

Interview with Laurie Wilson, Channel 7

21 April 1978

QUESTION: Prime Minister, the talks with Mr Ushiba this morning were in fact unscheduled. That seems to indicate that they have some significance, the fact that they were called at the last minute.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I think they're significant, because they flowed naturally out of the discussions that began yesterday with the Prime Minister. They're designed to probe in depth the trade negotiations taking course throughout this year. Australia I think has had a degree of scepticism about the total result, because on all previous occasions when there have been international trade negotiations, the major industrial countries have made arrangements to use tariffs on industrial goods, but then they have said "Oh well, agriculture was too hard, commodities are too hard, we won't do anything about that". And as a result, over the last decades there has been a general freeing of trade in industrial goods, but certainly no freeing of trade in agriculture. And the importance of that for many countries can be seen from the fact that the negotiations on industrial goods will cover say 40% of Japan, North America and Europe's exports but only 5% of Australia's exports. There have been many other countries in Australia's position, most of them developing countries.

QUESTION: In terms of your talks with Mr Ushiba, just what are you after then?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, what we really want is to make sure that in the international trade negotiations, agriculture is included as well as industrial goods. The United States says that agriculture will be included, Japan says that agriculture will be included, but it's not going to be any good waking up at the end of the day and finding that agriculture is once again excluded as has occurred in the past. And there's another reason why agriculture needs to be included, because the industrial side of these international trade negotiations are operating on something less than 20% of world trade. You have to exclude trade inside the European community, because that's already free. And if you exclude commodities and agriculture you find that the proposals on industrial trade, reductions in tariffs in that area, operate on less than 20% of world trade, and I don't believe that anyone can really see that the proposals, which could involve about a half percent tariff reduction a year over 8 years, but not starting till 1980, are doing all that much to achieve an expansion of markets which is necessary if we are to get greater productive use of our resources, and therefore a lessening of employment, not just in Australia but in all countries.

QUESTION: Is this the most significant aspect of the visit?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it's a very significant aspect of what's happening throughout the course of this year, and I think it is an important part of our discussions. We'll also be talking later today about the North/South dialogue, and the need to make sure that the developing countries are not excluded from any benefits under the International trade negotiations. There must be movement in the Common Fund.

QUESTION: Mr Ushiba is quoted as having said that the reason you were coming up here was because it was the normal sort of consultation which took place between the two countries prior to the major economic summit to be held later this year. You obviously see it as something different from that.

PRIME MINISTER : I had rather thought that these talks were different from talks that have taken place between Japan and Australia in the past. They're not talks about bilateral issues, and that's been made plain and I think it's now accepted. They are talks about what's happening in the international environment, and it's natural that we should want to talk to Japan about these matters because we're vastly affected as a significant trading nation, Japan as a significant trading nation. We're affected by Japan's access to markets overseas just as we're affected by our own access. Therefore I think it's natural to talk with Japan about these particular matters as we approach the more formal trade negotiations.

QUESTION: Are you yourself going to be going to Jamaica, and what is the significance of the Jamaica conference following the talks in Japan?

PRIME MINISTER: Providing the Jamaica talks go ahead as we've been told and as scheduled, I will be attending, yes, because again I think this is maybe one of the very few forums, maybe the only forum in which a group of developed and developing countries, Heads of Government, getting together in a completely unstructured way. There is the Commonwealth, of course, but I'm not taking that into account at the moment. I believe that if we are to get the sort of results out of the more formal international negotiations taking place throughout this year there has got to be a new commitment, a new dedication on the part of nations, and my understanding is that the Jamaica meeting has been called largely because of the same kinds of concerns that Australia has expressed, and largely because Prime Minister Manley wants to re-energise the international trade negotiations so that hopefully they can really be successful.

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