

**RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

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SUBJECTS: Darwin shooting; Australian Labor Party; tax cuts; Chinese ships; press freedom

HOST: The incoming Labor deputy leader, Richard Marles, joins me in the studio this morning. Welcome.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Good morning, Patricia. How are you?

HOST: I'm well. Let's just start with this story in Darwin. Shocking story. What's your response to what's unfolded?

MARLES: Well, it is a really shocking event. Darwin is a place I've been to quite a lot in recent times because it's one of our most important defence towns. I actually spoke with Michael Gunner this morning, the Chief Minister, and you got a real sense that this is a community that's in shock. It's a small city. It's not the kind of event that you would expect, or people in Darwin would expect, to be

happening on their streets, and I think they're all very much feeling it today.

Certainly, our thoughts and prayers go out to the families who are affected, but I think the whole of the country is really thinking about Darwin today and just how they're dealing with and coping with what is a really shocking and unexpected event for them.

HOST: Of course, the fact that this man was being, well, he had a bracelet on and he'd been released from jail, is going to be in coming days under questioning. I mean this is a very disturbing development, wouldn't you agree?

MARLES: There's a whole lot of issues that I know the Northern Territory Government will want to work through in relation to this, but the point is that the alleged perpetrator is in custody. The incident, in that sense, is over. I think the immediate issue is dealing with the grief around what has occurred, and I know that's where Michael's focus is today.

In terms of policy responses to all the issues that this event raises, there's time to work through all of that and I've got no doubt Michael will want to take that time, but really today is a moment to have all our thoughts and prayers for the people who were affected, but for the whole community of Darwin for whom this is a very, very shocking event.

HOST: Your first shadow cabinet meeting in Brisbane yesterday, what was the mood around the table?

MARLES: Oh well, it's a difficult time for Labor. There's no sugar coating that. We had hoped for a different result just over two weeks ago and we're coming to terms with what's happened and we need to do that in a very thorough and thoughtful way. We need to acknowledge the difficult reality that the proposition that we put to the Australian people just over two weeks ago was rejected. It would be nice to be able to put that in a better frame, but you can't, because that's actually what happened. So, we need to understand this, work through,

take our time. It's why Anthony Albanese is keen for us to engage in a listening tour and why he's doing that, and importantly doing that in seats where we did not receive support, in seats where we lost, to understand what went wrong and to hear from the Australian people about what we need to do right next time to get the confidence of the Australian people and win.

I think the important point to make is that there is sadness and grief about our circumstances, but the real sadness and grief is in respect of the millions of Labor supporters out there who were desperate for a Labor government. You know, we feel the responsibility very heavily that we need to make sure that we are putting our best foot forward going into the future so that we can get that Labor government as soon as we can.

HOST: I've heard from Bill Shorten, who is your friend, the former leader, that speech he gave to your party room, to your caucus, that it was about the corporates, the corporate powers against Labor. I've heard about News Corporation. These are the sorts of comments that have been made by Labor leadership. Is it smart to blame everyone else? Shouldn't you be looking at yourselves?

MARLES: Well, firstly I think we're doing a lot of looking at ourselves and soul searching. You know, all of us feel for Bill. There is-

HOST: -Do you accept that what he said was a little tone deaf?

MARLES: Look, I'm not going to criticise Bill Shorten for the comments he made in the immediate aftermath of this result. What I would say is that Bill has done an extraordinary job over six years in providing unity and stability to the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in circumstances where he took over after the period of 2010 through 2013, when there was a whole lot of division. Bill's made an enormous contribution and for that he is a giant.

HOST: The question is around blaming corporates and a campaign against

Labor, rather than looking at your own policy offering.

MARLES: Well, in terms of what we will be doing going forward, we will be very focused on our decisions, our actions, our behaviours. That's what we can control. Be under no illusion: that is going to be our focus. That's why Anthony Albanese right now is doing the listening tour of the nation and why we are very focused on making sure that we get our house in order as we go into the next election in three years' time. We've got a bit of time between now and then to make sure we get that right.

HOST: So you accept that it's a waste of time to blame others rather than take control of what you're doing?

MARLES: What I'm saying is we will be very focused on our behaviours and our decisions and the way we act going forward because that's what we can control. That's where our heads are at, and we've got the time to do that. We are going to hasten slowly in this and we're going to make sure that we have a thorough review of the election so that we, in a sense, honour the decision that was made by the Australian people by taking the time to really understand what that decision meant. We'll learn the lessons and we'll do so in a way which doesn't involve any individual blame here. There's only collective responsibility. Every-

HOST: -Is that a warning to your colleagues not to blame Bill Shorten, because some have said it was his unpopularity that was the issue?

MARLES: We're a team and this is a team sport, and actually one of the great-

HOST: -But you have a leader and that leader gets more coverage than anyone on the team.

MARLES: Of course, but this is fundamentally a team sport and I think one of the great contributions that Bill has made is to have brought that team together

in the aftermath of that period '10 through '13. What being in a team means is that there is no individual blame. What we took to the Australian people on 18 May ultimately was the result of decisions that were taken by all of us collectively, and so there is a shared responsibility for what occurred and it's really important that we all understand that - and we do - and as we move forward we've got to learn those lessons and make sure that we get it right.

That's not about us. It's actually ultimately about the millions of Australians who want to see a Labor government and we've got to do our best by them in making sure that we put the best foot forward as we go into an election three years from now.

HOST: 1-300-222-774 is the number to call in on, and I'm speaking to the new deputy leader of the Labor Party, Richard Marles, a Victorian, so there's still a Victorian in the leadership team. Not quite the leader. You are the deputy leader, which, according to my knowledge - correct me if I'm wrong - means you can choose any portfolio you like, yet you're in defence. Why didn't you choose the home affairs portfolio?

