

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOLLOWING ADDRESS TO YOUNG LIBERALS
CONVENTION, LA TROBE UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE

Question

Prime Minister, one issue which we may be debating later in the week concerns whether or not it is an appropriate response in regard to the Russian situation with Afghanistan that Australia and other nations should boycott the Olympics. Could I ask your own opinion please?

Prime Minister

Well, I can tell you the position of the Government at this point. We are assessing what a number of other like-minded countries think about this particular issue. A number of Heads of Government have either stated that the Games should not take place or that they should take place somewhere else. I think we need to look at the issue very seriously indeed. I said coming in here that we used to try and keep politics and sport entirely separate, but then there are many people who told us that we could not keep politics and sport separate. There were some countries who ran their sport on the basis of race, and apartheid was the obvious answer. The critics at the time were directed to apartheid and they did not want Australia to participate in sporting events which could give any support of any kind to that alien and most unpleasant philosophy. A number of governments have therefore introduced politics into sport. By the decisions that my Government made in recognition of the Gleneagles charter - the Commonwealth document in relation to apartheid in sport - we have recognised that the two cannot be entirely separated, that there are some elements of politics and sport, and however much we might regret it, that plainly applies to the Olympic Games as much as it does to other sporting events, maybe more so to the Olympic Games. There is not the slightest doubt that the Soviet Union intends to make the Olympic Games a great internal success, all the nations in the world coming to Moscow, competing, and in the Russian's view hopefully being defeated by Russian athletes. Well, recent events have given us all I think some stimulus to try and make sure that we and many others do better than the Soviets if the Games do take place.

There have been one or two interesting suggestions. One, that there should be a permanent home for the Games in Greece - and that could well be appropriate and it could well prevent what might otherwise be a very unfortunate politicisation of the Olympics. Another suggestion which I believe is worth consideration - and these things of course are all at the moment in the hands of the various Olympic committees and the International Olympic Federation and I am well aware that their Chairman has said something this morning - but another suggestion might well be that the Games should not take place in any one country but that it should take place in four or five or six countries at any one time. The reasons for that would be that a larger

Prime Minister (continued)

number of countries could participate in mounting the Games. The cost of mounting the Games is becoming prohibitive. Lesser numbers of countries would feel inclined to embark upon that path and put out the enormous sums that are now required and indeed demanded for a successful mounting of the Games as a whole. That second suggestion is not entirely novel, because some aspects of the Games are held in separate places now. It would be an extension if you like, of that principle.

I think it is very important for the Olympic committees, and for governments, to do what they can to see that the Games continue into the future free of political interference. I think either of the suggestions that I have put might well give a greater opportunity of that occurring than the Games continuing largely being held in one place, and therefore capable of being used for political purposes.

But, so far as these Games are concerned, the Australian Government has not yet made any firm decision. We are consulting with other countries. Quite plainly, the Games are an international event. While the Russians mount them they are not a Russian event, and therefore we look at the Games in a different light and other aspects of the bilateral relationship is strictly between the Russians and ourselves. So, they are different in that context. It is important I think. What a number of other countries do, we will have to be assessing that. I look forward to learning what the views of the Young Liberals are after you have passed, changed or amended what various resolutions you have.

Question

I congratulate your Government on introducing training and education schemes for young unemployed people, but do you maintain that in spite of technological advances in the future economic growth will provide jobs for all. If not, in other words, if there will be a permanent pool of unemployed what is your Government doing to come to grips with providing their social needs, their social role, their needs, and determining what place they will play in the future of Australia?

Prime Minister

The best thing we can do to help people who are unemployed is to re-establish the sound basis of economic growth taking Australia forward into the future, because whatever the level of unemployment might be, with a substantial level of economic growth it will plainly be much less than it would be without that growth. I think everyone could accept that. If we can take much as agreed, I think we then have to recognise that we are going to go through a much more difficult environment than we have over the last 20 or 30 years. A number of jobs have disappeared. Not so much because of modern technological changes, but because of dramatic changes in wage structures which have forced people to do things differently if they are to be done at all. When you have average wages, or award wages,

Prime Minister (continued)

going up 38 per cent in one year alone - and that is what happened in the year March to 1975 and all of that had to work its way through industry. It hit industry 9 months before we came into office. It had to work its way through before you could get back to a competitive Australian industry which we are now establishing again. But the impact of wage increases of that kind does lead to some permanent changes which is very difficult to overcome, especially the very great increase of wages of young, unskilled people where a lot of the jobs that might have been available just now are not there, or machines do the work instead. So it is not just a question of technological change. You have got to look at the other changes within society, within our own economy, to see how they have been affecting things.

