

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED ON PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS - LAURIE WILSON

Question:

Prime Minister, things got pretty heated today in Parliament. Was that really necessary, do you think?

Prime Minister:

No, I don't think it is necessary, and I really do think it is appalling. Debate ought to be on the basis of argument, one way or another, and it ought to be responded to on that basis. I don't think I have ever seen or heard such a personal attack in the time I have been in Parliament, but, I take that to be a mark of people who are totally devoid of arguments, and totally devoid of policies.

Question:

But don't you think you were being somewhat provocative - effectively, what you were doing was accusing the Labor Party per se, as being sympathetic to the Russian cause, in particular to the situation in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister:

Let's take what I said, quite exactly, because what I said, I think, is accurate - that there is a thread in the Australian Labor Party which seeks to find excuses, or if not that, reasons why we should do nothing. Now, reasons why we should do nothing over the boycott of the Olympics Games, for example. Mr Hayden started by saying yes, he could be in favour of an effective boycott, yes, he would be if there is strong international support. Well, fair enough. But then if you believe, as he does, that an effective boycott would get the message through to the Soviet Union about the abhorrence that we all feel, more clearly and more strongly than anything else. Why does he now take a view which leads him to argue very strongly against any boycott. The logic of his own earlier position should be that he would help us to argue for an effective boycott. It is no good saying, "If there is an effective boycott, I'll join it", after 40 other countries have joined it." If you believe it you have got to argue for it. So that is one very clear instance where a change in view by Mr Hayden now seeks to undermine the position that the Government has taken and therefore undermine our mark of disapproval of the Soviet Union. You could go on into other areas in what has been said about trade and the importance of the matter, which they also seek to diminish.

Question:

But, from the outset, Mr Hayden has always made the point that they were not in favour, that they did not support what happened in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister:

That is not in dispute, but if you don't support something, and if you believe it is serious - and if on all available advice to us, it is serious - then you need to do something about it. It is not good enough on the one hand to say, "We are opposed to the

Prime Minister: (cont.)

Russians moving into Afghanistan", then to seek to frustrate every single thing that the Government might do or seek to do to make sure that we along with others, exhibit a collective determination so that the Soviet Union will know it can't do that again, that there mustn't be any more Afghanistans.

Now Mr Hayden has to make up his own mind where he wants to stand. He condemns -all right and I accept that. We all accept that. That is not in dispute, but what I do say is condemnation of a military invasion, involving units of the best armed army in the world going into a non-aligned country, going into a country that could offer a threat to no-one. No way could Afghanistan ever be a threat to the Soviet Union. Now, it is not good enough just to condemn what we say. That condemnation has to be brought through in as realistic a way as can be to the Soviet Union. Again, I put it all in the context of a kind of experience that the world has been through on earlier occasions. In 1936, everyone tried to make excuses, reasons for doing nothing - nobody approved Hitler moving into the Rhineland, or I don't think they did. Nobody really approved them marching into Austria or approved them marching into Czechoslovakia, or approved Italy going into Ethiopia, but what they sought on every hand to do was to argue that we mustn't do anything, that the free world, France and Britain, must sit back and let Italy and Germany do what they want. Against that background, the last World War started. Now, I've said on other occasions that I think what has happened now is equivalent to 1936 - Germany marching into the Rhineland and therefore the purpose of the United States and of others who support it, is to try and establish the circumstances where those other subsequent steps which occurred in the latter part of the '30s do not occur in the earlier part of the '80s.

Question:

Time may eventually show that the stance the Labor Party was wrong, but is it not provocative to paint the sort of picture that gives the sort of feeling that you did to Parliament today suggesting there was a pro-Soviet feeling in the Opposition.

Prime Minister:

There is just one point that I would like to make to you if I could. In 1938, Neville Chamberlain said this. "How horrible, how fantastic and incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of quarrel between people of whom we know nothing". He was speaking of Czechoslovakia, and that was after other events - after the Rhineland, after Austria - but still not enough to spur France and Britain into really believing that a stand was going to have to be made. Then we have Paul Keating saying, "Far away from our area of interest, Australia is not threatened by Afghanistan. It is extremely unlikely that the Soviet Union will attack Pakistan or Iran. After all, who would want Pakistan, for that matter, who would want Afghanistan?"

Now that is exhibiting a lack of concern, a lack of interest in people whose life is just as valuable as yours or mine. If the invasion was closer to us, would they take a different attitude. I am not saying that the Labor Party is supporting - obviously that would be absurd and a terrible charge to make - supporting the Soviet Union. But what I do say is that is if they seek to condemn the Soviet Union as they have, then in the circumstances that prevail, that is not

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Prime Minister: (cont.)

enough, because the whole lesson of history is that once an imperial power starts out on an aggressive path, unless it is stopped by determination, it continues. And it is because nations did not recognise that in the 1930s that a World War in which tens of millions of people died occurred. It could have so easily been stopped on early occasions, and the stand that the President of the United States is making, the joint communique that was issued by the French and the Germans just shortly before I arrived in Bonn a week or so ago - that as I understand is taking the steps, making the statements, making the determination clear so the tragic errors of the kind that occurred between 1936 and 1939 will not be made between 1980 and some years hence. That is what it is all about and I just do not understand why the Australian Parliament can't have a concerted view on this. After all, in the motion that was passed, that committed - and Mr Hayden did not dissent from it, he got up just towards the end of it and said we don't think it is quite as serious as the Government thinks, and therefore, we want a certain section deleted. But we did not accept that. He did not dissent from another part which said countries should act separately or in concert to take what action they could to make sure that the abhorrence of many of us, nations from around the world, is brought home to the Soviet Union. But if you support that kind of statement as an expression of the Parliament's view, why then take steps to frustrate every single action that this Government has taken that would help make that necessary step.

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