

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED BY LAURIE OAKES - AFGHANISTAN

Question:

Today's Parliamentary row was sparked by you accusing the Opposition of sympathy towards the Russian involvement of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister:

No, sympathy is the wrong word.

What I have said in plain terms is that there seemed to be a thread in the Australian Labor Party which was either finding excuses for the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan or if not excuses, then trying to find a reason why Australia should do nothing about it. I thought that was on the evidence, a very reasonable statement to make and if the Labor Party wanted to rebutt it there are the devices of the Parliament to rebutt other than the devices of noise and the kinds of personal attack that came subsequently because I am prepared to justify those statements on the basis that the spoken word of members of the Labor Party.

Question:

You were fairly provocative, though, weren't you, given that the Labor Party seems to be saying much the same thing as you or an intelligence organisation, the ONA, has said.

Prime Minister:

There was a report in the National Times - there is a procedure if Mr Hayden wants to be briefed by ONA, he would ask my office and I would in normal circumstances say 'yes', and Mr Furlonger, the Director, would brief him. No such request was made, no such briefing has in fact been given. On the basis of what was in the National Times, I don't believe for one moment that Mr Hayden has had a briefing or seen their reports. Now, there can be differences of view about why the Soviet Union moved into Afghanistan and I have said that on many occasions, but the important thing is the consequences that can flow from them being there. In that matter, the Government and the Government's advisers, as I believe it, are virtually at one, and that includes the Office of National Assessments. If it didn't, if they did have a different view, they are entitled to it but the Government has to govern and be responsible for its views. But, the broad view is that, having moved into Afghanistan, that creates a thoroughly critical and dangerous situation that did call for a very firm response from the United States and obviously from others. If there had been no response, a much more dangerous situation would have developed. Now, there is no difference in the assessment of that, but Mr Hayden seems to be saying that all we have to do is utter a verbal condemnation of Afghanistan, and do nothing about it, and impliedly therefore, the United States does not have to do anything about it because it is not good enough for Mr Hayden to imply that the United States should do

Prime Minister: (cont.)

certain things but that we have no obligations whatsoever ourselves. So, he is saying, terrible as the invasion is, the United States and nobody else, should do anything about it. Now, that is the view that the Government rejects totally.

Question:

You said today that what you really want is a bipartisan policy in this issue. Last Thursday Mr Hayden offered you that when he said that the Labor Party would vote for the Government's resolution condemning the invasion if you deleted one clause which was the reference to this invasion being the greatest threat to world peace since 1945. Why weren't you prepared to do that?

PRIME MINISTER:

He then made it perfectly plain that the rest of the motion had his support. We wanted that there plainly as the view which the Government has of the matter. That resolution commits us to seeing what countries, individually or in concert, collectively, can do to bring the world's abhorrence home to the Soviet Union, and not only to the Soviet Union and the Russian people. Mr Hayden is on record as agreeing that a boycott of the Olympic Games for example would do that very thing, very well. But then having started from a position in which he would support a boycott if it were effective and if there was significant international support for it, he then moves to a position in which he opposes all our attempts - I don't think he will be ultimately successful, but in which he opposes the attempts the Government is making to achieve an effective boycott. I think there is a very real element of double standard in that. I don't understand it. Why therefore, does he do it?

Question:

On that subject, could I ask you about the proposed Games in Melbourne.

Prime Minister:

You have been wanting to ask me about that for about three days but there is really not a great deal to say about it.

Question:

Could I ask you how you rate the chances of some of the events being held here?

Prime Minister:

I can't say any more about that at the moment, there are some moves to have the Games split up in a number of countries. I can't go beyond that.

Question:

Can you say whether you would help finance events in Melbourne?

Prime Minister:

Of course we would help finance events in alternative places.

Question:

And do you have reports specifically mentioning Melbourne?

Prime Minister:

No, look it is fairly broad trying to get Games in a number of places at the moment - in a number of different countries.

Question:

And have you talked to Mr Hamer about the possibility?

Prime Minister:

Not yet.

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