

INTERVIEW ON MIKE WILLESEE - AFGHANISTAN

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Film clip of Mr Hayden on Willesee, March 3, 1980:

"We resent very much the way Mr Fraser is prepared to misrepresent, distort, in the most vigorous way, what we stand for.

Willesee:

When have you ever gone so far in Parliament as to call somebody of Mr Fraser's level, a liar, lacking integrity, lacking in integrity, lacking in ethics, honesty, virtue, desperate and unprincipled - I mean, it was an enormous attack - it was an emotional attack.

Mr Hayden:

Sure, and it was an enormous misrepresentation on the part of Mr Fraser. It was a massive assault against the Labor Party - a despairing effort by a desperate man. Everyone in the backbench behind as well as the frontbench reacted the way I did. They were furious. It was outrageous what Mr Fraser did. Mr Fraser has never been under any doubt as to how I feel about him or indeed the Labor Party. He is easily the richest, the meanest and the most unscrupulous Prime Minister this country has every had, and I make no apologies about saying that.

(End of film clip)

Willesee:

That is an unusually strong attack, and when Mr Hayden made that last night I countered by saying that we would give the Prime Minister a right of reply, and the Prime Minister is in our Canberra studio right now in Parliament House. Let's cross to the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser. Thanks for coming in, Mr Prime Minister.

Prime Minister:

Thank you very much.

Willesee:

What do you say to that?

Prime Minister:

I don't really think I want to say anything to it because I believe the language was extreme and quite unjustified. I would like to talk about the policies surrounding these particular matters because I think it is important that they be discussed, and I regret very greatly the kind of language that has been used in the Parliament, and apparently in other places also.

Willesee:

So none of those particular words worry you to the extent that you would like to reply to them?

Prime Minister:

I don't like them, Of course, I don't. But if I was going to want to reply to the slightly unkind things that are said about me from one week to the next, or one year to the next ...

Willesee:

More than slightly...

Prime Minister:

I know that but, is that my typical understatement perhaps? I think we could have a profitable discussion about issues. I also believe that anything I have said about the Australian Labor Party on this issue has been accurate, can be demonstrated to be so, but that again doesn't help to get to a public understanding of the issues which are of vast and enormous importance to the future of all the Australian people.

Willesee:

But that's the whole problem, isn't it? The issue has been obscured by the rhetoric and the emotional outbursts in Parliament.

Prime Minister:

I think it has and I am now trying to say, "Let's talk about the issues" because the issues are important.

Willesee:

Do you concede that you might have gone too far on your part in that emotional rhetoric?

Prime Minister:

Have you looked at the Parliament, the record, the Hansard?

Willesee:

I have read it all, and I have read it all with great repetition because you said it many times.

Prime Minister:

Said what many times?

Willesee:

Well, in particular your attitude of the Labor Party having a thread in it or a part of it which was, to paraphrase, soft on the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister:

I think the words I used were 'finding excuses for or reasons why we should do nothing'. The thing that is puzzling me about this, in part, is that while the Labor Party condemn the invasion of Afghanistan just as vigorously as anyone else, so there is agreement about that, but while Mr Hayden also says that an effective boycott of the Olympic Games will bring the message home to the Soviet government and people, more effectively than anything else, then he and the Labor Party won't work for it. And I believe that if you condemn what the Soviets have done, as we all do, and if you then believe that an effective boycott of the Olympic Games would bring this message home to the Soviet government, but even more important than that, to the Soviet people, in an effective and realistic way, then I think there is a moral obligation to work for that effective boycott.

Willesee:

Let's start with what went wrong with our Australian leaders. You agree that you both have that commonality, what went wrong? Let's start with you. What did you do that was wrong?

Prime Minister:

Is this going to be a programme for self confession? Quite seriously..

Willesee:

If I could be constructive, Mr Prime Minister - you can't get that bi-partisan non-political approach unless you both concede some error.

Prime Minister:

I am trying to make it as easy as possible by emphasising the points in which the parties are in agreement. I have been making the point that if one thinks that in an effective boycott of the Olympic Games will get the message through to the Soviet government and people, and there is agreement on that, why then is it so hard to work for that effective boycott. You see, on all the earlier statements Mr Hayden had made, I believe there was every justification for believing that the Australian Labor Party would support the Government in working for these things. There have been, as I believe, a very large number of countries around the world that take the same view, where the governments are working for an effective boycott. Ironically, the leader of the Opposition, the Labor leader of the Opposition, in New Zealand is saying that Mr Muldoon should be stronger on the issue and work more effectively for a boycott, so, it is not something where people are necessarily divided on philosophical or party grounds...

