

PRIME MINISTER'S INTERVIEW WITH N.B.C.'S "MEET THE PRESS",
WASHINGTON, D.C., 6 OCTOBER, 1974

PANEL

- Mr Lawrence E. Spivak - Moderator
- Mr Bernard Gwertzman - Chief Diplomatic Correspondent of the New York Times
- Mr Carl T.S. Rowan - Chicago Daily News, Syndicated Columnist and Television Radio Commentator
- Mr Henry Brandon - Washington Correspondent of the London Sunday Times
- Mr Robert Goralski - N.B.C. News

SPIVAK: Our guest today on "Meet the Press" is the Prime Minister of Australia, E. Gough Whitlam, who is in this country on a visit. Elected in 1972, he is Australia's first Labor Party Prime Minister since 1949. We will have the first question now from Mr Robert Goralski of N.B.C. News.

GORALSKI: Mr Prime Minister, no nation has been spared the agony of runaway inflation. Is there any kind of collective international action that can be taken to alleviate the situation?

PRIME MINISTER: None of us have thought one up yet. But it is clear that it affects all of us and we have to try to work out solutions together.

GORALSKI: The other day at the United Nations you talked to nations of the world, and talked about "sheer folly" in terms of possible military action. Is that a real possibility in your mind?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so. I don't believe any head of government would resort to it. There have of course been comments that it was in contemplation.

GORALSKI: Are you basically hopeful that some solution can be devised before the world does fall apart financially?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

GORALSKI: What kinds of steps, sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that we will come to a better balance between the needs of the developing countries and of the developed countries. We won't see the system disrupted so suddenly as it has been in recent months; but we accept the fact that there will have to be changes - that the great disparities between nations will have to be reduced.

SPIVAK: You have just met Robert Goralski of N.B.C. News. The other questioners on our Panel today are Bernard Gwertzman of the New York Times; Carl T. Rowan of the Chicago Daily News and Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times. We will continue the questions now with Mr Gwertzman.

GWERTZMAN: Mr Prime Minister, in your speech to the United Nations you talked about world events beginning to sour and a sense of drift setting in. In your opinion is it more necessary now to strengthen security in your part of the world, or have tensions been reduced as you said when you took office a couple of years ago?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think the big problem so far as we in Australia are concerned is security in our region. What does worry us is the proliferation of armaments - and particularly nuclear armaments. We are worried that the high hopes which attended the inauguration of the non-proliferation treaty should be now so often disappointed. We have done all we can. We hope - and this is largely why I was at the United Nations - to get more joint action; to realise the objectives of that treaty.

GWERTZMAN: Dr Kissinger spoke about this danger in his speech also. Do you think there will be a concerted effort to strengthen the safeguards on the spread of nuclear weapons?

PRIME MINISTER: I can only hope so.

GERTZMAN: One more security matter. In this country the United States has been concerned about perhaps a break up of SEATO. Do you think SEATO is still necessary?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is still useful. There was a useful meeting of all the participants last week. And they all seemed to be happy with it. It has changed its character. It is no longer designed to contain China. It is quite useful as a group to discuss problems regularly.

ROWAN: Mr Prime Minister. Shortly after taking office you opened diplomatic relations with Peking, you pulled Australian troops out of Viet Nam, opened relations with Hanoi, gave money to the Viet Cong, opened relations with North Korea. Are you trying to make Australia neutral or a sort of Sweden of the Pacific?

PRIME MINISTER: No, but we did want to dissociate ourselves promptly with the activities in which we had participated in Viet Nam and in Cambodia. I don't agree that we have given money to the Viet Cong. We haven't. And we have only just established diplomatic relations with North Korea. The other matters that you mentioned, Mr Rowan were done promptly. It was time to do them.

