

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD COLVILLE FOR "SUNDAY REPORT"Colville

Prime Minister, the Olympic boycott, the whole Russian-Afghanistan situation, yourself, the American President are obviously very concerned about it. Why is it so important? Can you draw an analogy.

Prime Minister

I think so, yes. I suppose now that it is only the older people in our community who can remember events in the 1930's. Indeed, I was only a child myself. But I was conscious through that decade of the growing concern of my own parents and obviously conscious of what was happening at the end of the decade. In 1936 Hitler could have been stopped very, very easily indeed when he marched into the Rhineland. Indeed, at that time there had been a great debate within Germany and the generals had orders to withdraw if there was any resistance from France or from Britain, from anyone. They did not. France at the time had 100 divisions and did nothing. Now, quite plainly, that particular event encouraged Hitler to believe that France and Britain would never act, that they were weak, that they were incompetent, that they were corrupt, that they were decadent. Therefore, he was encouraged, and Italy was also encouraged in relation to North African ventures. The invasions, Austria, Czechoslovakia, within Europe; Ethiopia in North Africa, and nobody did anything. The old League of Nations was totally impotent. So, step by step was set in train a process which led to the World War and literally tens of millions of young men and women being killed, a large number of people dying in camps and under the bombings around the world.

The nearest analogy I can get is that the Soviets moving into Afghanistan is the same as Germany moving into the Rhineland. If it does get the appropriate response from the United States, from the Western Alliance, from France and Germany and Britain, supported to the extent that we can by countries such as Australia, recognising the limits of what 14 million people can do, then I believe that terrible process will not be set in train and we can secure the safety of our nations, the safety of independent people. Our sons and daughters will not have to put on uniforms. As I understand it, that is what President Carter is all about. That is what was clearly referred to in the Franco-German communique where both those leaders referred to Afghanistan in terms which said that they feared that whatever people's motives might be, it would set in step, in phase, a process which step by step would have the gravest possible consequences for mankind. That was their way of describing what could be the first step in other moves that could really push the human race over the edge of the cliff. Now, that really is why we believe it is so important. I am quite certain that is why President Carter has acted as he has, why other nations have spoken as they have. It is not because we believe that a war of that kind is imminent.

Prime Minister (continued)

But we do believe that democracies, independent peoples, need to have a collective determination, a commitment, to their own faith, to their own way of life, and be prepared to make some effort - and if you like, some sacrifice - to secure it for the future.

Colville

You say that you and Mr. Carter don't necessarily think that a war may be imminent, but it does sound as if you are saying that what you are about is staving off, or making sure that World War Three doesn't happen. Is that going too far?

Prime Minister

I think that is exactly what the President is about, I really do: to see that it does not happen, to see that step by step there is not a chain reaction after Afghanistan which causes that to happen. Let's again go back to the thirties for a moment. There was a complete loss of will, loss of determination, loss of direction by France and Britain, and the United States just was not concerned with Europe and what was happening. They thought they could be an island unto themselves, that it was not really relevant. How sadly they learnt that that was not true some years later. One of the great difficulties in a democracy is we are peace-loving people, we do not really like seeing money spent on armaments. We would much sooner spend it on other things. There are enormous pressures to believe the world is as we want it to be and not just as it is. Now, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has pulled us all up with a sudden sharp jolt. We suddenly realise there are dangers in the world, that a people can be destroyed, that armies can march. What we are about is seeing that the aggressor is not so encouraged by lack of reaction, lack of determination - and the United States supported by many other nations around the world - not so encouraged by a lack of reaction that they think we can take another step and another, which would, as happened in the thirties, ultimately brought a massive reaction which of course led to World World II. So while I don't think anyone says things of that kind are imminent, because that would be foolish and overstating the issue, if there is not an appropriate and sustained Western independent nation reaction to Afghanistan, I do indeed have the gravest cause for concern about the future.

Colville

A lot of Australians are now asking why the Olympics. Why not, if you are going to take a stand like this one, not cut off diplomatic relations, expel diplomats. Why the Olympics. What is so important about the Olympics?

Prime Minister

Let me deal with the why not and I will come to the Olympics in just a moment. Nobody is out to humiliate the Soviet Union. That would not help in establishing that more stable and more peaceful, more secure world that we want to. Lines of communication have to stay open. We need to make sure that the signals that get to the Soviet Union are clear signals. When I say "we", I mean principally the United States, but Europe also and to the extent that we can, countries like Australia. The signals need to be clear ones. They need to be ones which say "nobody offers any

Prime Minister (continued)

threat to the Soviet Union. Nobody seeks to encircle the Soviet Union. Nobody wants to force the Soviet Union to live apart. But everyone has to comply with certain rules of international behaviour. The first of those rules is respect to the integrity and independence of peoples. So, to cut off all communications, all diplomatic relations, would not help in getting that message through. It really would not. It might be a good, emotional reaction if you like, but it would not assist in the larger and vastly important objective. We need sustained signals over a long period, maybe over years, to the Soviet Union which are co-ordinated, consistent, which do not give them cause for concern or fear but which at the same time let them know very plainly that the United States and others are vastly determined, and will not shake in their conviction. Therefore, if the Soviet Union presses too far there will be a great reaction. Now, that is the way to establish security so that, if you like, why we do not do certain things, why we do not shut off and isolate the Soviet Union totally.

