

PRESS OFFICE TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH VINCE SMITH 2UE  
FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY 1980

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Question

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Prime Minister

Yes. I think it was a constructive and a useful discussion. We have put out a joint press statement as a result. The people I was talking with of course, are not empowered to make any decisions. I did not expect that they could. But I did want to be able to speak with Mr. Grange and as many of his people as he wanted to bring along, as soon as possible, so that I could explain in detail the background to the Government's view and the seriousness with which we regard the whole international situation. And I think that is understood. The press statement that we have put out a few moments ago says that the Australian Olympic Federation explained that they were concerned as to whether a withdrawal by Australia or a number of nations would constitute an effective boycott, and the President of the Federation did not feel that Australia should withdraw unless it was established beyond reasonable doubt that an effective boycott would take place. They point out that constitutional processes that they would have to go through in making the decision and concluded by saying that they will give very serious consideration to the views that the Government put to them.

Question

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Prime Minister

Yes it has. Now there was some doubt about that point in earlier correspondence. I wrote a letter which has also been published, to Mr. Grange and which was given to him this morning. That letter in part says that the Government is also strongly of the view that it would not be in the national interest of Australia for Australians to participate in Games held in Moscow and therefore asks that in the event of the Soviet not withdrawing from Afghanistan, no Australian team be sent. So that should clear up that point, which was necessary from their interpretation of my earlier letter. I also made the point as I have before that we are not going to withhold passports. It is a request and we are not in the business of acting like the authoritarian, totalitarian kinds of regimes that we oppose. The Government does not direct  
Australian sporting bodies

Therefore there has to be responsibility on other people to take into account the policy and all the totality of the considerations.

Question

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Prime Minister

Well I saw a survey yesterday. Is there another one produced this morning?

Question

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Prime Minister

Well I am not all together surprised at that because in the earlier periods our television screens were giving pictures of Russian troops and tanks marching through Afghanistan almost nightly. Now that has not been on the television screens recently. I don't know when that poll was taken but the Government has really only been expressing the view strongly about the reason over the last three of four days. Some people have expressed the view to me that they are surprised that in the absence of the Government's views were being press publicly, which had not happened up to a few day's ago, surprised at so many people were in support of a boycott.

Question

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Prime Minister

Well that would be a view that could be taken but I do not think that it advances Australia's cause much to say that it will not trade in things which everyone else is going to go on trading in. One of the things I wanted to do when I was overseas was to see what goods the British and the Americans in particular were not going to trade with in the Soviet Union, because I wanted Australia to be in a similar position - not necessarily identical but similar. I found in terms of the commodities that have had some publicity here, there is no thought of an embargo really in relation to the Soviet Union. We have cut off scientific and cultural links. There are the grains embargoes, which will hurt, the fisheries embargoes, limitations on Soviet fishing, virtually the end of access to their scientific vessels to any Australian ports.

Question

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Prime Minister

I think that the weight of public opinion and the weight of international opinion, 104 nations in the United Nations, the Islamic Conference - these things have been expressed quite spontaneously as well as from the developed countries of the West. If you think back after Czechoslovakia it was not possible to get a condemnation out of the United Nations of the Soviet Union. So this does represent a very real change. It is not just an East - West thing. It is countries all around the world expressing a view and of course why a lot of attention has been given to the Olympic Games is that it is a very public thing. It is the Soviet Union itself that has said that the holding of the Games or the awarding of them to Moscow is a great political event. And they have also said that the awarding of the Games to Moscow represents a mark of approval of Soviet foreign policy. Now they have said that to their own people. It has gone out in their formal papers to their party activists. It is that kind of politicisation of the location of the Games which the Government believes makes it doubly important for Australians not to attend and not to compete. Because if

Australians, Americans, Englishmen and Germans and all the rest go it is not going to be what the Olympic Committees or the athletes themselves say, the important thing then will be what the Soviet Union news media says to the Russian people. And they will be saying very plainly - all these fine young men and women are accepting the Socialist faith and philosophy and repudiating their own society. And I do not believe that giving the Soviets that degree of internal self confidence will be at all helpful in taking the world to a more secure and safer international environment where the integrity and independence of nations is respected.

Question

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Prime Minister

Well the relationships with the ASEAN countries are very good on a personal basis and on a government to government basis. I know the leaders of all those countries personally and I know they are just as much offended and just as much appalled by the Soviet action as we are. The only country with whom we have not really got a good relationship in Southeast Asia is Vietnam, I suppose, and the Vietnam regime in Kampuchea.

Question

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Prime Minister

Well you know we tried. After the Vietnam War I can remember telling Vietnamese emissaries in Canberra - look we are prepared to let the past be past, we are prepared to provide aid for the rebuilding of your country. - we hope very much you can work constructively in Southeast Asia, with other countries there to build a peaceful world. And we were providing aid, and substantial civil aid and what happened? They signed a defence treaty with the Soviet Union and now they have got 22 divisions in Kampuchea. So we tried taking that path. I have got to say it did not work.

Question

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Prime Minister

What do you mean if the worst comes to the worst?

Question

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Prime Minister

Yes. Well I hope they won't. But we are not going to use the methods of dictators to stop them going. That is not the way a free society ought to act.

Question

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Prime Minister

Well I believe it would be a very great tragedy. I really do. It takes a number of nations but assuming the United States and significant countries in Europe and Australia (boycott) then you have a pretty effective protest. Somebody has got to be first in the ring with making decisions about that. We are in close touch on a government to government basis with the United States and with United Kingdom. Against that total background I think we need to keep in mind the objective of the United States, of Europe and of middle ranking countries like Australia. And that objective is to make sure that the Soviets do not go further. The objective is to make sure that we can establish a more peaceful and a more secure world which does respect the independence of states and if governments are making the judgment that a boycott of the Olympic Games is a significant ingredient in helping to establish that objective...

Question

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Prime Minister

No we have not lost. It just makes it harder to establish that secure world. It means that one of the devices that could have been used to diminish danger has not been used and it means that greater efforts are going to have to be put onto other things to convince the Soviet Union of the total determination of the United States and many other countries, that further aggression will not be allowed or tolerated.

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