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Manuscript of interview between  
the Prime Minister of Australia Mr. E. G. Whitlam  
and Mr. Borivoje Mirkovic of Radio Television  
Belgrade.

M. : Good morning Mr. Prime Minister.

P.M. : Good morning Mr. Mirkovic.

M. : I am very happy that you have found time to say a few words for our television. I know you are very occupied with the problem of the cyclone which is disastrous.

P.M. : Oh yes, this is the worst natural disaster that has happened to Australia. It is, in our terms, it is what happened to Skopje a few years ago.

M. : The people, let us say scientists, have found how to go to the moon but still on earth many problems have to be solved.

P.M. : The disasters to which mankind was subject before any scientific discoveries were made are still there to beset mankind.

M. : We have first to solve problems here on earth.

Mr. Prime Minister, 205 years ago James cook came to Australia with the Ship Endeavour, the Australian Prime Minister has not been to Europe for 15 years. After 15 years you are one of the first Australian Prime Ministers who have come to Europe. That means that you are somehow the Australian ship to travel to Europe.

P.M. : You are suggesting that an Australian Prime Minister is now setting out to discover Europe. You put it in a very romantic, poetic way. It is true that no Australian Prime Minister has officially visited the Continent of Europe for about 15 years but in that time most Australian Prime Ministers visited England. The significance of my visit is that I am visiting a very great number of countries in Europe.

M. : I saw in some English newspapers that the British were a little, how to say, not very satisfied that the Australian Prime Minister first went to Brussels and not to London, maybe because Brussels is now a very important economic centre of Europe. Is it so ?

P.M. : It is symbolic and significant that I made my first call in Europe in Brussels which is the capital of the European Economic Community. In previous years this would have been unthinkable. Any Australian Prime Minister would have made his first visit to London and in fact probably would not have visited Brussels at all. It is significant now of course to us that Britain is part of the Community and accordingly you should visit the capital of the Community first and so that is what I did.

M. : I see. Does it, for you as an Australian country whose economy has been blooming for many years, and with today's political situation in Europe a little bit gloomy with inflation and unemployment and everything, seem to you pessimistic.

P.M. : These two scourges of unemployment and inflation, which are afflicting Western Europe now and of course Northern America are also afflicting the countries of that type of political or economic system in our region, for instance Japan and Australia and New Zealand are also afflicted by unemployment and inflation. In each case we are worse affected than for 40 years and that is the case of unemployment; and this is the case of all these mixed economies, those western style economies; Australia is being affected the same way as those other countries and it is very important that I should exchange views with the leaders of the Governments in those other countries about how they are tackling these two problems which are affecting us at the one time and all of us together.

M. : Somebody told me that Australia lived for many years in isolation. I do not know whether you like such a kind of, how do you say, of describing the problem, may I say so ?

P.M. : It is a correct description, I suppose, in two ways. Until 25 years ago, or less than 30 years ago, every country near Australia was ruled from Europe. The United States ruled the Philippines, France ruled Indo-China, the Dutch ruled Indonesia, the British ruled Burma, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and the French ruled several islands in the South Pacific, and Portugal still has two small colonies, and then all the ports of China were ruled by Japan or by European countries and the only countries in the whole of our region which ruled themselves were Japan, which ruled herself

completely, she was already a great power, and Thailand, although there were some limitations on the application of Thai laws to Europeans. So that meant that in Australia the only other Governments which people ever had to bear in mind were Governments in Europe; in the case of the Philippines in Washington, and then there was Japan. Japan was the only significant Asian country. All our neighbours were ruled from Europe and if Australians travelled from Australia to England they would call at ports or airports which were ruled by Britain.

M. : The situation is completely changed which evidently ...

P.M. : In less than 30 years the position has completely changed. Also until much more recently in foreign affairs Australia followed the lead given by Britain and more recently by the United States.

M. : So this is the reason why your Government is very much engaged in Asian affairs, may I say, to make this region more stable and to have friendly relations with these countries. One would think you should have done, for instance, recognized the People's Republic of China, withdrawn your troops from Vietnam which, if I may say so, represented the kind of important steps towards good friendship with Asian countries.

