

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED BY RICHARD CARLETON
ON ABC'S "NATIONWIDE"

Clive Hale

First up tonight, Federal Parliament, and in the House of Representatives the second successive day of uproar over the Afghanistan question as both sides indulged in acrimonious debate; debate that reached a personal level not seen in the House in recent years. Reporting from our Canberra studio, Richard Carleton.

Carleton

Labor won yesterday's Parliamentary encounter, 60-40, and today in my assessment they won hands down. As much as anything, the Government's error has been tactical. Smarting as the Government was after yesterday's drubbing, today they sought to reverse the tide. It was the Government that brought the Afghanistan issue back on for debate and they sought to argue that the Labor Party was undermining efforts to establish an effective response to the Soviet invasion. But by debating the issue again so soon, they have merely provided another opportunity, for a very buoyed opposition and an especially buoyed Mr. Hayden to play them on their weak spot: the inconsistency of boycotting the Olympic Games but continuing with the wool sales. And to Mr. Viner, the Leader of the Government in the House, who led for the Government, and his was a very pedestrian performance. Mr. Lynch, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party followed. Mr. Lynch is probably the Government's poorest debater and he read a very dull speech. It fell to Treasurer Howard to save even greater embarrassment. His was a stirring effort, and what's more, it was needed. For Mr. Hayden, yesterday and today, he has put in the best performances that I have seen from him in the twelve years that I have watched him in the Parliament. He has both his head and his heart in this issue and it couldn't have come at a better time for him. He needs now to be seen as an effective and a strong leader if he is to carry the day this Friday when he attempts Federal intervention in the affairs of the State Branch of his Party in Queensland.

But having said that, Mr. Hayden did decline to appear on the programme this evening. The butt of the Opposition's attack and the man who has collected the thrown mud, the man whose integrity has been impuned, is the Prime Minister, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Fraser, I thank you very much for coming on the programme this evening sir. Could I suggest to you that the Opposition's attack has been effective largely because they have been able to sustain, true or otherwise, the emotive line that your wool from Nareen, your family property, is keeping Russian soldiers warm in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister

I hope you are not going to promote something that you know, as you introduced this programme, to be totally and completely false. It has been promoted by Mr. Hawke. It has been promoted by Mr. Hayden, but I thought that the ABC was meant to be impartial and I did not think that you were meant to be here to promote something that is, as you know, totally false.

Carleton

It is the opportunity for you to give your story...

Prime Minister

But it has already been said and you know it quite well.

Carleton

It was said by you today, I think it was said ...

Prime Minister

It had been said by other people on many other occasions.

Carleton

Yes, that your wool has not gone to the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister

Now, look, if you want to debate this on a personal basis, as Mr. Hayden has, that is your entitlement. But at the same time I would have thought it much better for this whole matter to be debated on the basis of policy. Your introduction to this programme, your introduction to yesterday's programme, is that of an observer who is looking only at the words that are used. It does not bother to go underneath the words that are used in that Parliament, to see what is said, to note that in Mr. Hayden's attack on myself it was the most personal attack in totality, without one element of fact, without one element of argument, without one element of substance, and you took the froth and the bubble without bothering to go the analysis of what was happening, of what had been said.

Carleton

Let me try that now then sir. Let me try that now.

Prime Minister

You try it, but let's keep on the policy issues..

Carleton

But the hard political fact, let me suggest sir are ...

Prime Minister

The policy issues I think we will stick on...

Carleton

But the hard political fact I am suggesting to you is that the Opposition is winning this because they are succeeding in having the mud stick. That the impression, and you say wrongly and I ...

Prime Minister

And you are helping, very greatly.

Carleton

No.

Prime Minister

Oh yes. In the introduction ...

Carleton

Offering you the opportunity to knock it down sir.

Prime Minister

Good, fine. Because your introduction to this programme yesterday and your introduction of the programme tonight was helping them to have that mud stick. Your first question was designed, perhaps, or not designed, I do not know, to have that mud stick on something which you know to be false. Let's debate the issues. Let's debate the Olympic boycott and why that is important. Why the Human Rights Commission in Poland believes it is important. Why they think that their people, the Poles, should not go to Moscow for the Olympic Games because it is a nation that has been struggling for freedom for 200 years. How many Australians would want to go to the Olympic Games in Moscow if the Soviets has put 100,000 troops into Papua New Guinea. Wouldn't you like to answer that question?

Carleton

That not for me to answer sir.

Prime Minister

Oh yes it is. You give opinions on a great many things. You are entitled to give an answer to that question.

Carleton

Well, you might like to speak to Sir Talbot Duckmanton about that.

