving-

HOST: -It is like grief, isn't it.

MARLES: There's no question it's like grief. I mean this has been as difficult a moment in my political life as I've had, and I think that's how we're all feeling.

HOST: So how long does that end up going on? How long's the grieving?

MARLES: Well probably you need to speak to people who are experts on that. What I know is we've got to deal with it and deal with it honestly and we've got to get through it as effectively and quickly as we can to put ourselves in a position where we're competitive at the next election.

HOST: Do you reckon you can win the next election?

MARLES: I absolutely think we can win the next election. No question of that, and perhaps that's the important point to make. There are, really, there are many examples out there where parties have had a very difficult result but have managed to pull themselves together and get back and win.

HOST: And the electorate's volatile.

MARLES: And the electorate's volatile. It's a little while ago and it's on the flip side of politics, but in 1993 the Coalition lost an election they were certain they were going to win. That must have been a difficult moment for them. Three years later they come back and they smack us, and, you know, if we want an example in history which inspires us for what we can do, that's it. So, I've got no doubt we can get ourselves back. We can put ourselves in a position where we win.

It's important to understand it's not like it's been a thumping victory. I mean, it's actually a relatively close result-

HOST: -But an unexpected one.

MARLES: Of course, but we're in striking distance, and I think if we go through the process of understanding what happened at this election, of making sure that we reconnect with our base and talk to the broadest range of the Australian people as possible; if we can make sure that as a group of people we get through the grief and we respond to this really devastating result as a team, and that the sense of team which Bill's been so important to continues over the next three years, I'm completely optimistic that we can win the next election.

HOST: Thank you for coming in. I hope we can talk regularly.

MARLES: I'd like to do that, Neil. I know this is *Talking Melbourne*, but as someone from Geelong, if you'll have me I'm happy to come.

HOST: We're right across Victoria. We broadcast right through your electorate.

MARLES: That's good.

HOST: Do you really collect snow globes?

MARLES: I do. I'm feeling a bit embarrassed at this moment, and it's something that happened back in 2000, but once people know that you collect them they start to breed because people will come and bring them for various places and they turn up on my desk, so I now have, I think it's almost four or five hundred of them in my parliamentary office.

HOST: So if the election was a snow dome, what would it be?

MARLES: Oh, that's, well, that's a kind of an esoteric question which I'll need to think long and hard about-

HOST: -Well, it would certainly be a blizzard.

MARLES: It would certainly be a blizzard, that's true.

HOST: One thing, a listener's called in about this: this would be the first time for some years there hasn't been a woman in one of the major leadership positions, leader or deputy leader, it would seem. Is that a bad message?

MARLES: Look, firstly, I really understand the question being asked. It's not about one position. We're a party which has a whole lot of really strong women in leadership roles: Tanya Plibersek, Penny Wong, Catherine King, Amanda Rishworth, Linda Burney. I could go on. They have been guiding our party for a long time. We have almost 50 per cent of our party room now are women. If you look at the other team they're barely above a fifth.

Having said that, we've got to be a party which makes sure that women are fully participating in our parliamentary wing and in the most senior roles and that journey isn't complete and we've got to make sure that in pursuing that journey it continues to be a core business for us, which it is.

HOST: Thank you so much for coming in.

MARLES: Thanks, Neil.

HOST: We'll see you soon. Thank you.

MARLES: Thanks.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.