MARLES: Well defence is a very significant part of government. That's what I've been doing for the last three years. It's certainly the area which I'm invested in and is my greatest interest, I suppose-

HOST: -Why didn't you choose home affairs? It was widely tipped that you would.

MARLES: Well, because ultimately I chose defence. Defence is a really significant portfolio. It is probably the largest endeavour that the Commonwealth engages in, and we're at a moment in time where Australia faces arguably the most challenging set of strategic circumstances that it has since the Second World War. This is the place where I felt I could make the greatest contribution.

HOST: On that, the arrival of three Chinese warships in Sydney Harbour was

apparently not a surprise to Scott Morrison. Was it a surprise to you?

MARLES: It was a surprise to the whole country-

HOST: -Was it a surprise to you?

MARLES: Yes, but-

HOST: -You hadn't been briefed?

MARLES: No, I hadn't been briefed at all-

HOST: -Should you have been?

MARLES: I don't understand why this wouldn't have been made public to the whole of Australia. Yes, me as the Shadow Minister, but in fact the Australian public. According to the Prime Minister he knew this back in April.

There's nothing remarkable about this. In fact, I think in many respects this is a positive development, that there's been a port visit of this kind from these Chinese vessels-

HOST: -On the eve of the Tiananmen Square massacre?

MARLES: Well, I don't think the particular timings of those anniversaries go to the question of when a ship needs to be replenished-

HOST: -But it does matter. Those optics do matter.

MARLES: Well, I'm not sure that they were being worked through, but the point is this: I don't think that there's anything particularly remarkable about Chinese warships coming into Sydney Harbour and being serviced in the way they have and in fact I think that there's something positive about that cooperation.

What is strange is that this wouldn't be made public by the Government. That's the bit I don't understand-

HOST: -Why do you think they chose not to make it public?

MARLES: Well, the Government will need to answer that question about why it didn't make that public in April, but transparency has not been the strong suit of this government. I mean, from day one, from the very first day of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government this is a government which has been shrouded in secrecy. When Scott Morrison talks you always think there's something else going on behind.

The Government actually needs to be transparent, and particularly I think about this: there's actually a positive story, I think, to tell, but given the significance of the relationship with China and given the significance of the military relationship with China you would think that this would be a decision that should have been put into the public domain.

Again, I don't think there's anything remarkable about it, but it's really surprising to me that the Government feels a need to keep this behind wraps and it says everything about the way in which this man governs.

HOST: Is Labor prepared to back a second stage of the Morrison Government's tax cuts, scheduled for 2022?

MARLES: Well, we'll work that through, Patricia, as-

HOST: -There is a report that you've supported the second stage at your shadow cabinet meeting.

MARLES: Well, I'm not going to go into shadow ministry discussions, but-

HOST: -Well, if it's a decision I'm not asking for the discussion, but outcome.

MARLES: Let me first say this: we have for some time been on the record supporting the first tranche. In relation to the second tranche of tax cuts, it's an important matter. It's still a month before we come to Parliament and we need to act on that. We will work through this issue.

Yesterday was the first gathering of the full shadow ministry, actually, since the election. It was principally about coming together, having a sense of understanding about how we now move forward. It was the first meeting of the new shadow ministry team. There was no formal debate or any decision taken about any policy issue, and I-

HOST: -But are you sympathetic to supporting the second stage?

MARLES: I'm not going to go into all of that. We've got the time to work through all of that and we will work through all of that.

HOST: At it's heart it's an issue around the kind of voters you want to lift up. Do you accept that that equation has changed because of the election result?

MARLES: It's an important decision, to be sure, but we've got time to work it through. What we're not going to do is rush into these matters. There is a certain pressure, I think, nowadays, to hear outcomes and decisions immediately. We are going to hasten slowly in the way in which we go about our policy decision making.

It's a month before we go back to Parliament. We've got the time to work this through and we will take the time and work it through, and after we've done that you'll hear people like me give you definitive answers to those questions.

HOST: Very quick questions I'd like to get your views on: do you think that the national anthem lyrics should be changed from 'young and free' to 'strong and

free', or something alternatively?

MARLES: Today's the first time I've heard about that discussion. I think what's important is that that discussion can occur.

To be honest, I'd actually like to speak to Linda Burney or Pat Dodson or Malarndirri McCarthy, who are all indigenous members of our Federal Parliamentary Labor Party about those questions. It's an interesting discussion, it might be important, but I'm not going to enter it now.

HOST: Do you accept that the word 'young' is not really representative of our nation?

MARLES: I hear the point that is being made by those players in the State of Origin, but again, this is a question I would actually like to talk to Linda Burney about, who's our Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

These are discussions which should be had. I'm not about to enter it though, today on the first day I've heard about it

HOST: Just very quickly before we go, this raid of Annika Smethurst, who's obviously a political editor for the Sunday papers for News Corporation, are you troubled by this?

MARLES: Well, it's a very significant action that has occurred here and it requires, I think, an explanation from the responsible minister, who is Peter Dutton, the Minister for Home Affairs. Again I think this comes to a question of transparency, which this Government has not been strong about.

When a journalist is going about their business and when we understand how significant press freedom is to the core of our democratic society, a step such as that which occurred yesterday I think does demand an explanation from the responsible minister. Now, we're asking for a briefing from the Minister about

exactly what occurred here, but actually I think it's important for the Minister to give an explanation to the Australian people about why this did occur.

HOST: Richard Marles, thanks for coming in.

MARLES: Thanks.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.