INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER -

MR WILLIAM McMAHON

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Interviewers : Mr. John Hudson
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Q. Mr. Prime Minister, do you and the Government intend this rugby tour, and then the cricket tour to go on, despite the protests of demonstrators?

PM So far I've only looked at the problem of the rugby tour, and it will go on, and it will complete the number of matches that it said it would go into. We are not going to be intimidated and blackmailed by certain sections of the Trade Union Movement, and for reasons that I've made abundantly clear both on radio and to the media.

Q. In other words you believe that the police will be able to maintain sufficient control regardless, to keep this tour flowing?

PM Yes, I do. And not only do I think the police will be able to maintain control, but I'm certain that the vast majority of the Australian people want the tour to go on and to be successful. We're a great sporting country, and we're not going to let the few intimidate the rest of us.

Q. For those people Prime Minister, who are anxious about Australia's attitude to apartheid, who have done their best to show the world that Australia's against it. What do you say to them tonight?

PM I believe that the attitude to apartheid is one of individual conscience. Now we as a Government dislike the system, we think it is a bad one. But we think that so far as Australians are concerned, and their consciences are involved, then it must be a matter of individual judgment what they do within the law. In other words, providing that they make up their minds they don't like it, if they like to persuade their friends too, that their friends should not like it - then let them stay away from the matches, but don't let others, whose motives perhaps are not yet fully disclosed to the Australian people, don't let those other people exploit the position, and try and intimidate people not to go. In other words, conscience is a matter of very deep personal concern, and that personal conscience shouldn't be affected by the judgments and the influence of others.

Q. The bigger attitude that's arisen out of this, of course, is the people who wonder why the Government was so quiet in the early days of the proposed tour according to the ACTU, and then the much broader issue of whether such power policies in Australia will be effective - Who is the Government is the crude way of putting it.

PM Well you used the words "according to the ACTU". The point is that from the very earliest days when I became the Prime Minister, I made it clear

that we would place no impediment whatsoever in the way of the tour proceeding and being successful. From then on it generated, I believe, into a struggle for power by certain elements within the Trade Union movement, and blatantly and obviously they showed that they were prepared to force a kind of tyranny on this country. And from that moment on, the question of apartheid degenerated into a squabble between these members of the ACTU, some of them, and the people of Australia as a whole. And I'm abundantly certain of this - that the people resent the fact that this small group of people want to force their opinions upon others. Now we are the Government. But we hear very little from the Opposition today. In other words instead of the Opposition being able to express a view they've abdicated their position to Mr. Hawke, and a few people like him. And if ever an Opposition has given way to a small minority, we see it in existence in Australia today. But we are the legitimate Government, elected by the people, and we will do what we think is right in their interests, rather than the interests of that small minority who obviously are hell-bent on tyranny.

Q. You seem to be saying that there's an important principle at stake here, one of the most important principles that we've ever been confronted with perhaps. It's not just a matter anymore of whether a few football matches should go on or not.

PM It's degenerated now into three principles - four perhaps if I can put it that way. The first one is the right of Australians themselves to choose, providing they obey the law and act within the law. And why shouldn't they? They were born free, and they want to remain free. Why should someone else deprive them of the opportunity of free choice, and the opportunity to do what they want to do - to watch a football match, it doesn't matter whether it happened to be the Dynamos from the Soviet, or whether it happened to be a football team from South Africa. The second one is far more important - who does govern this country? Is it to be a very small minority of people, or is it to be the duly elected people of this country - representatives of this country. I believe in a liberal democracy here, and consequently when it comes to the question of Government, I believe it is the representatives of the people themselves who are to govern, and we're not to be coerced by a small section of the Trade Union movement. And there is another question involved too. I don't like people to prostitute their political position by saying there's some moral issue involved. I think sport ought to be divorced from politics and I believe that's the view of the Australian people, too. If people like to mix the two up together, driven purely by a political motive, and in the attempt to use this as a way in which they can enforce their views on the Australian people, then we have to resist it, and we've done so. And the last one, and I know I'm taking a long time in this, and consequently you have to forgive me. Frankly this is not the way to go about ensuring that the South African people themselves come to grips with apartheid, solve the problem to the benefit of all people in South Africa. I think the way we're going about it is bad. It strengthens the very conservative elements in South Africa and doesn't give the young people and the liberal elements an opportunity to express themselves quickly.