P.M. : There was a great deal of leeway to be made up. It was necessary for Australia to have normal relations with all her neighbours and my Government has now established diplomatic relations with every country in Asia, every country, and, at the same time, we have established diplomatic relations with all the countries in Europe, with which we did not have relations. There is only one country in Europe with which we do not have diplomatic relations, and we have diplomatic relations with every country in Asia. We are not categorizing nations as to those that are favourable or unfavourable, the goodies, the badies, we want to have normal diplomatic relations with every country with which we would have dealings.

M. : Now normally comes the question of non-alignment. On Asian soil may I say, somehow, the roots of non-alignment are the deepest if you start from Bandung Conference, the Conference in the role of India, Indonesia and other countries which are in that region. Your country and your Government express the wish to collaborate, to approach non-alignment. What does it mean ? What does it mean exactly ? What is your attitude towards non-

alignment as a political and economic movement, may I say ?

P.M. : Australia is not a non-aligned country herself. There is an alliance, there has been since the last war, between Australia, New Zealand and the United States. The initials, the acronym ANZUS, but very clearly the matters which concern all our neighbours, the whole of our region are matters which are identified with the non-aligned movement. The question of developing economies, colonialism, racism, the confrontation between great powers in our region, all these are matters which are involved in a non-aligned movement and accordingly if Australia is to have a proper understanding of Australia, then Australia must be aware of the objectives, the preoccupations, the aspirations of the non-aligned countries. Accordingly, we would be very happy in Australia if we were to be accepted as guests or observers at non-aligned meetings.

M. : If I understand you well ... does it specifically mean non-alignment in your case, particularly in Asia, somehow to say "Go out big powers from this region", somehow to leave the peoples of this region to arrange their affairs by themselves.

P.M. : We do not want any escalation of military installations or operations in the Indian Ocean.

M. : This is at least ...

P.M. : We do not want a confrontation to be promoted between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Indian Ocean.

M. : So, one of the very important points of the non-aligned countries is concerned with raw materials. This, may I say, redistribution of goods. Your country is one of the biggest world exporters of certain very important raw materials. Do you intend to join this movement for redistribution, may I say so, or more equalitarian, may I say, prices on the world market with non-aligned countries.

P.M. : We, of course, do export a very great variety of mineral and primary products and we therefore sympathize with the situation of so many developing countries which export some of those products but not the same

variety as we export, and we are very much aware that they want to have a stable market for their exports and of course we want to have a stable market for our exports as well. It is completely unsatisfactory where conditions can be changed without our being involved. The best thing of course is to have some arrangements between the producers and the consumers and in the past the advantages have been too much with the consumers. They have been able to pick off the producers one by one and the consumers very often have been themselves exporters of manufactured goods or the providers of services and as manufacturers or as entrepreneurs they have had no compunction to put up the price of their products or their services and they have been very much more reluctant to adjust the prices of the goods upon which they depend on other countries : the primary products, the mineral products. So our objective would be to get the producers and the consumers making a proper marketing agreement, trade agreement between them for the space of some years. We have joined, for instance, the International Bauxite Agreement where Yugoslavia and Australia each have considerable interests. We have consulted concerning the formation of APEF, the organization for exporters of iron ore but no agreement, no association has yet been formed there.

M. : Concerning the Australian-Yugoslav relations, you were two years ago in Yugoslavia, a few years ago ....

P.M. : 3 years

M. : and you know Yugoslavia. When you mention Yugoslavia to an ordinary Australian, you know, the voter, what kind of country does it (Yugoslavia) represent ?

P.M. : The main thing the Australian think about when the word Yugoslavia is mentioned is the considerable number of migrants, very sturdy migrants, who have come from Yugoslavia, I think I would be correct in saying that physically the most powerful migrants who have come to Australia have come from the Coast and the mountains of Yugoslavia. There are other people, older people, who would remember that during the First World War and the Second World War the heroism of the people of Yugoslavia, and at one time of course Yugoslavia was the only country in the whole of Europe which was fighting Hitler and Mussolini and Yugoslavia was the only ally that

Australia had in the whole of Europe. Now that is over 30 years ago, now, but there would be people who would remember and value this association and of course earlier still in 1914, Australians remember how staunch the Serbs were.

