

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL WILLESEE FOR
"WILLESEE AT SEVEN" PROGRAMME

Willesee

Prime Minister, thanks for coming in.

Prime Minister

Thank you very much.

Willesee

Well, how do you react to rotten vegetables, eggs and manure?

Prime Minister

And also potatoes.

Willesee

And potatoes.

Prime Minister

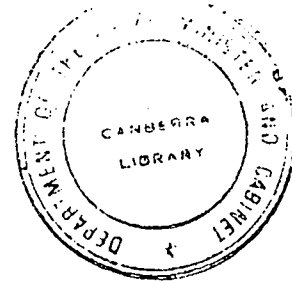
It is the sort of thing that should not happen in Australia. People ought to be able to go and express a point of view in any Australian environment, and I believe, be heard. Now this is something that makes, obviously, free speech very difficult. But it also something that causes enormous inconvenience. It causes danger, and in the case of the old people's home at Fitzroy where there are a number of frail aged needing nursing home care, it caused an enormous amount of concern to the inmates.

Willesee

What happened yesterday?

Prime Minister

Well, I was asked to go and open a nursing home in Fitzroy, from the Melbourne City Mission. They have said, before the event, that they would have asked whoever was the Prime Minister. It happens to be the first nursing home that has been built in Fitzroy - that in itself is something of a criticism because it is an area where that kind of facility is much needed. It has cost about \$1 million. There is a large of Government money in it. Then, the Fitzroy Council said that they were going to boycott it. A Fitzroy Councillor made some statements about a large demonstration; that he could not guarantee that the demonstration would be peaceful. It was boycotted by Mr. Innes, and State and Federal Labor politicians in effect. There was a great deal of concern amongst the people running the Melbourne City Mission, and a great deal of concern amongst people running that particular nursing home and the patients in the nursing home. I would have thought it was an apolitical occurrence; a cause that is not political in itself, but one which all Australians could support - the provision of better facilities for Australia's elderly people.



Willesee

What actually happened when you got there?

Prime Minister

When we got there: or before we got there, people had to move from an open-air environment in a car park and the opening ceremony was held within the church itself, so it would be secure. Because people were going to be throwing vegetables and whatever, it would have been very insecure, and I believe, positively dangerous, especially for some of the elderly people, if the opening had been held on the outside. So, that moved into the church. Tamie and myself arrived a little later to give them time for that movement. The police were handling matters well. We got inside, but not before we had both been pelted by various missiles. Then, the opening ceremony went on. There was an inspection of the building. A great deal of noise; more people gathered; a lot of difficulty for the police. None of that I saw because I was inside and they were outside. But I understand it was captured by the television cameras. I also understand there were some very nasty and unpleasant incidents. A lot of noise, a lot of shouting, a lot of sloganeering going on, all during the ceremony.

Willesee

Do you know who these people are?

Prime Minister

Not in detail. No. A report is being prepared for me, as is normal in these circumstances: the organisations that might be involved. But we do know that the Fitzroy City Council passed a motion deploring the fact that I had been asked to go, and that it was plain that some members at least - or at least one member - of that Council was helping to organise a meeting and members of the Australian Labor Party, State and Federal, boycotted the opening.

Willesee

Have you yet seen security reports?

Prime Minister

Not in relation to it. No, I have not. I have asked for a report to be prepared; as soon as it is ready. Before the event of course, there was advice that there was going to be a demonstration but the advice also was that it would probably be a peaceful demonstration. Well, that advice was very wrong.

Willesee

But they must have known a month in advance to take the people into the hall, into the church?

Prime Minister

That decision was made about 10 minutes before I was due to arrive. A large number of people had arrived by that time.

Willesee

Would you take Mrs. Fraser again, knowing that was going to happen?

Prime Minister

I asked my own office to go through my engagements and to make an assessment about whether or not Mrs. Fraser ought to be with me on the engagements that have already been accepted. So far as I am concerned, if I am asked to do something and it fits into the programme and I think it is something that I ought to do, then I believe I have got to do it. Because I do not believe that any Prime Minister of this country should allow a mob, a riot, violence of that kind, to run him off the track. You cannot have some ground in Australia which is too unsafe for a Prime Minister to walk over, or to visit. We cannot have that kind of country here.

Willesee

And yet there is the danger of violence begetting violence, isn't there?

Prime Minister

I think there is. But if people have a difference with me on political matters - and I know well enough there are a large number that have that, as there would be in free society, and that is to be expected - but let them argue it in the Parliament. Let them argue it with words. Let them argue it with reason. I believe that violence is the hallmark of those who have no reason, who have no arguments, who are morally and intellectually defeated, and therefore can only resort to the tactics of the thug and the bully. Surely, that Fitzroy City Council should have deplored violence. Surely, the Australian Labor Party and Mr. Innes - as a person who had been asked to go to the meeting - should have deplored the violence.

Willesee

Are you personally concerned that what is rotten fruit today may be something a little harder tomorrow?

Prime Minister

That process has already started. It started off as eggs and tomatoes. Potatoes did not land on a mark, but potatoes thrown over 50 or 60 yards could land quite heavily, especially on somebody who is old and frail. They could land very, very hard indeed. I think that what has happened does pose a problem for those who are concerned with the safety of various people and the safety of organisations in these circumstances.

Willesee

Do you have any plans to combat that?

Prime Minister

Let me only say it is being examined right at this moment, as a result of what happened yesterday.

Willesee

What is your personal reaction?

Prime Minister

One of sadness that this could happen in Australia. Look, I know we play our politics ruggedly, roughly maybe, if you like. But I would hoped also, that it can be played in a forthright way, with people expressing views, ruggedly, but in the proper forum. Australians ought not to take this kind of politics to the streets. They really ought to turn their backs upon it and condemn totally anyone who has anything to do with it. It is un-Australian, in its origin and in its practice.

Willesee

There are those cynical enough to suggest that it is not harmful to you in an election year. What do you say to that?

Prime Minister

Why is it that violence always seem to be against my side of politics? Is that an accident, or is it organised? There is no politics in violence if violence is condemned. The Australian Labor Party has a capacity to condemn violence if they wish to. They have a capacity to disassociate themselves from it, by word and by deed. Mr. Innes had originally accepted that invitation to go to that particular opening of that old people's home yesterday. He refused, presumably, once he heard of the resolution through the Fitzroy Council, and once he heard there was going to be a demonstration. He needs to ask, was he happier to organise, or help in organising a demonstration - if that is what he was doing, or would he have preferred to be at the opening and see the work and commitment of a large number of very fine Australians.

Willesee

Mr. Prime Minister, thanks for talking with us.

Prime Minister

Thank you.