Q. Of course, Mr. Hawke answers that and it is convincing to many people, when he says that the rest of the world has cut itself off from South Africa over this question of apartheid, and then he enumerates all the sports who have done this, names a number of other bodies and lets it go at that. And that sounds very convincing, because in fact this has happened, but what is your answer to that?

PM My answer to that is that I've just given the answer. We make up our minds what we think is right and what is the proper way to go about settling a problem of the kind that I have just mentioned.

Q. Even if it does happen to conflict with what the United Nations or anyone else has decided?

PM Yes, even though it might conflict with others. Because we're an independent country, independently minded and we do what we think is right. But I can only say this, we've adopted exactly the same attitude to the Chinese coming here. We've adopted the same attitude to the Soviet coming here, we let their ballet companies and their football teams come. Now their system is abhorrent to us too, they're tyrannical and dictatorial but we haven't mixed up the two. And we hope, we can hope in time, and all of us must hope in time, we'll be able to solve the problems in a way that gives freedom of choice to the individual, lets them exercise their own individual consciences, permits them to go about their lawful business, in a way that is most pleasing and satisfactory to them. And we don't believe, and I want to emphasise this, in interfering in the business of other countries. Because whenever others at United Nations, or anywhere else, start to interfere in ours, we tell them where to get off - and we've been remarkably successful.

Q. There's the element Prime Minister, which is frightening to a lot of people. The element is blackmail as called by some. We've reason to believe that the same principles which have been drawn out - the power, fight, protesting - could be used in Australia, after August, to force the Government, or persuade the Government, to do something more for the aborigines. I think you're aware of this.

PM Yes, I am.

Q. Again from the ACTU of course. Now the country doesn't want that to happen. So drawing out a stage further, have you promises to offer to our own coloured people?

PM This would take me quite a long time to answer. But can I go back a little over the history of this problem? Immediately after I became the Prime Minister, Mr. W.C. Wentworth, the Minister for Social Services, and then in charge of Aboriginal Affairs, came to me. And he said, the native councils, the aboriginal councils have asked me if I can get you to agree to 11 reforms, and to take them up with the Queensland Government, and to get our own Department of the Interior responsible for the Northern Territory to carry out some reforms too. Within a matter of days I was able to go up to Queensland, and 9 of the 11 reforms asked for by Mr. Wentworth, that had been promoted by all of the Aboriginal Councils in Queensland were agreed to immediately. Two others were not, and I believe that the changes were made in the interests of the aboriginals themselves. The two changes that were not immediately adopted were one regarding alcohol - the free supply of alcohol on the Reserves. And there it was suggested to me, and agreed to, that the local Aboriginal Councils should have the right of local option. The second one was relating to those aboriginals who were given control of their own property by the Queensland Administration, and here we agreed that they would have a form of protection. If we found they had been exploited and people had taken their money away from them, or otherwise exploited them, we would, that's the

Queensland Government, would administratively ensure that justice was done. So on each one of the 11 cases put to us, we did what we were asked to do, and recently Mr. Neville Bonner, who I believe will be a very distinguished member of the Senate, or he is now a distinguished member of the Senate, he has said that their claims have been fulfilled and their requests have been agreed to. So too in the Northern Territory - we've set aside land for them, we've set aside funds. I wish time was available to me to explain to you what was done but I think most thinking Australians would agree that we're acting responsibly and fairly, and when I go home I'll ensure Mr. Ralph Hunt, my Minister for the Interior, makes another statement to indicate clearly what we've done and the Australian people will be pretty proud, because they're the ones who are paying through taxation.

Q. We haven't mentioned the name Bob Hawke, or Mr. Hawke at all, but if the reply to his letter, or the ACTU letter about land rights and so on is not satisfactory - this was the point I was trying to make - he gave reason to believe that protests would be organised again, and black bans and disruption of industry.