In trade, our actions are consistent with the United States and the United Kingdom and other countries. They will remain so. They have been quite considerable in certain areas. But there is little point, against the background I have just described, of Australia taking unilateral action which is not going to be supported by other countries around the world, which would then just have an economic consequence for Australia, but which would have little or no impact on the Soviet Union. Here, I think we need to understand the trade sanctions can in fact to a significant extent be hidden from the Soviet people by the Government of the Soviet Union. Now, even if they are short of wheat, and there are difficulties, they can say for example, crops have failed in America and Canada and Australia and that is why we cannot get wheat, not letting them know that it is a mark of extreme disapproval. But if you come to the Olympic Games, that is a very public event. It is very plain. For years all the people of the Soviet Union have been told that this is going to be a great event, with the athletes of the world coming to Moscow to pay homage to Moscow and to the Russian people and to the first Socialist State of the world. Therefore, they are expecting the athletes of all nations to go. It is the Soviet Union that has said it is a great political event, the mark of approval for the Soviet Union, it is indeed a mark of approval of the Soviet foreign policy. Now, you do not believe that, and I do not believe that, but it is what the Soviet people will be told that counts. So, if Australian athletes go, if American young men and women go to Moscow, it is quite plain that all the people of the Soviet Union will be told, especially after recent events, that the athletes of Australia, the United States and of other countries are plainly repudiating their own governments and their own peoples, their own systems and by their presence in Moscow they are affirming support for the first Socialist State. That would then bolster the Soviet Government and Soviet people in the conviction in what they are doing. But if they do not go, there is something that the Soviet Government then has to explain. Why is it that the United States, and if it falls that way, the British, the Germans and the Australians, why is it that they have not come to Moscow. After the publicity of the last two or three years, the Government of the Soviet Union I think would have some difficulty in explaining that to their own people. There

Prime Minister (continued)

would be questions raised and difficulties caused. That, as we all believe, those who have studied the Soviet Union, would be the most effective way of bringing the abhorrence of the free and independent world over the invasion of Afghanistan home to the Government of Russia and to all the peoples of Russia. That is why we have argued this cause so strongly.

Colville

You and Mr. Anthony have explained in detail why any trade bans, overall, not just unilateral, to be effective. But can you understand the Australian people feeling a little cynical that athletes have to carry the can while the miners and the farmers apparently go ahead, export their products, and make their money.

Prime Minister

Well, there are restrictions on grain sales, as you know. Look, I can understand that feeling and I have enormous sympathy for athletes in relation to it, but when you look at the larger issues, the objective which I indicated the United States and other countries are trying to achieve for a safer and a more secure world, I do not believe it is asking those athletes to give up too much, I really do not. Because if the free nations of the world, again the United States in the vanguard as they have to be because it is only they who have the power, but Australia and many others in support, if we fail in our objective of establishing that more secure world what then happens to the many young men and women who might ultimately have to put on a uniform. If, looking back through the pages of near history in four or five years' time and athletes had gone to Moscow and won a medal and the Soviets were given their propaganda victory, their propaganda triumph in relation to their own people, if their own conviction and their righteousness was thus reinforced, and if they were thus encouraged to pursue by different ways other Afghanistans, and if that did lead to a much greater disaster, I do not believe any of those athletes ever after would really be able to live with their own conscience in what they had helped achieve.

Colville

What has been your reaction to the way that your Olympic boycott proposals have been received, I suppose not so much in the electorate because we know that, but say the Parliament, the Parliamentary debate on it.

Prime Minister

I think the debate was, in a large sense, a very disappointing one, because as I believe anyway, the Opposition trivialised the debate. We have spoken about the great issues that are in front of us, that we are trying to do something about. The Opposition to a man while condemning the invasion of Afghanistan then seemed more concerned to try and demonstrate that my motives were, in

Prime Minister (continued)

condemning the invasion of Afghanistan, were the wrong motives. Now, I just do not think that .. they are prepared to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan. We do, so why cannot it just be let at that with a bi-partisan approach to a vastly important matter. In the end, the House passed, really without dissent on this particular point, a resolution which said that countries ought to do what they can separately or in concert to bring home our great opposition to the Soviet Union. Then, having supported that section of the resolution, why does the Labor Party seek to oppose everything that we have done in a practical way that will bring that message home to the Soviet Union. Mr. Hayden says that an effective boycott - just as I have - would bring the mood of free peoples home to the Soviet Union more effectively than anything else that we could do. In those circumstances, why does he do everything he possibly can to see that an effective boycott is not brought about. It is not good enough to say, look, there is an effective boycott, I will join it. If you believe an effective boycott will send the message to the Soviet Union you have got to work for it. That is what the Government is doing and that is what the Government will continue to do. I think the debate, and many of the attitudes that were expressed unfortunately trivialised a great and fundamental issue. I think that is regrettable.

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