



NEWS INTERVIEW WITH CHANNEL 9, MELBOURNE,
GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON

14 September 1969

Q. What is your reaction, Mr. Prime Minister, to the demonstration outside?

PM. Well, I think it was a perfectly peaceful and orderly gathering. There was no attempt to use any force, nothing of that kind. I think it would have been more interesting if their voices and their singing had been a little bit better, but that is the only criticism I would care to make!

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, in our "Today" programme on Channel 9 on Friday, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Freeth, seemed to indicate that any close association with Russia wouldn't do Australia any good. You seem to have said the opposite to this. Could you clarify this?

PM. You have got an awful lot of "seems" in there and I haven't seen the speech to which you refer. Frankly, I don't accept your interpretation of it and I would doubt very much if it seemed that way.

Q. But you do agree there is confusion at the moment?

PM. No. I don't. I admit there is misinterpretation of a perfectly simple speech. It's no different from speeches which have been made in the past but it has been misinterpreted in very, very odd ways indeed. There has been some suggestion that we would be happy to see a military presence or would be happy to join in some collective security pact or to see Russia join in some collective security pact. I want to make it perfectly clear that we realise better than anybody that the continuing aim of communism is imperialist domination of the world and we would regard it as dangerous for us if Russian military or naval bases were set up in that part of the world, but there has never been any slightest suggestion that we should enter into any kind of collective security pact with Russia. We would not look with any favour on Russia entering into a military security pact with countries to our North, but we would like to see the countries to our North enter into a security pact amongst themselves and help each other and if that were a common objective, then I would have no objection whatever to that. But that is quite different to any Russian military bases or military presence or Russian participation.

Q. Well this actually brings up two points - the first, say, Russian ships in the Indian Ocean.

PM. Well the Indian Ocean is an international ocean and ships have a right to go there. So far there has been no great incursion of Soviet ships into the Indian Ocean. If there were, they have a perfect right to be there and we couldn't stop them unless somebody suggested we should go to war with Russia or something like that, but should there be a build-up of Russian naval power in the Indian Ocean then we would obviously need to watch it as the United States have said they will be watching it.

Q. On the economic side, you were saying if the countries to our North formed a pact this would be fine, but if Russia persisted.....

PM. Now are you sure you are not getting a little confused yourself. I said "A collective security pact of countries to our North" which means a general effort of trying to help themselves in all ways, including military ways as well. On the matter of providing economic assistance, we want to see the people of these countries given a better standard of living. That has always been our objective, the hope that they would get better administrations, their economies would build up and the benefit of those improved economies would spread throughout the people. That requires various kinds of economic assistance and we could certainly have no objection to such economic assistance being provided by the USSR, provided there were no strings attached, provided there was no great incursion of technicians or something else, but this is speaking purely of economic assistance. And that is our objective.

Q. You don't believe that this is what could be described as a "soft line".

PM. Good Heavens, no.

Q. Is this what you believe your critics are suggesting is the "soft line"?

PM. I don't know what they are suggesting except they seem to have completely distorted what in fact Mr. Freeth said and jumped to completely unwarranted conclusions about us being happy if there were military bases or a military presence or Russians entering into a pact there none of which is justified.

Q. The coming election, Mr. Prime Minister. The Gallup polls are indicating that there is a substantial swing to the Labor Party. What is your reaction to this?

PM. The Gallup polls, I think, indicated a three per cent swing from the high point which would have been roughly the same as the 1966 elections. That is common. If you look at the history of the Gallup polls, it is common for them to come closer together during an election period or when an election is in the offing. Having said all that I am always happier with Gallup polls - which I don't regard as utter authorities - but I am always happier when they go for us rather than against us.

Q. How do you feel about former Liberals standing against, for example, the Army Minister, Mr. Lynch?

PM. I think there is a local problem there. Ever since Mr. Lynch has been elected, a certain group in the electorate has been strongly opposed to him personally and I think this has played a very large part.

Q. I will have to use the word "seemed" again because I can only gauge this from outside reports - that there is dissension within your own Party, that there is certain unhappiness with your leadership.

PM. I don't believe there is. Are you basing your question on the meeting of 12 or 14 people at the North Sydney Branch which is one of the 25 Branches in the North Sydney electorate. You probably are. Anyway it is absolutely ridiculous.

Q. You don't consider some of these "fall-out" people are spurring others on?

PM. Oh yes, I would think so, but I should imagine with very little success.

Q. One other point which I haven't mentioned to you at all is the ACTU and the new leader of the ACTU. Do you have any comment at all about Mr. Bob Hawke's election?

PM. Oh, I think we will have to wait to see what develops.

Q. On this basis, do you believe, as some would say, that the position of President of the ACTU is almost as important in this country as the Prime Minister?

PM. No, but I think it is a very important position. I don't think it is as powerful, but I think it is a very significant post.
