

EMBARGO : 9.50 p. m. Sunday 19 July

CHANNEL 7 NETWORK CURRENT AFFAIRS  
PROGRAMME, "THIS WEEK"



TV INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
MR. JOHN GORTON

Interviewer : John Boland

Recorded on Friday, 17 July for screening on Sunday, 19 July

Q. Prime Minister, what were your overall impressions of your tour of Papua/New Guinea?

PM: I think the deepest impression one gets is of the great difficulty in advancing a country such as the Territory to full self-government. This is because there are different races, different languages, different levels of development in different regions, different aspirations in different regions and whatever one does would be interpreted by some regions as going too fast towards self-government and in other regions as going too slow. And there are jealousies between the various regions as well. This makes it an extremely difficult exercise. It is one that has got to be carried out gradually but with some regard for the wishes of all the region and for the different levels of development in them and for the growing - what shall I say? - elite as distinct from those who have not yet had full chances of education.

Q. I would like to be a little more specific on some of those particular divisions which you have spoken of. One of the immediate impressions one gets here in Australia is how long can Australia continue as a colonial power in New Guinea?

PM: Well, first of all I reject the concept of Australia being a colonial power. I don't believe she is a colonial power, but we can put that to one side for the moment. And the only answer I can give you is the answer I gave in New Guinea, and that is that we should continue there as long as most of the people want us to continue there and feel they want our help and they want our skills. As an illustration of that I don't know of any section up there, for example, that doesn't want to try and ensure that Australian administrators and technical officers and agricultural officers and surveyors and key people will stay and help even after self-government comes. So the only answer I can give you is I believe we should stay there as long as we are wanted to stay there and no longer.

Q. Now do you think that say, the more advanced people on the coastal fringes... how long can they wait until the people from the highlands catch up with them?

PM: I would say that you have put your finger on the difficulty which I pointed out at the beginning of this interview. It is a matter surely for arrangement up there. It is not for the Australian Government, I think, to say "You have got to wait this long" or haven't got to wait that long, and indeed even in the coastal areas, there is by no means a unanimity as to what stage they would like the Australians to go. The Pangu Party, for example, is keen on very quick self-government, but the Pangu Party, as far as one can judge, has not got a very large following. In the highlands, I believe, opinion is unanimous against any early self-government, and the highlands have the majority of the population of the Territory of Papua/New Guinea.

Q. Have you got a sort of twenty-year vacuum here, though, between say, the Tolais who we seem to feel are more educated than the remainder of the indigenous people of New Guinea. . . . now is there a sort of a twenty-year vacuum here where they have had the advantages of say the Germans when they occupied New Guinea, and then the Australian Administration since it has been their area to look after, and the highlands people where there hasn't been a lot of penetration from the white man, have had this sort of twenty-year period : : that they have to catch up?

PM: Oh, it is more than twenty years in that sense in that the coastal areas have been subject to European influence for, what, seventy or eighty years, and the highlands for say, twenty, but on the other hand, that doesn't mean that the highland people can't catch up quite quickly. And, indeed, I believe they are catching up quite quickly through the provision of primary schools and secondary schools and technical training, teacher training colleges at Goroka and things of that kind. But they are still. . . . they believe they still need Australian participation and they need Australian administration. Now, so do a lot of the coastal people, so do the people around the Sepik and so do, I believe, a lot of the coastal Papuans. But around Moresby and say Wewak or Madang, there are groups of people who are more eager to move more quickly. And it is a matter of the most delicate balance to try and see that one doesn't go too quickly and one doesn't go too slowly, but that all the time one seeks to leave it finally, at any time, to the decision of the people generally. Now it is not easy to decide how to arrive at that decision. People have said to me, "Well will you come out in favour of a referendum?" I wouldn't be prepared to come out in favour for or against a referendum on that at this time, because that is a possible way of arriving at what they want to do. So is sitting down and arriving at a consensus of opinion by discussion. . . . that is, all areas, perhaps through the House of Assembly. So are expressions of views of the House of Assembly. There are a variety of ways in which I feel this feeling could be discovered. I am not prepared to come out now and say this is the way in which it will be done.

Q. I gather from your visit, now that you have seen it and you have had a pretty good look at it, that one again had to gather the impression that perhaps you went there to - what have a look at the problems which perhaps had been created with the white planters through Mr. Whitlam's visit. Now would this be a fairly reasonable assessment?

PM: No, I went there because since, well February or before, .....

Q. And what he said, incidentally, and what Mr. Whitlam said, if I can add that to it....

PM: Yes, but you asked me why I went there?

Q. Yes, fair enough.

PM: I went there because we had been conducting discussions with the Administrator's Executive Council and with the Constitutional Review Committee on the next steps towards self-government, on trying to ensure that less had to be referred back to Canberra, on trying to ensure that the Australian administrative officers of whom I spoke would stay there and be given some security of tenure now, all these matters which they had raised with us. And I went there to announce, as a result of these discussions, very large steps towards self-government, a great deal more power of administration and decision being handed over to the Administrator's Executive Council and to the House of Assembly.