PM I think you can take it that there has been a course of action by Mr. Hawke and those who go along with him. Since I've been the Prime Minister this course of action has always been in terms of threats and intimidation, and the kind of action that he's tried to drum up over the South African sporting tour. Always force to be used - always coercion. But I'd be prepared to make this statement to you, that Mr. Hawke hasn't a glimmer of knowledge of what happened in Queensland or in the Northern Territory. He's concentrated on the Yirrkala case, and he's been critical of the judgment of Mr. Justice Blackburn. Now Mr. Justice Blackburn was acting as a lawyer. And I believe it is a brilliant judgment and ought to be read by every thinking citizen. We should not be criticising him, what we should be doing is looking for worthwhile ways of reform, and when we get sensible suggestions we will adopt them. I'll see that Mr. Hunt, Minister for the Interior issues another statement, and I'll be certain that the Australian people will say "Well done. You're acting as our representatives, but they're native Australians, just the same as anyone else, they're entitled to a fair go, and they're entitled to justice and we'll ensure that they'll get it.

Q. In a moment, Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to switch topics, but firstly, just one final apartheid question : Have you or other members of the Cabinet perhaps, had any discussions with top Ministers in the South African Nationalist Government over the question of apartheid, and particularly over the question of these tours?

PM Not that I'm aware of, but I have written to the South African Prime Minister, and I've informed him of the views of the Australian people, because I said they were bitterly disappointed when the ban was imposed upon native South Africans - that's coloured South Africans taking part in the tour. But we haven't had any personal discussions with them, face to face. They know our views anyhow, they know our dislike of apartheid, and they know that we'd like a much more liberal system introduced, and equality introduced there as soon as it was practicable.

Q. All this then has thrown into highlight a whole range of Australia's life. And here's a good opportunity for pensioners who are watching, and farmers and others who feel out of it a bit in this country, give some good words for them.

PM Yes, I can. First of all as to the pensioners. I confess immediately, that I felt that in the last Budget, we had not been fair to them. And the first action I took as the Prime Minister was to increase the pension for the married couple and the single couple too. And I gave also certain assurances relating to the base rate pensioner, and the changes we would introduce - the kind of changes we would introduce with the next Budget. Naturally I can't tell you exactly what can be done because I think the Budget has to remain secret. But nonetheless this is one of the problems we have to give careful attention to. As to both the woolgrower and other sections of Primary Industry....

Q. Mr. McMahon may I interrupt you just for a moment....

PM Yes, of course you can.

Q. ...Mr. Wentworth's statement then about the superannuation scheme is a very much long-term plan.

PM Well, look I haven't read what Mr. Wentworth has said, and I understand that on radio today, television anyhow, he has said that he'd been misunderstood. I wouldn't like to make a comment about superannuation until I hear from him. But what I can say is that there is no Bill before the Government, and we have no proposals, at present before the Government, that I know of, relating to superannuation. But nonetheless, I come back to what I said : My fundamental responsibility is to look after the more needy sections, and I regard that as the paramount objective of Government.

Q. Farmers then?

PM On farmers what we have done - and I took a leading role in this myself - was to ensure that the strongest interdepartmental committee we could get together would look at the problems of the wool industry, and of rural industries in general - or those rural industries who want or who are in need of assistance. I understand the papers are just about completed, and we will set aside a special Cabinet meeting to consider them. This should be done within the course of the next two to three weeks.

Q. Might I mention Vietnam? It's not so long ago Mr. Prime Minister, that moratorium marchers stirred the same sort of scenes that we're now seeing with apartheid. But now people seem to be accepting them fairly peacefully. And in fact, almost saying, Well perhaps we were wrong, perhaps we should get out of Vietnam , generally speaking, the allies, right now. And certainly Labor is making a lot of capital out of this. What's your attitude?

PM My attitude is a clear one. I've stated before why we are in Vietnam. And if you'd like me to refer to the principles involved I'll mention them now. I believe we're taking the correct attitude. What we are doing is trying to ensure that the people of South Vietnam have the right to determine their own future? We want to determine our own future - why shouldn't they have the right. And I believe we've been remarkably successful. Who would have thought two years ago that South Vietnam would soon be able to stand on its own feet. To be able to protect itself. To be able to give their citizens the right of choice in the same way as ours have got the right of choice too. But Vietnamisation is being successful, and our own role is steadily diminishing. We've already withdrawn one battalion. The Americans are withdrawing their forces quickly too.

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Q. Are you impressed by the latest Viet Cong offer?

PM I haven't read it.... I've read it and I haven't been able to give it enough consideration to be able to be precise about it, to be definitive. I can't do that just yet.

Q. Seems to be impressing the American Government, if we can believe the reports we're getting. They seem to be accepting the Viet Cong as being at last realistic, and perhaps genuine, in saying that they will allow American troops to be handed over, prisoners of war that is, providing American troops withdraw - in other words the whole thing simultaneously. Now this seems to be impressing President Nixon...

