

INTERVIEW WITH LAURIE WILSON

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QUESTION: Has it really been a worthwhile trip? People probably expected you to come back with something positive, some achievement, but are you able to say what that is and have you in fact achieved anything of any importance?

PRIME MINISTER: I think something of great importance has been achieved, yes. Australia's view is known and Australia's view is understood in areas where it counts, where it is quite essential that our point of view be taken into consideration. We have the circumstance in which the United States has guaranteed that it will walk away from the Multilateral Trade Negotiations unless agriculture is part of the final result. If agriculture is part of the final result, as we of course argue that it must be, then that will be a major victory, because in all the major trade negotiations since the war, agriculture has been pushed aside into the "too hard" basket leaving it open to other countries to use whatever restrictive and unreasonable practices they like, inhibiting, preventing, trade in agricultural goods.

QUESTION: How do you respond to the picture that's being increasingly painted of the trip -- of it being hastily convened and ill-conceived to a large extent?

PRIME MINISTER: I just don't think that's correct in any sense and I would have thought that all Australians would want Australia's view to be put with strength in these particular matters. You know, Britain entered the European community a considerable time ago and we finally got excluded from European markets - 1973, 1974, about that time, and my Government is the first Australian government to argue with strength for Australia's right to export to Europe. Now some people say well don't worry about that because there's Asia. Alright, our exports in the Asian area, the Western Pacific area have been expanding very greatly and I've got no doubt they'll continue to grow, but it happens to be in Europe that we've been up against non-tariff barriers, discriminatory trade practices of one kind or another which have not only denied us the possibility of expanding trade, it's greatly reduced trade that we had out on a traditional basis and if anyone is going to say it's alright to ignore the most affluent technologically advanced market of well over 200 million people, then they are something of great seriousness for many Australian industries because there are a number of industries that need access to the affluent markets of the world for their own prosperity in Australia and my Government is just not prepared to say alright we won't bother, we won't try. We are determined to press Australia's view because it is important for Australia's well being.

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QUESTION: You've been painted as taking something of a bull at a gate approach to the Europeans and yet it certainly doesn't seem like you have achieved very much at all, if anything. Do you think perhaps, if anything, you may have forced them to dig their heels in even more?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so. A number of people in Europe have said that, for heavens sake, don't give up, you've got to keep pressing and they've made that perfectly plain. We knew two or three days before Mr. Garland had his final meeting that the result was going to be quite unsatisfactory as far as Australia was concerned. A number of individual Community countries made it perfectly plain that they expected a very sharp response and that we will need to keep pressing. They also believe so long as we did, ultimately we would gain some kind of access. Now the support we have achieved from the United States in saying that they will walk away from the Multilateral Trade Negotiations unless agriculture is included is obviously very important. They weren't prepared to say that during the Kennedy round and I think the prospects of some success are better than they've been. Mr. Jenkins, President of the Commission, told me that he knew quite well that whatever came out of MTN would mean nothing to Australia unless there was the reality and prospect of Australia being able to sell beef, for example, to the European Community. Now, that's an advance. I haven't heard Mr. Jenkins speaking in those terms before. The final result at Geneva comes out, or is meant to come out, in a relatively few weeks time. Many people are pressing for a final result in July. So if that happens, we'll know and if not, if it's an adverse result, well we will continue to press our view. But, now let me make the point again, our trade with Asia has been expanding enormously, it will continue to expand. It's not in Asia that we're up against the non-tariff barriers, the discriminatory trading practices, and if they are allowed to be pursued without any restraint, it's going to be very serious indeed for Australia. I don't think many Australians in fact understand that there are moves to break down the most-favoured nation principle in trade which means that countries would have the right to be utterly discriminatory in what they do, and it's the most-favoured nation principle that's of enormous importance to the middle ranking countries such as Australia, for the developing world countries and as a result of my visit many more people will be aware of the dangers of what's happening and will be trying, I believe, to do something about it.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, how did you feel about the coverage of your trip. The press has been nothing if not critical, if not sceptical, of the validity of your overseas visit?

PRIME MINISTER: I think you put it right yourself in your own question. I think that there was too much attention on peripheral matters, not enough attention on the major matters. It's important to have the circumstances in which as an Australian Prime Minister can go overseas without being expected on each occasion to bring back a basket full of goodies.

PRIME MINISTER: (continued). That's not the way in which international discussions, negotiations, are undertaken. It's important for a Prime Minister to be able to put a point of view and I believe in particular, over these last two or three weeks, if I'd not been putting Australia's view I would have been failing in a duty and obligation to all the Australian people because our well-being as a trading nation with a very significant part of our total income dependent upon trade -- our well-being as a nation is going to depend what happens as an outcome of these negotiations in Geneva. The standard of life of every Australian will be affected by that outcome. If people want to say that in these circumstances Australia should not press her view with all the strength and vigour at her command, then that's not a view that I can embrace.

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