Q. Do you tend to echo the sentiments of the white planters and were you worried about what Mr. Whitlam said, and they are reported to have been very concerned?

PM: I think Mr. Whitlam caused a great deal of uncertainty in the whole area. I think he upset large numbers of people by putting a firm date on when Australia would get out whether the people wanted it or not. I wouldn't by any means say this was confined to the white planters, because it was quite evident it was an uncertainty and discomfort and fear felt by the highlanders and by many of the coastal people as well. But that is not the reason why I went there.

Q. Now that you have seen it, and had a pretty good look at it, could Papua/ New Guinea be self-governing by 1972? This is what Mr. Whitlam said. Now, I don't want to go into imponderables here, but if for instance, you lost the Senate election and next year there was a double dissolution and Mr. Whitlam became the Prime Minister, he would have a pretty difficult job in front of him with about twelve months up his sleeve to give Papua/ New Guinea self-government, but from where you sit now, do you see any feasibility of them governing themselves by 1972?

PM: I imagine any area can be self-governing if the people who have the responsibility to help it and to advance it move out and say, "Well you are on your own", well, presumably, it has to be self-governing. But I think the things that could flow from that action would be quite dangerous. I think it not putting it too high to say that if one were not careful, something even like a Biafran situation could develop if we just moved out and said, "Right you are on your own. We wash our hands of you." I believe it possible.

- Q. This is very interesting because actually you have not really set a date at all. And this is very difficult to try and pin you down on. Mr. Whitlam says, "Right, 1972". You don't say the mid-seventies. You don't say the early eighties. Have you got, though, at the back of your mind, some idea of when they could govern themselves?
- PM: No, because I think the prerequisite for when they could govern themselves is a general wish in all the regions that they should from that time govern themselves, and I think as soon as they reach that point, then they should govern themselves, with, of course, continuing Australian assistance in the administration and other matters.
- Q. You don't see this in a matter of years, though, or time at all, keeping in mind this.....
- PM: I'm sorry, I just think it quite impossible with any responsibility to say a particular date. It can't be too long delayed. I don't myself think it will be too long delayed, because I think the situation will arise, certainly not by 1972 and certainly not by 1973 or 4. I am not going to put on any date at all. All I am going to say is I believe a situation will eventually arise when the people generally there will say, now, we would like to have self-government, and then they should have it.
- Q. The way you speak there, it sounds very much as though you see that though as a possibility in the seventies, in this decade?
- PM: I see it as a possibility at some stage. In fact, I don't see it as a possibility at some stage, I see it as a certainty at some stage.
- Q. In the seventies?
- PM: A certainty at some stage. I am sorry, you are not going to pin me down to any date.
- Q. No, well, why I put this to you is it has been suggested....all.right, you haven't really got anything in mind for the early eighties, you haven't really got anything in mind for the seventies. Mr. Whitlam has come out and said 1972. Now, we can be critical of him for saying that, but also, can we not be critical of you for saying, "Well, I don't..... it will be at some stage?"
- PM: Yes you can, if you wish to, but I can only repeat what I said to the people up there, that I think it is highly wrong for the Australians to say, "You will have self-government in 1972 or 1973 or 1974 or any date, and we will decide when you are going to do it, and you will have it whether you want it or not". I think it is much better to say: "You will have it as soon as you want it".

- Q. When you arrived at Rabaul, and you had these 13,000 Tolais of the Mataungan Association there chewing betel nuts and drinking hot beer in a sort of an angry mood, were you surprised? Were you surprised to see this sort of a reaction?
- PM: Oh, no, not a bit because for quite a long time the leaders of the Mataungan movement had made it clear that they were going to stretch every nerve to get as many of their supporters in there as they could and put on this kind of reception. I expected it.
- Q. Are you concerned about the Mataungan Association? How so you see them as an organisation?
- PM: Well it is very difficult to say. I think that they have now reached a stage where their leaders at any rate are adopting the attitude : "We are not interested in any laws of any kind. We, in fact, are the Government. We are going to do what we want about everything." I think that their illegal movement into land is dangerous. I think that the tactics they have adopted of beating up those Tolai who disagree with them is also dangerous. . . . .
- Q. You have pretty good evidence of that?
- PM: Oh yes. And I don't believe they are genuinely interested in settlements of what they claim to be grievances. Now, I say that for this reason. Long ago, months and months ago when the question of the Multi-Racial Council came up, I spoke, in Canberra, to Mr. Kaputin, who is one of their leaders, and I said to him then that if the Mataungans felt it was reasonable we could have a referendum to see whether most of the Tolai on the Gazelle Peninsula wished a Multi-Racial Council or not, but he refused to have one. He refused to have a secret referendum. He again refused, when I was up there this time. And before I went there this time, I asked that the Mataungan members should sit down and discuss their worries. If they had land problems, they could discuss those. If they had any problems of any kind, let us sit down and talk about them. And they flatly refused to have any discussions whatsoever, any talks whatsoever. So I don't really think they are interested in settling disputes so much as creating them.
- Q. I noticed you earlier referred to some of the things that perhaps could be learned or perhaps could occur in New Guinea as had happened in some of the emerging African nations, but do you feel that we have learned something from the problems of the emerging African nations in dealing with New Guinea?