ROWAN: Now recently in debates in your country your Foreign Minister Willesee said this: "The policies of the former Government were geared to a colonial era in which Australia dared take no action unless either Britain or the United States moved first". Do you share Senator Willesee's view, that the previous Government made Australia "the laughing stock of the world"?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I agree with all that you have quoted my Foreign Minister as saying. But, I don't necessarily want to pursue any factional or partisan attitudes while I am in your country. I think it's enough to say there will be no going back to the attitudes that our predecessors pursued. I believe that they accept the inevitability and propriety of those things which we have initiated.

ROWAN: Mr Prime Minister is it simply a matter of your having concluded that some of the interests of the United States and Great Britain in the Pacific area are now inimical to the interests of Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't believe that. But we have helped the change in attitudes of the United States. The United States doesn't take the same attitude towards matters in the Pacific that it was taking in the 1960's. America has changed.

BRANDON: Mr Prime Minister. Australia, earlier this year I think, joined the International Bauxite Association which will control about two-thirds of the world supplies. We have heard a lot about oil cartels. I was just wondering whether the Bauxite Association will create similar financial difficulties to the industrial world.

PRIME MINISTER: I would think not. We certainly have joined the International Bauxite Association. The Association very largely stems from suggestions I made in North America fourteen months ago. But we have spelt out in the guidelines for the Association the fact that we want to see that the consumers of bauxite are assured of regular supplies, on fair conditions.

BRANDON: But there was some talk about fair prices for the producers and that raises the question whether there won't be some price gouging.

PRIME MINISTER: I know that there has been some talk of this - as there has been in respect of any commodity agreement whatever, agricultural or mineral. But Australia, I believe - under previous governments as well as under my Government - has a good record for wanting to have commodity agreements. And we naturally understand the attitude that the other bauxite producing countries have - in that their prices for their sole export, in most cases bauxite, hasn't kept pace with the prices they have to pay for their necessary imports. There ought to be some relation between it. We share that view.

BRANDON: Let me come back to the earlier debate about Australia's security. I think there are three theories. One is based on the forward strategy from which Australia seems to have withdrawn; then there is the fortress Australia strategy; and then there are those politicians in Australia who say that Australia really doesn't need much of a defence. I was just wondering where you stand.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I wouldn't be in any of the three categories you chose. There is the other one that the best arrangements are regional or collective ones. Some necessarily have to be global. We must be worried for instance if India, or further afield Israel and Egypt, acquire a nuclear weapons capacity. That concerns us. It concerns everyone in the world. But also in our own particular neighbourhood it is necessary that there should be a lack of tensions. We ought to play our part in reducing them and eliminating them. And we are doing that. We aren't waiting for initiatives by Britain or the United States. We are establishing good relations with our neighbours, ourselves, directly.

SPIVAK: Mr Prime Minister, there are some people in this country who are puzzled by your sixteen day visit to the United States and Canada at this time when Australia has so many domestic problems of its own. Is this just a pleasure trip or is there some special reason for your trip?

PRIME MINISTER: The trip is a pleasure. I make no bones about that, in America, Canada, or at home. But the matters we have mentioned such as non proliferation, or commodities, or resources are important to Australia - always will be - not least now; and they can be dealt with in many cases only on a visit like this. On top of my visit to the United Nations, there was the fact that I thought it appropriate to become acquainted with the new President in the United States and to be in touch, as I always am when in North America, with the Prime Minister of Canada who has just been re-elected, as I have.

SPIVAK: Mr Prime Minister, we have had reports in this country that over the past few months at least that your position towards the United States is not as friendly as Australia's position has been in the past. Can you tell us in your own words how you now view our present relationship?

PRIME MINISTER: My attitude towards the United States has always been friendly. That of my party has been friendly, but as I said in answer to one of the panel earlier, nations do change their policies. America has changed her policy since the 1960's, and if we recognise Peking instead of Taipei, that is not to be wondered at. It is not resented by America. If we get out of Viet Nam or Cambodia we are doing what America is doing. May I add that there are some countries, such as Japan and Indonesia notably, with which our policies tally very effectively with America's interests too.

SPIVAK: Are you saying this then, that although for a great many years Australian security depended on its firm ties with the United States, that's no longer true?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I think that in the ultimate circumstances Australia's security is tied with America. In the case of a world war there is no question where Australia's interest would lie.

