

EMBARGO : 7.30 p. m. Monday, 28 September 1970

"THIS DAY TONIGHT"

Television interview given by the Prime  
Minister, Mr. John Gorton on ABC TV Network

28 SEPTEMBER 1970

Interviewer - Gerald Stone

- Q. Mr. Gorton, I'm sure you'll agree that there is considerable difference between legitimate criticism of a political opponent and attempts to smear him through exaggeration and innuendo. In that light, I wonder how you would describe your Government's recent attacks on Mr Whitlam?
- PM Well I understand Mr Whitlam claims that he has been smeared, and if that is so, it is the first occasion on which I can ever remember when a man has put out a statement in his own name and then claimed that that statement smears him.
- Q. We'll get back to that statement in a second. What was the purpose of the allegation that Mr Whitlam in addressing the September 19 Moratorium stood under a Viet Cong flag?
- PM He stood facing a crowd in which a number of flags were flying - Viet Cong flags, other flags associated with the Viet Cong, a defaced Australian flag and Australian flags as well - and that was seen, of course, by scores of people from Parliament House. There can be no question but that that was in fact so.
- Q. But you would agree there is an emotive difference at least between standing somewhere in the proximity of a Viet Cong flag in a large group and standing under a Viet Cong flag?
- PM I think there is a difference between standing holding a banner or having it directly over your head as you speak, but on the other hand, I don't think it myself very different from addressing a mob, a crowd - I don't use the word "mob" in a derogatory way - from addressing a crowd flying Viet Cong flags when one's own troops are engaged in action against troops fighting under those flags.
- Q. Well can I ask you - was the purpose of making this statement "under a flag" was it to identify Mr Whitlam with the most irresponsible elements in the anti-Vietnam campaign?
- PM It was to make a perfectly straightforward statement that he was prepared to go and talk to these people who were flying the flags of our enemies. But that is not an issue of significance compared to the call for soldiers to disobey orders which he has made in his statement that you were going to come back to.

Q. Right. Again we will come back to it, but just one last point on this. Is it a fact that you requested the Australian News and Information Bureau to cover that Moratorium Rally with the express purpose of trying to get a picture of Mr Whitlam in relation to a Viet Cong flag?

PM No, I asked the Australian News and Information Bureau or sent a message to them to cover the Moratorium because after all there are a lot of pictures taken from a lot of different sources at these kinds of gatherings and they tend to be brought forward later as evidence of police brutality or something of that kind, and I think it's not a bad thing to have official records of what in fact goes on at them.

Q. Well then you consider News and Information Bureau to be a fit source to be taking this type of picture?

PM Yes, certainly.

Q. Now, on this question of Mr Whitlam's statement about the Army. You have said he has made a call to mutiny. Mr McEwen used the word "treachery" in describing this action. If you really believe that, do you think Mr Whitlam is a fit person to sit in Federal Parliament?

PM This is what makes it so significant, I think, so nationally significant that a man with a responsibility, the responsible post of Leader of the Opposition, should call - he doesn't like the word "mutiny" - that he should advise young men to join the Army and disobey the orders to go to Vietnam. He claims that's not mutiny. He can argue that out with the dictionary, but I think a dictionary definition will indicate that it could be covered by that. For myself, over the weekend, I am quite happy..... if he doesn't like that word - to just say that it is just as bad to give advice to young men to join the Army and then to disobey orders.

Q. Would you agree there is a difference, though? You have been using the word "call and urge young men to violate orders". Mr Whitlam insists he did not say he urges anybody to violate orders. He simply says if they feel they must in some way avoid service in Vietnam, the best way, if they don't qualify as conscientious objectors is to join the Army and to refuse orders to serve in Vietnam.

PM He advises them. They are his own words. He advises them to join the Army and then to disobey orders. And if you read the transcript of his press statement, he makes it perfectly, explicitly clear in the sentence - and I quote from memory but I think it's accurate - "if they get the order to go, when they do, they should disobey". Well, I'm sorry, what's your point? That, surely, is saying what should happen.

Q. But there is a difference between urging somebody to do something and simply telling them that if he feels he must violate orders that perhaps that's the way he should do it.....

PM I think you are drawing a sort of hairline aren't you here? Here is a Leader of the Opposition, a young man going to him and saying, "I don't mind bearing arms but I don't want to fight in Vietnam" and he says to that young man, "All right. You don't mind bearing arms, then join the CMF and you won't have to go to Vietnam". But he doesn't say that.

Q. Well, I want to raise this question of the CMF, You said if a young man really wanted to avoid service in Vietnam, he could join the CMF. Now isn't this being rather destructive to the CMF, to load it up with young men who in time of war might not want to serve overseas?

PM You are talking about time of war. I am talking about a young man who would be a National Serviceman and who could be called up and who could be sent to Vietnam and who feels he has a genuine conscientious objection to going to Vietnam. In that case, he has the full opportunity of taking a legal course of joining the CMF and not being subject to that liability. Now surely that would be the advice to give and where the advice should stop.

Q. But if we are to treat the CMF as a serious organization.....

PM Now you are trying to talk about the CMF, I'm afraid, instead of the real central point - the advice given was to join the Army and then to refuse to obey orders, and the results of that can only be... these can be the only results that you would make it impossible for an Army containing an element of National Servicemen to be able to be used. People could say "I don't want to go to Vietnam". Other people could say, "I don't want to go to Malaysia". You wouldn't know where you were. It lays the young man himself open to very serious penalties and it is an advice, advice to disobey the law when the young man can obtain the objectives without disobeying the law.

Q. Now you say this would make National Service unworkable, and yet Mr Snedden and the Government has said only a very minute fraction of young men eligible for call-up have tried to evade call-up. So how many men do you think would actually try to refuse.....

PM CK. Not very many because 99 per cent or 99.8 per cent, I think it is, of young men go into the Army when they are called up and accept their obligations. But if this advice that is offered by the Leader of the Opposition, which he says hundreds of young men would want to take, if this advice is to be offered by him and accepted by an increasing number of young men, then this would be the end result.

Q. Mr. Gorton, I think you have acknowledged in the past that the anti-war movement in this country has many moderate and responsible followers. Now isn't there a danger that by making extreme or distorted remarks about some of these moderate followers that you might tend to drive them to an extreme position and tend to further develop splits in the country.....

PM I haven't made any extreme or immoderate remarks about the moderate elements nor about those who are anti-war, nor about those who seek by legal methods to change the law as it stands. I am concerned only with the man in the position of the Leader of the Opposition urging that the law as it stands, after an election in which National Service and continuation in Vietnam were key points, that a man in the position of the Leader of the Opposition after that should advise a breach of the law.

Q. Well, finally, and after all is said and done, Mr Gorton, do you consider Mr Whitlam to be a loyal patriotic Australian with the good of his country at heart?

PM I think that the advice that he is giving to young men.....and according to his own statement - not mine - is unpatriotic.

Q. Thank you, Mr Gorton.

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