

Interview with Laurie Wilson, Channel 7

22 April 1978

QUESTION: P.M. What sort of positive things do you point to as having come out of these two days here. There has been a bit of a feeling that maybe-it really hasn't achieved that much.

PRIME MINISTER: I think the discussions have been very useful because it's the first time Japan and Australia have sat down together to talk about the broader based economic and trade issues. It's natural that we should talk to Japan about these matters because we're both very much affected by the world economy, very much affected by changes in trade. We also have very substantial economic and trade links of our own. I believe there is a significant degree of a common view between Japan and Australia about the problems that we all face at the present time, and about the need to make the trade negotiations taking place through this year as successful as possible, about the need to make sure that agriculture is included, and also about the need to make progress in the dialogue between developing and developed countries - not just progress, but positive results.

QUESTION: If we look to an area like more particularly the EEC, there have been some pretty harsh words exchanged between yourself and some members of the EEC over the past few weeks. Is it possible that Japan can be of assistance in smoothing the way, so to speak?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I don't think that's the role, and that aspect didn't come up. I would hope that in some matters, such as codes for export subsidies, there can be very close co-operation between Japan and Australia, and Australia will be tabling a code for export subsidies in the MTN discussions. The bilateral matters between the EEC and Australia - we need to battle on in our own way in relation to those matters. Those words that we used, we used very deliberately, advisedly and with forethought, because only relatively shortly before that we found representatives of one Community country in MTN discussions saying if Australia doesn't do this, we will break off the bilateral discussions, and Vic. Garland got something of the same flavour in Europe, and after the best part of a year in getting to the situation where constructive and meaningful bilateral discussions could take place, we felt that that was going a little too far, and something needed doing about it.

QUESTION: Looking at the sorts of things that you've been saying over the past few weeks, particularly over the past few days, there now seems almost a sense of urgency about your feelings about what needs to be done internationally, particularly in respect to trade. Can we expect to see over the next say six months or so you playing a much more active role internationally?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I think there is a sense of urgency because there are major trade negotiations going on through the course of this year, and if the wrong decisions are made the dangers are a reversion to the protectionism of the 1930's. Therefore it is very important to try and get to a situation where constructive, useful and sensible decisions are made to try and widen the bases of world trade and to try and achieve an expansion of markets. It is very important to make sure that the developing countries are involved in that. Let me give you one example,(tape turned) a matter of a week or a matter of a month. And I don't think anyone really suggests that that kind of improvement in tariff structure is going to have a substantially great effect on trade. Bringing that to attention just emphasises the importance of other aspects of MTN discussions and negotiations, and emphasises the importance of making sure that agriculture stays a realistic part of the negotiations, and doesn't get pushed aside, as it has on other occasions. If the wrong decisions are made through the course of this year we face the prospects of protectionism of a kind that the world hasn't seen for many years, and I think that would be most unfortunate for all of us, and therefore the decisions taken this year could set the pattern for many years, and therefore it's important to try and set the right pattern.

QUESTION: Finally Prime Minister, You have said that in the past Australia has perhaps been a little reticent in its attitude towards bringing some influence to bear on world attitudes. Are you hoping in fact that we are going to be able to have more influence in the next twelve months?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I think that we've always expressed our views constructively in international forums where Australia is represented as a responsible member of the international community. But any Australian government has a very particular responsibility to all the Australian people, and it's not good enough to say that merely that other nations are larger, more powerful and that therefore they discuss these things amongst themselves, and that Australia can happily leave it to other people. We do have a responsibility to our own people, and countries with whom we have close relationships, Japan, the United States when the Vice-President visits Australia in a few days time. There is a responsibility to speak about these issues as we see them, and I believe that Australia has a constructive role to play, and I believe that should apply to any nation, no matter what its size.