GORALSKI: Mr Prime Minister, how has Australia benefited from its relations with mainland China, with East Germany, North Korea, North Viet Nam.

PRIME MINISTER: If one is to have relations with other countries then one has to have relations with them on the diplomatic level. Now I don't know how much further you want me to go on this. The fact is that the relations which my Government has established with these other countries which you have mentioned will be continued by any Australian Government; and to take East Germany, the United States has now established diplomatic relations with East Germany. I don't think that if there is a change of administration in the United States those relations will be severed, as you will ultimately, obviously, also establish diplomatic relations with the Peoples' Republic of China. You have very meaningful liaison already with the Republic and you will also establish diplomatic relations with North Korea as well as with South Korea. That is - taking sides in the case of these divided countries no longer serves any national or world purpose.

GORALSKI: I think the point I am getting to, Mr Prime Minister, that charting a new foreign policy, a more independent foreign policy as you have, where do American and Australian foreign interests not coincide.

PRIME MINISTER: Well one could give instances in the past. I would believe that America over-reacted between Korea and the Paris agreements to events in East Asia. Now I am very happy to see America's attitude has changed there. We have collaborated in that change. In many ways we have made it easier for the change to be made.

GWERTZMAN: Mr Prime Minister, I would like to ask you about a problem which has bothered some Americans. It was your decision to recognise Soviet de jure sovereignty over the Baltic States. As you know it caused some concern among Americans of those nationalities as well as in your country. Could you tell us how you decided to do this? What was the motivation for it?

PRIME MINISTER: We just wanted to face up to the facts. We believed it is a delusion - worse it is a deception - to suggest that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will again be independent sovereign political entities as they were only between the two world wars.

GWERTZMAN: Do you find any inconsistency with this position with your other well know position of urging human rights and ending of exploitations of other people?

PRIME MINISTER: There are some cases where you can do something about human rights in a country with which you have diplomatic relations, where you can't with a country which you don't have them with. For instance with Chile we have been able to do some things with Chile by recognising the new regime, that we couldn't have done if we had not recognised it.

ROWAN: Mr Prime Minister, I think it is known that in the past Australia was thought of as European - all her ties to Europe. Are you consciously trying to make Australia look more Asian?

PRIME MINISTER: No, we are obviously a European nation and we, as far ahead as one can see, will be a European nation. Nevertheless it is clear that geographically and economically we must recognise the fact that we are right on the opposite side of the world from Europe.

ROWAN: Well with regard to the racial implications there, you got a lot of publicity as the man who set out to right the wrongs that had been committed against Australia's aborigines. Reports now come out that you may be caving into a white backlash. Is there any validity to this.?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not, nor I believe are any of my colleagues. It is very difficult to get overall satisfaction with new policies - particularly where they are policies which are reversing policies which have been pursued for some generations. But the hopeful thing is that the aboriginal people in Australia, under my Government, now have sufficient confidence to express their dissatisfaction. If they are dissatisfied with my Government they will let us know, and that is a necessary aspect of any self respect or emancipation - that people will speak up and act where they think that their interests are being harmed.

ROWAN: Might I ask what your policies will be with regard to who can migrate to Australia. Will the door now be open to coloureds - to blacks?

PRIME MINISTER: If coloured have - blacks have - close dependent relatives in Australia they can come in pretty well automatically. If they have skills - but have no relatives - they can also come in, but there is some waiting list. But there is no discrimination now, whatever, in those who can come in to stay, or to visit, on the grounds of race or colour.

BRANDON: There is a strong group on the left of you, Mr Prime Minister, in the Cabinet - and I gather in the Party Caucus - that sometimes is very difficult for you to control, and I was wondering whether there is a danger that they might oust you.

PRIME MINISTER: They would be cutting their own throats.

BRANDON: Why would they be cutting their own throats?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I - you come from England don't you?

BRANDON: Yes.