PM Well I have to go this far. I didn't get that impression from the cables that I've received. But I don't want to be precise because I only received the cable rather late last night, and you know you can't read them, and give an immediate judgment about them. But if we could get to the stage when the North Vietnamese will say "We will leave the South Vietnamese alone", and we could get assurances that there would be freedom for both the North and for the South, well then of course we'd want to get out as quickly as we could and we'd want to give aid and assistance programmes to the South Vietnamese so that they could build up their standards of living, so that they could give their own people the opportunity to have the kind of life that we'd want for them.

Q. I wonder whether you've been in touch with the United States recently about further withdrawals. That there's a chance that more of our troops will be coming home soon?

PM I have had, since I've been the Prime Minister, under constant review the problem of the withdrawal of Australian troops. And the Defence Committee keeps it under constant review on behalf of the Government. We will, as soon as we've made up our minds what we're to do, announce it to the Australian people, most probably in Parliament, because Parliament will be sitting at the time when we'll make our decision. I've been watching the problem carefully, I've been asking myself the problem when can we get out of Phuoc Tuy Province, when will the South Vietnamese there be able to look after themselves? Based upon all the facts, and the implications that are put to me, we'll make up our minds what we're to do. I want to assure you that of course it's our objective to get out. The problem is one of timing - when we can do it, and above all when we can give the South Vietnamese the opportunity to live in peace and in freedom.

Q. Now Labor is saying "We told you so", Mr. Prime Minister, and making capital out of recent revelations from America - published by American newspapers. And to some this might be seen as a way of damaging your image at the next Federal poll. Could it?

PM Well I don't believe that. Labor will of course jump on a bandwaggon and say "I told you so". But Labor never thought that South Vietnam could be preserved as an independent and free country. They wanted to get out and to let them be overrun by the North. In other words they were prepared to have a tyrannical and dictatorial government in North Vietnam dominate the freedom of the people of South Vietnam. We're not like this. Australians traditionally have fought in

the cause of freedom - World Wars I and II - in the case of Malaysia, in the case of South Korea and South Vietnam. And now that victory is there and we're giving the South Vietnamese the opportunity of freedom, surely we just don't want to run out now - run out on them now, and ensure that the North Vietnamese have a better chance than they should be given. But this doesn't really matter. The point is Vietnamisation has been successful, and as soon as we find that the South Vietnamese can protect Phuoc Tuy Province themselves, of course as soon as that happens, and it won't be too far distant either, as soon as that happens of course we'll go through our proposals for withdrawal of Australian troops and announce them to the Australian people.

Q. I'm not sure Prime Minister, whether after having been involved with all the finer detail of Government and Australia's policy in the whole range of life, whether you step back every now and again and look at the general picture. Certainly with regard to the democratic system, the international scene, who we're going to be friendly with next, or with whom we can be friendly. First the democratic principle in this country. Are we too cumbersome? Are elections as we conduct them now, and elected Governments and so on, an anachronism in our way of life? Isn't there something better we could have?

PM No I don't think so. I happen to be a liberal democrat and I have fought for liberal democracy ever since I've been in Parliament. This is the greatest goal - one of the greatest goals we can fight for, apart from making certain that none of our people go short of all the things that are necessary in order to survive, and to give them the opportunities of a better life too. But I'm sure you'll achieve your purposes far more easily and quickly under a democratic system of government than by permitting some element of tyranny to creep in.

Q. But we can't exist as an island. And although we were in Asia a pretty good example of a liberal democratic system, we know that we've got to deal with other countries...

PM Yes.

Q. ...And it seems more and more there's an insistence that our political system should be aligned with their political system. And if there's a growing tendency to national socialism in the world, doesn't this put us in a precarious position?

PM I don't think it does, because I think we'll do ever so much better as a liberal democracy than we would do with the kind of system that would be forced on us if Mr. Hawke and people like him, dominate the Labor Party, and compel us or try and compel us to introduce the systems of socialism or even of communism.

Q. What's the best thing to fight it then? Is it education, or is it simply a liberal democratic system ad nauseam almost? Which part of our society can preserve what we've got now?

PM By keeping a liberal democratic government in power. And it is a fundamental duty of a liberal democratic government to educate the Australian people and keep them informed of what they are doing, and why they are doing it.