PM: I don't think the problems are the same myself. In spite of there being some land difficulties, the Administration has in fact over the years taken great care to try and ensure that the land remained in the ownership of the local people. It has been one of the difficulties in fact of development that it has been very hard to discover who did own land which was required for actual civic development as distinct from private development. I think there is one problem . . . . . it is not the problem of advancing towards political self-government because that is happening. It is not the problem of finding more and more local civil servants because that is happening. It is not the problem of handing over internal administration in greater degrees and so on, because that is happening. But I think there is a difficulty of more indigenous participation in businesses . . . garages and businesses generally. This is something which I believe must be fostered. It is being specifically fostered at Bougainville, for example . . .

Q. That corporation . . .

PM: Yes, and in the development of the Arawa township, for example by the Administration itself. Certain businesses are going to be financed by the Development Bank for the indigenous people, if they have got any hope at all of making a go of it. In other instances, we are going to seek 49 per cent at least equity for the indigenous people, but in other areas . . . . Moresby has sort of grown up, rather.

Q. I would like to get down to . . . . time is pressing with us now . . . one or two other areas. I think last financial year, or the financial year just ending, the Australian taxpayer gave New Guinea a grant of \$96 million which, incidentally, is 58 per cent of the Territory's total receipts. Now this must increase as everything goes up. It never goes down these days. Now are Australians happy being a colonial power at this price, do you believe?

PM: I don't think they are a colonial power.

Q. You don't like that word. I've used it twice now . . .

PM: I don't think this is a colony. A colony is an area of land . . well it always has been in my book . . . an area of land which has been taken over and run for the benefit of some colonising power, and I don't believe this is happening at all. But we gave \$96 million as a grant, part of it was for recurrent running expenses and part of it for development. You say this must increase. I sought to make it clear when I was up in the Territory that as political responsibility is assumed by the people in the Territory themselves, so they must assume more responsibility for raising their own revenue, And indeed what we propose is that there should be two grants made by Australia, one for adding to the revenue raised in the Territory for recurrent expenses of government and that will be under the control of the Administrator's Executive Council. That will

be allocated and spent by them which is a big step forward. But I would expect that the grant from Australia over the years ahead - I am not talking about next year - in that component would reduce and the amount raised from the Territory would increase. The second grant we would make would be for general development purposes. That would be made under the control of Australia and as years go by, as the Territory becomes more viable economically, as it gets a good economic base, that too should be able to be reduced at some stage.

- Q. I wonder if I could ask you these questions quickly, and get rather quick answers from you without destroying them. How powerful do you believe Mr. Kaputin of the Mataungan Association to be?
- PM: I think he has got quite a lot of power over about half the Tolai people and nowhere else?
- Q. What do you think of his New Guinea Development Corporation?
- PM: From what I know of it, if it is as is described, well, fine let him go ahead and do it. Nobody is stopping him, anyway.
- Q. The Multi-Racial Council, what is its future in the light of the Mataungan opposition?
- PM: It depends on whether most of the people in the area want to have a Multi-Racial Council or not. We have sought to find that out. If most of them don't, then there is nothing saying....
- Q. They could win, you know they could win....
- PM: Well, fine. I mean, what does that matter? That at least settles the question of what most people want. And then you have an all native council. It is very nearly an all-Tolai Council now. Very nearly. I have forgotten the numbers. But there is only a very small fraction of European and Chinese on it.
- Q. Turning now to the home front, Prime Minister, we have heard murmurings in recent weeks about inflation, overheated economy and so on from the Federal Treasurer, Mr. Bury. Now, how do you view the economy at the moment?
- PM: I think the best thing I can do is to refer you to the last Treasury White Paper which came out a short time ago which pointed out that actions taken by the Government in its last Budget had reduced the pressures on the labour market and on the demand in the economy for the last two or three months of this financial year and had damped down what had previously been described as an overheating economy. And this paper also points out there are prospects for very great growth in this coming financial year but that we need to be careful to ensure that we don't allow demand to become so great that it would be followed by inflation.

Q. Well, now this is interesting because you have been under some pressure from the Federal Liberal Council and also from your State bodies to fulfil this promise of yours during the elections for taxation relief for middle and lower income earners. Now do you see this as being a very real thing in the near future?

PM: I see it as being a part of the Budget which I don't discuss before the Budget comes out.

Q. I realise that and I don't intend to frame it in that context . . .

PM: But you can't frame it in any other context.

Q. You think you have got me on this one at this particular stage?

PM: No, I don't but I have just constantly refused to discuss what might be in the Budget.

Q. But you do agree that there has been a little bit of pressure on you from your own Party bodies to look at this promise and that you are conscious of it?

PM: I think that I would sooner discuss this whole matter with you perhaps on August 19.'

Q. Thank you very much Prime Minister.

---