



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP  
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
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**SUBJECTS:** *Press freedom; China; Australian Labor Party; snow domes*

**HOST:** Richard Marles, good morning. Welcome.

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

**HOST:** Listening to that then you would think that the Government set up this framework, as Anthony Albanese calls it, all on its own without any support from Labor, but of course by and large Labor backed most of these initiatives.

**MARLES:** At every moment along the way, Barrie, Labor has had concern for the national interest, to make sure that we are protecting journalists' freedoms and the freedom of the press, but can I just say this: what we have seen in the last week has been absolutely extraordinary. The freedom of the press is at the heart of a democratic society. Annika Smethurst, I think, has been guilty only of doing her job and for that she has been subject to a 7-hour police raid, which for anybody would be absolutely terrifying, and we have not seen the Minister

anywhere. Now, to have extraordinary raids on the media in this way, with everything it represents in terms of an affront to the freedom of the press, without any explanation from the Government, really is behaviour which belongs much more to a tin-pot autocracy than it does to modern Australia.

**HOST:** The raids only happened, though, because the law allowed for it. These espionage laws that went through went through with your support and they basically give the police these additional powers to track down journalists' contacts and their sources.

**MARLES:** But at every moment along the way in the last few years as we've been dealing with legislation around national security, Labor has been focused on ensuring that there are national interest tests at play which provide for journalistic freedom and freedom of the press. We-

**HOST:** -Do you accept now, given the nature of this raid, that you didn't do your job?

**MARLES:** I think what we have seen here is extraordinary behaviour on the part of the Government and we need to understand that this is a process which was initiated by the Government. This was a referral that was made to the Federal Police by the Secretary of the Department of Defence. At the time, Marise Payne was constitutionally sworn to administer that Department, so the idea that the Government is seeking to be at arm's length from what's going on here is patently ridiculous. We've got a minister, the responsible Minister in Peter Dutton, who's basically in witness protection.

Why is it so difficult for this Government to come out and make clear that they believe that freedom of the press is at the heart of our democratic society?

**HOST:** Because they're saying that this was a matter for the AFP and nothing to do with them.

**MARLES:** It has everything to do with this Government. I mean, the moment that the police engaged in a raid of this kind you would imagine, wouldn't you, that the responsible Minister, Peter Dutton, would come out and explain it, because the look of the police engaging in this kind of behaviour, hours' worth of raids, without any explanation from the Government, without a single statement from the Government about its belief in the importance of the freedom of the press, says everything about how this Government has got it completely wrong.

**HOST:** Nobody questions that this raid happened against the law. It happened within the law as framed by the Parliament. You were part of that. The problem over the years has been that Labor has just been too worried about being accused of being soft on terror, too worried about being accused of basically being weak on security.

**MARLES:** This is not about Labor.

**HOST:** It's about the laws that you supported.

**MARLES:** And in supporting those laws we made sure that at every moment along the way, Barrie, there was appropriate exemptions and safeguards for journalists to do their job and for there to be the freedom of the press within our society. But this is my question-

**HOST:** -Do you think those safeguards are adequate now, on the experience of what we've had?

**MARLES:** What I think is that the idea that the police have gone and done this and we have heard nothing from the responsible Minister about why this has occurred, and about this Government's attitude to the question of the freedom of the press, is completely extraordinary.

Now, they are the Government, Barrie. You know, a few weeks ago they were

elected to be that for the next three years and they, as such, are the custodians in this country of the freedom of the press, and in the last week we've heard nothing from them on this subject.

**HOST:** Well, we heard something from your Shadow Attorney-General some time ago, and it was on the story that Annika Smethurst wrote, and of course that became the focus of this raid, and he said that because it contained highly classified national security information then he was demanding an investigation into the source.

**MARLES:** The letter that Mark Dreyfus wrote a year ago was pointing out the chaos of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government and the fact that they were leaking like a sieve and they needed to get their house in order. The idea that the remedy of that is to then go and shake down the Press Gallery with the Federal Police is ridiculous. I mean the Government needs to actually get its house in order in terms of how it manages its information. That's not a question then about stopping the media from doing its job, and that completely crosses the line.

**HOST:** There might, well, there will be a review. I think there's already some suggestion of a parliamentary review around these laws. Do you think if that happens and there is a review you will be a little less sensitive to criticism and perhaps a little more conscious of how these laws erode press freedom?

**MARLES:** Well, I don't accept the premise of the question.

**HOST:** What part of it?

**MARLES:** Well, I don't accept the question about our sensitivity. We are absolutely sensitive to the question of national security. We're completely sensitive to the question of freedom of the media.

**HOST:** But now we know what those laws can do. Will you be open-minded

about - at least - about scaling them back a bit?

**MARLES:** At every moment along the way we have been the proponents and responsible for amendments which go to the question of there being national interest tests which protect the freedom of the press. That's actually our form over the last few years.