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And similarly, too, and you obviously recognise this because of the questions you asked at the beginning of this discussion, you pointed out, or implicit in what you said to me was the fact that today there is an element that wants tyranny to be established here, and wants to enforce its will against the wishes of the Australian people. When you get television of the kind you had here a few days ago with Mr. Hawke appearing on it, then that alerts the Australian people of the dangers, and it is once they are alerted you can make abundantly certain that they won't agree to it and they won't permit it to be the kind of Government that's operative in this country.

Q. Are you saying that Mr. Hawke damaged himself from what you saw of that interview we did with him last week, and the Labor cause in this country?

PM I am sure he did. But I don't want to come in very much against Mr. Hawke - I've known him for a long, long time. I was Minister for Labour for about eight years, I - you know haven't got a very great regard for him, but I'd rather leave him out of it and draw attention to the issues in sight and the political issues.....

Q. In terms of life and death, Mr. Prime Minister, perhaps of far greater problems even than Vietnam - I mean, for example, we see the enormous death toll on our roads here which makes the Vietnam toll pale into almost insiginficance. Is there anything that you have in mind to perhaps do about that nationally?

PM There are several things that we have done. When I was the Treasurer which wasn't very long ago, we decided that we would give a very big increase in the grants for roads to the State Governments to let them have a better road system in this country. I think the phrase I then coined - an additional half a billion - it is a catchy phrase, but catchy phrases are rather good these days - we gave them half a billion in order, over a period of three to five years to be able to better the roads system of this country and so to reduce the toll. For the rest of it such as seat belts and control of the roads and safety measures that can be taken, these reside within the field of the State Governments.

Q. Would you personally like to see seat belts compulsory all over Australia?

PM I don't mind. I don't think I know enough about it to be able to be precise. But if the safety authorities think it is desirable then I believe we should enact the laws to make them necessary - and I'd be one of the first to admit that if they want it done it ought to be done.

Q. Prime Minister, time goes by very very quickly. But again in order to improve the country - roads, Vietnam, labour relationships - I was trying to fish in the previous question towards education - I was thinking that in our country most of the money ought to be spent perhaps on education. And more and more and more - for my children, for your children. Do you agree?

PM You can never spend enough on education. But I think you have to take a balanced view as to where the money should be spent. Well first of all we must remove pockets of poverty wherever we can. We must see that we've got a first class and an improving health system. We must have increasingly better education because we've got a wonderful lot of people with pretty high IQs - native intelligence of the highest order. And I say this as a man who's travelled the world and knows the capacity of the Australian in comparison with others. And of course, we then have to make our provision for defence. But what we always

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have to remember, is that we are not a very big country, and we have to act within the limitations of our natural and physical resources and our people. What we want to do is to ensure that we get that happy blending - that blending that means that it's in the best interests of the Australian people as a whole. And we will increasingly give a greater advance, a greater amount of money for education. I think you know that only a few years ago we did give the States enormously increased advances - what they call general revenue grants. And out of that we hope they'll be able to develop a better education system.

Q. If we had a federal election any time between now and the arrival say of the Springbok cricket team: do you believe that you could win on one simple platform - law and order - who's running this country - myself the Prime Minister and his Government or the ACTU lead by Bob Hawke?

PM It's my own belief that if we had an election today we would win at least two seats in Western Australia, and we would win seats in very nearly every other State as well, winning at least three in New South Wales. So it does show that the Australian people are interested in the problem of public order, they are interested in ensuring that a truly democratic system is protected and they want the right of freedom of choice within the law themselves. In other words we're a pretty responsible and decent community and we don't want thelarrikin few - the demagogue or the brash - we don't want them to be telling us what we're to do.

Q. And this suggests that you should have an election quick and lively.

Q. Why not today?

PM Well, you know you can't have elections in a matter of days. I once, if I could now make a simple confession to you, did contemplate one shortly after I became the Prime Minister. I felt, well, this was the day. But we weren't very well organised, and there were other views, that felt it was too soon after becoming the Prime Minister, too precipitate, and of course I thought about it, but never got to the stage where a decision had to be made. But if I had I know what the consequences would have been. It would have been a very, very unhappy day for the Labor Party, and an extremely unhappy day for the socialist left, and for those who Mr. Hawke told what he should do during the course of the last few weeks.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you.

PM Thank you too.
