

From the Press Office

SUMMARY OF AM

Afghanistan and the Olympic boycott: this week saw the issue become the subject of a bitter and divisive party political debate in Federal Parliament, with a scathing attack on the Prime Minister by the Leader of the Opposition and Mr. Fraser accusing the Labor Party of trying to find excuses for the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister is with us this morning speaking to Warwick Adderley.

Question

Well Prime Minister do you regret the manner in which Afghanistan and the question of an Olympic boycott has turned into a bitter party political debate.

Prime Minister

Oh of course I do because the Government set out very firmly to try and establish the circumstances in which we could have and would have a bipartisan policy in relation to Afghanistan.

Question

What steps did you take to seek a bipartisan policy Mr. Fraser?

Prime Minister

If you could just let finish an answer please and in the introduction to this programme you, whoever did the introduction, whoever wrote it, inadvertently fell into an error, which I think was perpetrated yesterday - when it said that I had put it that the Labor Party as a whole was trying to find excuses for the Soviets over Afghanistan. I said there was a thread in the Labor Party. That's quite a different matter and it happens to be totally accurate and it is because of that that the efforts that the Government has taken to try and establish an effective boycott of the Olympic Games, for example, and other effective measures, has been sought to be undermined in the debates and the discussions that have gone on. I think this is regrettable and most unfortunate.

Question

Mr. Hayden claims that by referring to that thread you're impugning the patriotism of Labor politicians. Was that your intention?

Prime Minister

If Mr. Hayden is taking that view he has an extraordinary sensitivity which is surprising after his period in the Parliament. Because let me demonstrate why I said it. There is one Labor member and I do not want to mention names, but if you wish to look up the Hansard's it is all there - there is one Labor member who has made it plain that it is a Russian presence, not an invasion, not a suppression, not an occupation. Now if that isn't making excuses being an apologist I don't know what is.

Question

But in referring to a response to either a Russian invasion or a

Russian occupation or a Russian presence, is opposition to a boycott un-Australian?

Prime Minister

The Leader of the Opposition has said that a boycott of the Olympic Games would be one of the most effective means of bringing the abhorrence of the free world through to the Russian Government and to the Russian people; and with that we are at one. He is record as having said that very plainly in the Hansard. Then he said if there is international support of course he will support it. Then a little later he said there is not sense and no justice in a continued pressure for a boycott of the Moscow Games by the Australian athletes.

Question

Can I draw your attention to the point of my question Mr. Fraser. Under the present circumstances is opposition to a boycott un-Australian?

Prime Minister

If you allow me to answer the question without interrupting and if you are going to continually interrupt then all right so be it. But I would be grateful if you would allow me to answer the question before interrupting and we will make more progress quicker. I am making the point that Mr. Hayden said quite plainly that a boycott would bring the message through to the Russians and the Russian people very effectively. Then he said there is no sense and no justice in a boycott. And he ended up his statement in the Parliament yesterday by saying if there is an effective boycott the Opposition supports it. That's fine but if it wants to support it why won't it work for it? Why does it do everything possible to try and prevent the effective boycott being established as far as Australia is concerned when he knows that this is the one thing that can bring the message home to the whole of the Soviet people. Now that's a great question that he has to answer.

Question

Is not working for a boycott un-Australian?

Prime Minister

You introduced this term 'un-Australian', I didn't.

Question

No on the contrary Mr. Fraser, Mr. Hayden introduced the question of patriotism and I'm trying to explore that issue.

Prime Minister

You have introduced the question of un-Australian, I didn't and I am not making any charges about patriotism. I said Mr. Hayden was too sensitive. The question I asked him is if he says a boycott, as he does, is an effective means of getting the message through to the Soviet people, and it is an invasion and a suppression of a people we are talking about, not a Russian presence, and if he says there is going to be an effective boycott, the Labor Party then supports it - in those circumstances why will he not work for it? Why does he then have to work against it as he so patently has.

Question

Mr. Fraser can we turn to your view that the Russian invasion poses the most serious threat to world stability and peace since World War II. It's been reported that the Office of National Assessments advised you that that wasn't the case before your trip overseas and that the occupation was merely defensive and didn't pose a threat to Western oil supplies. Is that true?

