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FINAL PARTY TV INTERVIEW

1969 FEDERAL ELECTION

TELEVISION INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. JOHN GORTON, FOR ABC TELEVISION NETWORK

Interviewer: Mr. George Wilson

Q. First, Prime Minister, how successful do you think you have been in your attempt to make foreign affairs and defence the main issues in this election?

PM. Foreign affairs and defence are the main issues in this election. It is not a matter of my attempt to make them so. They are the main issues in this election. Any domestic programme that is put forward for Australia can only succeed provided Australia is secure against attack from abroad, provided Australia retains its alliances with its powerful friends. The foreign affairs and defence area is overriding at this election and I have no doubt at all that the people of Australia fully realise this. The real question is: Why is the Opposition so frightened to talk about foreign affairs and their defence policy? You haven't heard anything from them at all - or I haven't. I haven't heard their Leader mention it at all because he is running away from the question because he knows it is overriding and because, as I believe, he knows most Australians realise it's overriding.

Q. What do you think of Mr. Whitlam's timetable for withdrawal from Malaysia?

PM. Oh, it's merely a restatement of the withdrawal to isolationism which he said before - "all Australian troops will be withdrawn by the time all British troops are withdrawn from that area". There is nothing new in it except I think there is an extraordinarily impertinent attempt to mislead and to confuse the Australian people as to what is involved in what he proposes. You see, he said, "All that is at stake is a different destination". It's worth looking at that because it is a very strange way of putting it. You see, what is at issue is: Do Australian troops remain in that area in Singapore - in that area - ground, air and naval forces or do they all withdraw to the isolationism of Fortress Australia. That's what is at issue. And he is going to bring them all back to the isolationism of Fortress Australia. What he says is: "Oh, the only thing at issue is the destination". The only thing at issue by that, he means, is whether they stay there or whether they come back to Australia, but what a way of putting it, and what an attempt to confuse and mislead.

Q. But don't you think that many people might find a certain amount of attraction in Labor's plans to abolish National Service and to withdraw from Vietnam?

PM. I think there would be a number of people who would be attracted by the suggestion of the abolition of National Service. I believe there would be many many more who would not be attracted by that idea and who would not want it to be brought into effect. And I am positive that Australia's requirements are that we shouldn't abandon National Service. It would immediately mean a cut in the Army by one-third and there is no way ever put before us in which our armed forces can be maintained at the strength we need unless we do retain National Service. Now, we will retain it and the Opposition will not and that is their first real blow at Australia's security. There are many others but that's a real blow. On the question of Vietnam, I think all Australians would want to see a peace in Vietnam which provided an opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to elect the sort of government they want and which would enable all foreign troops to withdraw. I am sure they would. I would. But that is a different proposition from unilaterally withdrawing, abandoning the United States and the South Vietnamese, giving up what was a proper objective of getting a proper just peace for the South Vietnamese people and cutting and running and leaving our allies in the lurch. Now that is a different proposition and I don't believe most Australians would want to see that happen, particularly when they took into account the effect it would have on the world, and on Australia's credibility in the world, and I think the effect it would have on our alliances with the United States.

Q. What is your reaction to those critics who have been saying that you want to concentrate on foreign affairs and defence, simply because your domestic proposals are no nebulous?

PM. I think it is utterly ridiculous, because our proposals are not nebulous in the least compared with the Opposition's proposals. Let us take national development as an example. There isn't one proposal that I can find in their policy for national development. None at all. Oh, setting up a commission here, or a committee there, but nothing that isn't nebulous. Now we have got specific proposals to take Australia into the atomic age, to set aside \$100 million for water conservation, for exploration of water resources, to establish an institute of marine science so that we can find out more about the waters around our coast and know more about the Reef we wish to protect. All these are specific requirements as are the suggestions for building railways. There isn't one in the Opposition's policy speech. If you go through our proposals, you will find they are specific. And they do take some account - we do realise that there is going to be in the future a need by the States for more revenue for their own requirements. This is not mentioned in the suggestions put forward by the Opposition, the nebulous suggestions.

Q. What would you say has emerged as the main domestic issue?

PM. Oh, I think without question it is whether we continue with that kind of responsible economic management which has led to the unprecedented growth that we see around us now, to the prosperity we see around us now, to the employment situation we see around us now, to the general excitement in Australia, the general growing in Australia, and the general building of Australia's population. The question is whether we can continue with that kind of management and keep inflation under control as we do or whether we put all that at risk by injecting hundreds of millions into the economy when there isn't manpower to match it, there are not resources to match it. It is injecting hundreds of millions into the economy for the sake of making specious promises at an election. Look, if these specious promises are accepted, there is no doubt at all that either there will be heavier taxation required or that inflation is going to run rampant in Australia. There is no choice between those two. This will happen - must happen. Now what is the result of that. If inflation runs wild, then there will unquestionably be first, damage and hardship done to pensioners, low income earners, to primary producers, to all those who have no way of meeting cost rises which run from inflation. Also, there will undoubtedly be a diminution of that growth capital we need, that development capital we need from abroad. And if there is a diminution of that, then we won't be able to keep our immigration record at the record heights we have it at now, and there will not be the same job opportunities which we have now. All this - the growth, the employment, the building up of our population, the stability of those on fixed incomes depends on good economic management. Now Australia has seen the results of good economic management and we can see this around us now. All this will be put at risk if the specious promises are accepted.

Q. Finally, Prime Minister, with only a couple of days before the poll, what is your final message to the electorate?

PM. Well, I would say this: I think that at this poll on October 25, Australians are making a momentous choice which is going to have an effect on the future security and possibly the future existence of this country. And so they have to choose which defence policy they prefer. First, do they wish to alienate our allies? Do they wish to retreat unilaterally from Vietnam? Do they wish to retreat from Malaysia/Singapore? Do they wish to argue about joint defence bases with the United States? Do they wish, having driven us into that kind of isolationism, then to cut our own defence forces so we can't defend ourselves? This is the first choice they have to make. Secondly, as I said, the maintenance of the existing prosperity and economic advancement of Australia which has been shown to be in good hands and which is at risk and threatened by the proposals made by the Opposition. This is what the electors must decide on October 25. And I hope for Australia's future security, for Australia's continuing growth, for Australia's future name in the world, the electors will choose that Liberal/Country Party coalition which has made our name stand so high and which at home has brought the benefits we see around us every day. Those are the choices for the electors and I have little doubt what their choice in fact will be.

Q. Thank you, Prime Minister.