Willesee:

..divided on the boycott issue, aren't they?

Prime Minister:

But not between countries. I am making the point..

Willesee:

..Australia..

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Prime Minister:

In Australia - no I think in the wider community people have views on this issue quite irrespective of their party political affiliations.

Willesee:

Well, could you have done better, and I hope I am saying it constructively, by talking to the Labor Party, before you proposed the boycott?

Prime Minister:

Again, having in mind the fact that Mr Hayden had also said that an effective boycott would get the message home, through, to the Soviet government and people, and that was one of his first statements on the question of boycotts. I would have thought that one could expect that that would therefore be worked for by the Australian Labor Party, and I am puzzled, and remain puzzled as to why they don't.

Willesee:

You have become upset, and I can understand it about the emotive issue of wool from your property, Nareen, going to Russia, because in logic it is not relevant. But, in emotive terms, of course, it has become highly irrelevant - highly relevant, I'm sorry...

Prime Minister:

You were right the first time, but for the purposes of the interview, you have got to say, relevant.

Willesee:

Yes, but, is that the real problem? Emotion? Is that what gave the Labor Party the chance to bat you around the head?

Prime Minister:

If they took that course because they thought they could bat me around the head over wool sales, well then, quite obviously, there was never an opportunity of getting a bi-partisan policy, because, a couple of points have been known by the Australian Labor Party for a long while. One, almost an irrelevancy: that wool was sold before the war began. But also, by the time they started to attack Fraser, for wool that was alleged to be his but had been sold before the occasion and therefore wasn't mine. And people know how the auction system works - you put your wool into the ring and anyone of 200 people buy it. You don't know where it goes that, in this case, all happened before the war began - the invasion of Afghanistan. Even before they started to talk about that, they had said that a boycott of trade with the Soviet Union wouldn't work, and especially for farm products. It would be dangerous and unfortunate if we went down that path. So, they had already put themselves against a boycott on trade matters.

Willesee:

You're talking political sophistication. The people in the street who we work hard to keep in touch with, and we have done several street surveys on this matter - people talk in simple terms -

Willesee: (cont.)

the athletes are being punished, but Malcolm Fraser can sell wool and make some money.

Prime Minister:

Can I make a couple of points about that, because the Australian Labor Party had said, and you don't want me to look up the quotes but I have brought them in with me if you want it, from Mr Hayden and from others, which show that they were opposed to a boycott of trade, especially opposed to a boycott of farm produce.

Willesee:

We accept that.

Prime Minister:

All right, you accept that...

Willesee:

Mr Prime Minister, if I could interrupt, I really would like you to address yourself to the people who take that simple approach, well why should the athletes be punished and Malcolm Fraser can sell his wool or other traders can trade. That's the thing that sticks in the mind...

Prime Minister:

..on the basis of all traders, and let's deal then with the trade position. There is no point - and Mr Hayden again was right in this - in Australian pursuing trade sanctions which are not going to be supported by other countries and other places. What we are doing on trade matters is just as vigorous as anything that other countries are doing. We have said that we will support a list of strategic goods and whatever is on that as part of the European approach to these particular matters, if additional goods, if commodities happen at some future time to get put on that list, then obviously we take note of it, but at this point they haven't, and there is no point. As Mr Hayden has said, in pursuing a trade boycott, which the Russians will get around because they will buy it somewhere else, and which no other country is trying to pursue...

Willesee:

So you are saying that if it is going to hurt them you will stop, if it is just going to hurt us, there is no point?

Prime Minister:

If it is just going to hurt us, if it is just going to hurt Australia and it is not a question of wool growers.

Willesee:

That is the simple message, isn't it?

Prime Minister:

Yes it is.

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Willesee:

That both of you are trying to say that really hasn't got across.

Prime Minister:

Well, you say it again as you did it - as you said it then.

Willesee:

If it is going to hurt them, you take action. If it is simply going to hurt us, you don't do it.

Prime Minister:

There is no point, and I think that is a very good way of putting it. But can I say something about the Olympic Games, and why I think that the boycott of the Olympic Games and why I think that is important. For two years, the Soviet government has built up this issue to their own people. All the countries of the world coming here. Their athletes, their countries paying homage to the first Socialist state, as a mark of approval of the Soviet government's foreign policies. Now, how do you get it home to the Soviet people, that we don't approve of their foreign policy. That is it putting the world on the brink of a great danger, flags absent, athletes not appearing, all the Soviet experts that I have discussed it with, and including Mr Hayden himself, have said that this is the most effective way of getting the message through to the Soviet government and people. It is a public thing - it can't be hidden.