Prime Minister

No it is not true. And that report happens not to be true. There is a particular device by which Mr. Hayden can be briefed through the Office of National Assessments. He asked my office and I would normally approve and Mr. Furlonger would give him a briefing. That request was not made. That briefing was not made. Mr. Hayden was not briefed. Many people differ as to the reasons why the Soviets went into Afghanistan. But all the Government's advisors agree that once they are in Afghanistan, as they are, that opens up opportunities for further adventures by the Soviet Union, opportunities which in all their history, they have shown themselves only too willing to take. It's not only in Afghanistan that we have to look for this lesson, but in Africa, where they have armed 40,000 Cuban troops, in Vietnam and in Kampuchea, in northeast Africa and now in Afghanistan, in nearly part of the world - they are the only country that has been promoting and supporting subversion, invasion, destruction.

Question

If then, the situation is as serious as you say, do you regret not having sought a bipartisan approach over Australia's response before announcing a boycott?

Prime Minister

We did take a bipartisan approach and Mr. Hayden has said in the initial stages that a boycott would be an effective means of bringing the message home through to the Russian people. And on that basis, we were entitled to expect that he would support it. And I still am puzzled as to why he doesn't.

Question

You actually approached Mr. Hayden over it?

Prime Minister

Would you please let me answer a question. It is a great habit of the ABC to interrupt but so be it. Mr. Hayden had made is perfectly plain that he believed the boycott would be the effective way of getting a message through. Since he criticised and strongly criticised, which I applaud, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan - the natural result of that one would have thought would be that Mr. Hayden would support the boycott - now he does not. This time he has gone on to say if there is ultimately an effective boycott of course he would support it. But if he believes an effective boycott is necessary to get the message home you have to work for what you believe - not just sit on the sidelines and say other people can do it.

Question

If the Government and the Opposition then are divided at the moment, are you prepared to make that division an election issue?

Prime Minister

Oh look I am not going to talk about elections in this matter. It would be much much better if Australia can have one policy in relation to these matters. You have only got to look at the way the British Labor Party supported the present British Tory Government in relation to these particular matters. They didn't seek to get in and undermine and undercut what Prime Minister Thatcher is doing, but to establish an effective response and people really do need to understand what all this is about. The Soviets have moved into Afghanistan - the largest and most powerful land army in the world - a small non-aligned, inoffensive State, you said it was defensive reasons, but Afghanistan could never have offered any threat to the Soviet Union and the whole world knows that.

Question

Mr. Fraser that's where we'll have to leave it - we are running out of time. Thank you very much for joining us.  
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It seems that the Soviet Union may be trying to find a way out of its problems in Afghanistan. Reports from London indicate that the Soviets may support a British proposal to the EEC that Afghanistan be given the status of a neutral state. Mark Colvin reports. The British Foreign Office is denying that it has received messages from the Kremlin expressing support for the idea of a neutral Afghanistan. But a report published in London's Evening News states categorically that such messages have been received in White Hall. The British initiated the proposal at last week's EEC meeting and Lord Carrington has been following it up in meetings with his counterparts around Europe. The proposal was originally something of a gamble based on the theory that Russia's invasion had been intended as a stern warning to Soviet Islamic minorities. The idea was that the Kremlin might now be searching for just this kind of face-saving device. The political editor of the Evening News said he has seen informal messages from high Kremlin sources to White Hall, which indicate that this may indeed be the case and which urge Lord Carrington to keep pushing the neutralisation proposal. There is no question that the United States is in favour of the EEC proposal. President Carter has already publicly endorsed it and what could improve its chances of success with the Soviet Union is its stress on flexibility. I was given to understand in Rome that an agreement on a neutral Afghanistan need have no political strings attached and the British at any rate, would not object to a communist government in Kabul as long as it was an elected government. However Lord Carrington made it clear then that many details had still to be worked out. David Willis reports from Moscow that it has been equally hard to obtain an unequivocal indication of Soviet reaction to the proposal for a neutral Afghanistan.

Diplomats, including an American Ambassador have been taken hostage in yet another guerrilla attack on an Embassy. This one in Colombia in South America. Geoff McMullen reports from Washington.