We will have a look at whatever the Government put before us in terms of propositions here, but the starting point is they have actually got to come out and make it clear that as a Government they support the idea of the freedom of the press, and right now we haven't even heard that.

**HOST:** OK, in your portfolio area in defence, these Chinese warships suddenly turned up in Sydney Harbour. It was a surprise for some. Should it have been a surprise and was it anything remarkable?

**MARLES:** It was nothing remarkable in my view, but it should not have been a surprise, and the insight that we get from this incident is into the complete lack of confidence that this Government has about managing our relationship with China.

Now, this is a big public policy issue. It didn't get so much treatment during the election, but I can tell you how we as a nation manage our relationship with China will go to the security and the prosperity of every Australian through most of this century.

The idea that the Government felt so insecure about its handling of this relationship that it wasn't willing to make public the fact that a couple of Chinese navy vessels were going to come in for replenishment in Sydney Harbour says everything about their total lack of confidence - as does the extraordinary opinion piece that we saw from Senator Fierravanti-Wells which completely makes clear the Government is divided on the question of its relationship with China.

**HOST:** She says, and she's a Liberal senator, of course, and she wrote that it was insensitive of this to happen virtually on the anniversary of Tiananmen Square, and she said it demonstrated that Beijing can dictate the terms. Is that, though, a bit of a stretch? I mean, she is a disgruntled Liberal senator.

**MARLES:** I don't accept the position that she's put, but what is clear, and I think you've described it correctly, is that this government is really divided on such a critical question of public policy. They do not have a sense of confidence about how they're managing their relationship with China. That is completely clear and everybody who follows this closely knows that the Government are amateurs, really, when it comes to what is a profoundly important matter of public policy going forward.

**HOST:** Do you accept, then, another observation of hers in that article, that the Chinese Defence Minister, when he was talking about the Tiananmen Square massacre, he said that the crackdown was the correct policy. Now, there's no nuance there. What did you make of that comment?

**MARLES:** We can all feel as we do in relation to Tiananmen Square, and when I think about Tiananmen Square I actually think about your former boss and my idol Bob Hawke and his comments at the time, and they speak for me and I think for most Australians in relation to that.

No-one's here about defending every human rights issue in respect of China, but the relationship with China is complex and indeed the human rights story of China is complex. Most people would describe me as a hawk in relation to China, and that's fair enough, but we do need to have a total view in relation to China. For all the human rights issues that we rightly put on the table - and we should do that, I might say, whilst at the same time placing Australia in a place of judgement in the international community about our human rights record - China is responsible for the single biggest alleviation of poverty in human history. There is a human rights achievement in that. So, that's really just to say

the relationship is complex. It matters. We've got to get it right, but it's amateur hour what we're seeing on the part of this Government, and actually two visiting warships from China could have been quite a decent moment. As it was this Government turned it into an embarrassment.

**HOST:** Just finally, and with a new leader, Anthony Albanese, what will he bring to it that either Bill Shorten couldn't or didn't?

**MARLES:** Well, firstly it's not a comparison between Anthony Albanese and Bill Shorten. It's actually not.

Bill has been our leader for the last six years, and let me say I think he did a wonderful job. After a period of really significant turmoil of the years 2010 through 2013 where we were very divided and we were not functional, Bill created a unified and functional team that we are today and we owe him a debt of gratitude.

But the real comparison going forward is between Anthony Albanese and Scott Morrison, and what I can say about that is that Anthony Albanese is a deeply collaborative person. He is absolutely authentic in terms of the way he speaks about policy, but the way he speaks about life beyond politics. He is a person who has enormous experience and is greatly admired and respected across the labour movement, and I've got to say, as much as there is pain right now in the aftermath of the election, one of the things that really excites me is watching Anthony Albanese go up head-to-head with Scott Morrison, because over the next couple of years that's going to be a whole heap of fun.

**HOST:** All right. Thank you. Thank you for your time this morning.

**MARLES:** Barrie, we're not quite finished just yet. I'm very mindful of the significance of this moment-

**HOST:** -I'm mindful of the significance of the snow domes. You've got how

many in your office?

**MARLES:** Too many to count, but feel very honoured to be here today so can I just say on behalf of everyone who has sat in this chair, for those of us who are on the inside this is the interview of the week, and the person who has sat in this chair changes week on week and from party to party, but the person who's been sitting in that chair for the last 18 years has been a constant and that's been you, Barrie. It's an enormous contribution to our public debate. It's an enormous contribution to our nation.

Last week you raised my interest on the question of snow domes, so this is a unique, one-of-a-kind, Barrie Cassidy snow dome, which can I present to you on behalf of everyone who has sat in this chair, and with that, Barrie: back to you, Barrie.

**HOST:** Well, you have 400 snow domes, I think. I now have one.

**MARLES:** Very good.

**HOST:** Thanks very much.

***ENDS***

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.