M. : During the Second World War you were enlisted in the Air Force, you were of this generation ...

P.M. : Yes, Flight Lieutenant Captain.

M. : Oh yes, important ...

P.M. : (jokingly) Very important, so important to ....

M. : Concerning the political and economical relations, what more could be done for the development of Yugoslav / Australian relations. What more could be done ?

P.M. : Well this is the sort of thing that I want to be discussing when I am in Yugoslavia. I am accompanied by the Head of the Australian Department of Overseas Trade and by the Head of the Australian Department for minerals and energy, and there are also of course very senior officials from our Foreign Office, and so on, so these are matters which I will be very pleased to discuss because your Prime Minister was in Australia 21 months ago so we will pursue these matters.

M. : You think we could increase our trade in exporting more to Australia because ...

P.M. : Well, I think this is quite likely but I do not know enough about what you could supply or what we could supply. Now it is one of the advantages of visiting a country, it is a visit by a Head of Government to another country, everybody's mind are concentrated on the community of interests between those two countries.

M. : To say on the very spot how the things could be done.

P.M. : Yes, that is right.

M. : Mr. Prime Minister, maybe I should ask you such a question. I know you have won twice on elections but the Opposition is very strong still in States, in the Senate too. They are somehow accusing you of driving too left, is it true that you are driving Australia apart ?

P.M. : Oh, we have made a very great number of changes in Australia, that is true. These changes would have caused no surprise in most countries. Australia had the one Government for 23 years, an extraordinary long period. We have the same system of Government that one has, say, in West Germany, or in Britain, or in the United States, and it is quite exceptional to have a Prime Minister, or a President, or a Bundes Chancellor belonging to the one party for 23 years. So, naturally, the changes had to be made and they would surprise many people. But we have quite a good majority in the House of Representatives, in the Senate; because of our particular method of electing the Senate, it is evenly divided and this means that very often bills do not get through the Senate because they can only be carried if there is a majority. And, if there is a vote, an even vote, a tied vote, they are not carried, so that is where the difficulty lies and there are also ...

You mentioned the States too, we have a federal system and federal systems are very difficult to operate, as you know in Yugoslavia, as people know in the United States or Canada or West Germany. In Australia in particular the States' Parliaments are not elected on a democratic system.

M. : As this interview is going to be on the air the day before your visit, the Yugoslav TV audience, the man watching your interview, - I am going to make a fault, might say, here is an Englishman from the South, an Englishman from the Southern Hemisphere.

P.M. : Oh well, Australia was founded by Englishmen, that is true, but there... most Australians were born in Australia. Three quarters of the people there were born in Australia, the other quarter would have migrated to Australia since the last war from Britain and from most countries of Europe.

M. : From Yugoslavia.

P.M. : Yes. In recent years most of the migrants to Australia have come from Italy and Malta and Yugoslavia and Greece increasingly. So anybody from

Yugoslavia would be able to find a great number of people with a common background on common interests in Australia. But they would tell you that it is very easy to fit in in Australia; there is no segregation.

M. : About Australia, what is an Australian ?

P.M. : Ah well, we were founded from Britain but that is last century and nowadays I would think that people from Yugoslavia or from Europe would regard Australians more like Canadians or Americans, or at least as much like Canadians and Americans as like British people and there is a very great number of people from Europe now living in Australia, and the climate is much warmer, it makes for a much more informal style of life.

M. : So it makes somehow, how to say, a warmer hearted people.

P.M. : Yes, we are informal, friendly, relaxed people.

M. : I know that you have a lot of things to do. Thank you very much Mr. Prime Minister, really you were very kind.

P.M. : I have enjoyed talking to you and I am looking forward to doing so in your own country.

M. : Thank you very much.