Modern technology I think, I am certain, has got to be embraced as a challenge and as an opportunity, not looked at in any sense with defeatism or despair, because technology enables you to produce things more cheaply and better, and if you do that you are going to sell more. You will employ more than you otherwise would. If you do not use that technology, your competitors in some other countries certainly will. And then we in our industries will be left with old technology; inefficient, high-cost, not able to compete overseas, not able to compete in Australia except under higher and higher tariffs and protectionisms which carry their own problems with it. So embracing modern technology, and using it to Australia's advantage, is the only sensible course that we have available to us.

I think that in this kind of environment, taking the domestic changes and other changes into account, we are going to ... more difficult employment situation than we have had for a long while. But the policies we have set in train will minimise those difficulties. In addition, I believe that there has been readier access to training throughout life, partly because of the changes of technology. It is not good enough to have somebody trained at the age of 17 or 18 or 19, or early 20's and then that training is the be all and the end of it for the rest of life. If technology makes that particular skill unnecessary or outdated, the person should have an opportunity for later changing and moving into the additional technology. A number of firms do do this with their own employees, and I think it is essential for the smooth and quiet and happy introduction of new technology. So we cannot get over the fact that we are living in a world of greater change, greater need for education and training opportunities. The trade unions could help us greatly if they would accept more willingly adult training and adult apprenticeship, if they would accept re-training. That is one of the great conservatisms in the Australian environment, one of the great reactionary forces which does place difficulties in the way of people who time might otherwise pass by. So we have to work on a broad front. There are problems, but our policies are designed to minimise those problems.

Question

Mr. Fraser, it seems fairly clear that there has been a good deal of public unease about the Government's health insurance policies and the relatively frequent changes that there have been in them from time to time. Is it likely that we will see any more substantial changes in the near future, during this election year, or - we acknowledge the presence of the Minister for Health as well - are we likely to see the scheme settle down in its present form.

Prime Minister

I would not like to pre-empt anything that the Minister for Health might propose or be wanting to propose - which might well be just a continuation of what is. That is always one of the options. I think we need to understand the background of the problems that we confronted in the health arena. The fact that there has been more than one set of changes we have not liked, but it only I think emphasises the extent of the problem. Many countries around the world have lost control of their health expenditure. They really have. We were doing that in the Hayden time under Medibank. One particular aspect of health expenditure went up. I think it was hospital costs to the Commonwealth, Micheal, went up 113 per cent in one year under Mr. Hayden. That is the so-called architect of the only economic responsibility that Labor ever had. It gives a measure of what they regard as economic responsibility. Quite plainly, the changes that we have introduced have been introduced against two elements, two things we wanted to preserve and to establish: adequate health care for Australians, and especially for disadvantaged Australians, for pensioners, and for people in special need but at a cost that the community can entertain, at a cost that the community can stand. It is easy to say everyone will get free health care if you are not going to care how much people have to pay out of their pockets to do it through taxation and all the rest. But after what Labor did, to be able to continue with reasonable, proper health care, but to do within a budgetary position which is overall responsibly managed, is obviously difficult. That is the challenge. That is why there has been more than one change, and I make no apology for that, because it has been necessary in the meeting of those twin objectives. If Micheal wants to recommend further changes of course the Government will be looking at those closely in the pursuit of those further objectives.

I must say that in some areas, especially in New South Wales, we could be much better helped and the taxpayer could be much better helped if the Health Minister did not want to play politics with hospital finances to quite the extent that he has over the past 12 months. With a 60 per cent occupancy of beds, with a very large part of the total health costs in the hospital area, quite plainly we have got to make sure that enough beds are available for everyone, but you do not want a whole lot of beds, fully staffed and operational, but nobody to be in them. The rationalisation of hospital facilities, in the medium term, is going to be quite essential to get the total cost of health care under control. I agree it is a difficult area. I agree that there has been an element of

Prime Minister (continued)

concern, but I also believe that people understand the basic objectives that we have been pursuing.

Question

Mr. Prime Minister, this morning, recently this morning, we re-endorsed one of the Liberal Party's 1955 election policies and that was to end the 48-hour blackout prior to an election on radio and television, including comment. Could you give a commitment to end that for the 1980 Federal election?

Prime Minister

By that particular Wednesday I think the general public have been so bombarded with political propoganda that there are quite a large number of people out in the community who are able to get back to their normal programs with relief, and not have me or Bill Hayden coming out, or Micheal MacKellar or somebody else coming out with an advertisement, and giving them a little relief in which they can make up their own minds quietly, without people who think they know so much better than all the rest of us telling them what to do from that box.

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