PRIME MINISTER: Well you know perfectly well that this is the stock-in-trade of any criticism of any Labor Government - that it is faction ridden, that the right and the left are at arms length and the Leader is about to topple; well it doesn't apply.

BRANDON: You have been quoted I think off and on that you have certain policies that you would like to pursue but have difficulty in getting through your Cabinet or the party machine.

PRIME MINISTER: I get through whatever I set my heart on, and all the matters that have been mentioned to me in your questions today have produced no resistance or resentment whatever.

SPIVAK: Mr Prime Minister, you have been critical of United States plans to strengthen naval facilities in the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia. Do you think it is unnecessary for the United States to do that in order to meet increased naval pressure in that area?

PRIME MINISTER: As I said when I was asked at a press conference at the United Nations only three days ago, there is no nation around the Indian Ocean which welcomes the build-up on this uninhabited British group of islands.

SPIVAK: Would you like to see the United States withdraw entirely from the Indian Ocean regardless of what the Russians do?

PRIME MINISTER: No, certainly not. Russia and America are the world's great naval powers - they can sail wherever they choose - that's clear. But we don't want a proliferation of armaments in the Indian Ocean which up till now has been freest of all the world's oceans, of this American-Soviet confrontation.

GORALSKI: Mr Prime Minister. The United States and Australia have a similar petroleum problem. I believe we have both produced about 70 per cent of our petroleum requirements and import about 30 per cent. Do you feel that you can go along with an independent foreign policy, without being pro-Arab, to ensure the 30 percent flow of oil from the Arab States?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't stress independent foreign policy so much as inter-dependent foreign policy. Now as far as we are concerned, we aren't strong in oil but we are strong in other energy sources, such as coal and uranium and natural gas, and we are very anxious to see that energy sources in the world are not disrupted. But at the same time we want to see that other countries which have energy sources, like Australia, get a fair price for them.

GWERTZMAN: Mr Prime Minister, you said your Government depends on the United States in case of a big war. Do you intend to permit the United States to retain its intelligence gathering and communications facilities in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: My Government knows what the United States is doing in Australia, and we know that nothing the United States does in Australia will be done except with our full knowledge and our full concurrence.

ROWAN: Do you share the view of some of your countrymen that Australia's economic future depends more on Japan than any other single country?

PRIME MINISTER: More than any single country, yes. That would be true.

ROWAN: In that case do you intend to give Japan long-term access to Australia's minerals and other resources?

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, we are doing that. We don't want to see that Japan is driven to desperation again as she was in 1940. We want to see that she has dependable access to markets and resources. We are playing our part in that.

BRANDON: You have imposed a ban on uranium exports. I wondered what the reason for it is?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there are two things that we want to achieve and one is that we want to see that there is a proper return for these exports. Secondly we want to see, if we can, that we have some say in the processing of this mineral, of which we possess about one-fifth of the known reserves. But there have been some legislative difficulties in Australia which have delayed the solution of this matter.

SPIVAK: Mr Prime Minister, it has been reported in this country that you are steadily severing the cord between Australia and Britain. Is that true?

PRIME MINISTER: No, not at all. Australia would have closer sentimental or personal ties with Britain than with any country including the United States.

SPIVAK: Why does Australia remain in the British Commonwealth at all? Why don't you become an independent republic?

PRIME MINISTER: Being in the Commonwealth is not inconsistent with independence. We are completely independent, but like the three dozen members of the Commonwealth, we see advantage in belonging to a body which is very diverse racially, economically, politically, but where there is such complete freedom in exchanging views. There is no-one who wants to get out of the Commonwealth.

GORALSKI: I was going to ask you very briefly Mr Prime Minister - you were very critical of Mr Nixon when he was President, particularly aspects of foreign policy. What is your view now of Mr Ford's administration?

PRIME MINISTER: I criticised - privately - some of the things that Mr Nixon was doing at the time that we came into office - Hanoi, Haiphong and so on. But I met Mr Ford for the first time. He is a good man. He will get on well.