Prime Minister

No. You have given opinions on a great many programmes - your own - much, much more political than that. You will not prejudice your ABC impartiality by answering that question.

Carleton

My contract is in the wind at the moment.

Prime Minister

I think you might do better by answering the question than by not answering the question. If they put 100,000 troops into Indonesia instead of Afghanistan, do you think any Australian would want to go, would dare to go to Moscow? Come on, please answer it. Surely.

Carleton

I think yes, probably many would go to Moscow, yes.

Prime Minister

If they had put 100,000 Soviet troops into Indonesia, in an invasion, do you think Australians would still go?

Carleton

I don't want to get into the position where I am just voicing my ill-informed views on issues like this though sir. But I mean you go back to the time when ...

Prime Minister

At least you are gracious enough to say they are ill-informed.

Carleton

Well, of course they are sir. I mean I don't have any access to the information that you have. I mean that is why you are here. I have asked you here to hear your views.

Prime Minister

But I am trying to drive home to you that this invasion of Afghanistan is a serious matter. That this is what the Government has been talking about. On this programme yesterday, and in introducing it today, you tried to pick up the froth and the bubble. But let's get down to the substance of it: an invasion by the most powerful land army in the world of a small non-aligned state that could not never have offered any threat to anyone. Many people have likened what the Soviets have done to Germany's marching into the Rhineland in 1936. Then, because France did nothing, because Britain did nothing, they marched into Austria. Italy marched into Ethiopia. They marched into Czechoslovakia and ultimately into Poland and ultimately a World War was joined in which tens of millions of people died. I really do believe it is time that the media and the Parliament - I make no excuses for the Parliament because Mr. Hayden has personalised this issue,

Prime Minister (continued)

whether it is wool or whatever, has sought to personalise it in a way which is a disgrace to the substance and the importance of the issue, in which men's lives, of your age and of mine and of younger and of older are at stake and are being killed and dying at this very moment.

Carleton

Mr. Fraser, why should Australians accept your assessment of Afghanistan and the importance of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister

But it is not my assessment.

Carleton

The argument that you put now of the importance of Afghanistan, when ten years ago sir, in your capacity then, Minister for Defence, Minister for the Army in previous governments, you put forward the argument of the domino theory and that Australia was threatened by the events in Vietnam.

Prime Minister

And do you think that has not been so? Do you think that what has happened in Vietnam, with the victory of North Vietnam, then moving 22 divisions into Kampuchea, establishing a refugee movement that resulted in more people being sent out of Vietnam than left Germany in all the days of the 1930s, with the instability that that had the potential for creating in South East Asia, with the problems in Thailand because of refugees pouring across that border, to a country that could ill afford to look after them, another half million refugees already in Pakistan as a result of Afghanistan, with the expectation of that rising to a million - not on my count but on the count of people who know, the relief authorities, the United Nations agencies. One of the most remarkable things about Russian victories, communist victories because that is what they are, is their capacity to create refugee movements of vast masses of peoples. Really, it is important that these matters be treated for what they are. It was not a frivolous question when I said what would you do about the Olympic Games if they had marched into Papua New Guinea or Indonesia, because that then brings it closer to us. Closer to an understanding that a life is a life whether it is here, in Indonesia or in Afghanistan.

Carleton

Or Vietnam.

Prime Minister

Or Vietnam, yes. The de-stabilising effects, the refugees that have occurred have been a direct consequence of North Vietnam's victory. It was Lionel Bowen, Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, who said in the Parliament over the last day or two, that

Prime Minister (continued)

unless we get the Russians out of Vietnam, get the Russians out of Kampuchea, we are going to be in a very dangerous situation. That is his judgement, support of the Government's. He did not speak much about Afghanistan. But what the President of the United States is about, what the French and the Germans and the British are about is not making the mistakes that were made between 1936 and 1940, in the early part of this decade of the 1980s. That really is a substantial matter. I think that when you put that alongside the personal attacks and the vituperation that has come from some people in that Parliament over the last day or two, trying to undermine the thrust of the Government's effectiveness and its policies in relation to Afghanistan, I think it is a tragedy, not only for the Parliament, but it is a tragedy for Australia.

Carleton

I am going to end it. I am going to end also on a domestic political note sir. Are you conscious that some of your own backbench, and probably much more importantly, some of your own Ministers, are have been critical of your performance over the last couple of days.

Prime Minister

Now, I really think that that is taking personality politics. Playing Mr. Hayden's game, isn't it?

Carleton

I (inaudible) intended to sir.

Prime Minister

Yes, I know. But I know if anyone wanted to be they would be critical to me. They wouldn't be critical to you. So you saying that here and now, it is really playing the Labor Party's game for them.