Willesee:

Yes, it is very difficult to argue with that. I think that maybe you might agree that the problem is getting the message across of domestic politics in Australia..

Prime Minister:

I think that you have done a great service in helping to get that through in making that comment - if it hurts the Soviets, you do it, if it just hurts us, we don't do it.

Willesee:

We are running out of time, Prime Minister, but I would like to raise two points briefly. One, Mr Hayden did have a crack at you last night. Do you think that he is under inordinate pressure?

Prime Minister:

I would have thought inevitably after the last weekend, and I have thought, sometimes, that within his own Party he is under great pressure. But, I don't want to reply in kind, I really don't, and I am not going to.

Willesee:

All right, so I will leave it with one more question. Have you been under inordinate pressure - bear in your mind the Parliamentary performance and your clash with another television interviewer.

Prime Minister:

I hope that you have read that interview, because I enjoyed it nearly as much as I am enjoying this one. The worst pressure I feel is when I am in a Willesee interview to make sure that it keeps moving and interesting and good humoured. Is that fair enough

Willesee:

That will get in quotes of the week, I promise. The other point is that if we are really fair dinkum about a bi-partisan approach, and surely that must be the way if we are serious about international politics - something of the magnitude of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan - you have failed so far to get that, Bill Hayden has failed so far to get that, and I think the people expect it, what can you do about it?

Prime Minister:

I think you gave the answer to that, by making it perfectly plain that Mr Hayden was pursuing the dual question of Olympics coupled with trade, because of the fact that I grow wool gave him the bat to belt me around the head with, and so you gave the answer to it, because if he hadn't taken hold of that bat to knock me on the head with, if he hadn't seen that opportunity, I think he would have been taking quite different attitudes to a number of these questions, and would have followed through on his original statements - a boycott of the Games would be effective, a boycott of trade would be totally ineffective.

Willesee:

If you could see a situation where both you and Mr. Hayden could speak unemotionally to the people of Australia and put your points of view, and seek their reaction - would you agree to that?

Prime Minister:

What do you mean? On the Willesee programme?

Willesee:

Yes, that would be ideal I would imagine. It hasn't worked in the Parliament, has it.

Prime Minister:

No, but I don't really think it would work on your programme either because you read out or you showed at the beginning of the programme the sorts of things that Mr Hayden said about me.

Willesee:

But if you say that then how can you really seriously seek a bi-partisan non-political approach?

Prime Minister:

Again I think you gave the answer to why that won't work under the current circumstances, and Mr Hayden has said some very strong things. I suppose I could adopt an approach which Carlton tried to adopt with Alex Jesaulenko, but I don't think that would work either

Prime Minister:

so I am not going to.

Willesee:

That was very unAustralian.

Prime Minister:

What was unAustralian?

Willesee:

Treating Jessa like that - a great footballer.

Prime Minister:

I have got some divided loyalties. I am a very violent Carlton supporter, but I am certainly going to have some soft spot for St Kilda and Alex Jesaulenko when he is playing.

Willesee:

You have just lost 25,000 votes and picked up another 200,000, I think.

Prime Minister:

Which ones did I lose and which ones did I gain.

Willesee:

You lost Carlton and you picked up St. Kilda.

Prime Minister:

Oh no, I didn't lose Carlton because I suspect that the large number of Carlton supporters and harrackers still have a great affection for what Alex Jesaulenko has done for that club.

Willesee:

How did we get onto the subject?

Prime Minister:

It's a question of keeping the interview moving.

Willesee:

Also, Melbourne Football is a priority always.

Prime Minister:

Yes it is.

Willesee:

But wouldn't you look - I mean, a referendum is far too difficult, but if you could have professionally conducted opinion polls...

Prime Minister:

You cannot conduct a foreign policy or a major matter of government..



Willesee:

But this is a divisive community issue.

Prime Minister:

But you cannot conduct a major element of policy by the polls, by an opinion poll or by a referendum, because a government has got to make up its mind what it believes to be right. It then has to argue for it, and argue as strongly as it can and as well as it knows how, and that is the way it goes. On this particular matter in which I have got the deepest of all possible convictions, I think we need to support each other, independent nations of the world, support the efforts of the United States and of the leading countries in Europe to try and stop this world in the 1980s going through the tragic and dangerous path that it took in the latter part of the 1930s. If we believe that, if I believe that, I can't put it to a poll to judge it - you know, a Gallup Poll - I have to argue for it because I believe it, and it is a fundamental significance to the future, the freedom and to the happiness of every Australian.

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