



PRIME MINISTER

Transcript - Press Conference - Travelodge Hotel
8 August 1984 - 5.30 pm.

E & O E - Proof Only

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke how did you interpret what Mr Somare had to say this morning about Mr Lange's position on nuclear issues.

P.M.: Well the only way it can be interpreted and that was what he was saying that what individual countries do about the question of visits of nuclear armed and nuclear powered ships is a matter for each individual country. I mean he had no intention of intervening in that position. And I understand that subsequently he's made that quite clear.

JOURNALIST: Does the election of Mr Lange however boost the chances of getting a nuclear free Pacific?

P.M.: No because the question of a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific had its own momentum from within the countries of the area. I should qualify my answer by saying to the extent that Mr Lange's predecessor had been perhaps less than enthusiastic about the concept it means that we will have New Zealand supporting the position that I'd been advancing in the Forum last year.

JOURNALIST: Are there some problems with the proposal at this stage.

P.M.: Well only the proposal of taking a concept which is what you always have, taking a concept from a position of a concept into a treaty. That will take some time. But I believe it's achievable. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. But there is obviously widespread support amongst the countries of the region for it.

JOURNALIST: Is there division among the South Pacific nations about the question of nuclear ships passing through the South Pacific. In other words is that consistent with a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific.

P.M.: Oh yes, it's consistent with it and we have made it clear at all times that our proposal for such a nuclear free zone would embrace the right of ships of our ally, the United States, to pass through.

JOURNALIST: Well having said that what are the principles that Australia would be putting to the South Pacific Forum later this month?

P.M.: The same principles as we advanced very explicitly last year and that is that we believe that in this area it should be a nuclear free zone in terms of the non-storage or acquisition of nuclear weapons. It should be free from testing of nuclear explosive devices and there should be no dumping of nuclear waste products in the area.

JOURNALIST: In between now and the South Pacific Forum in two or three weeks time would there be further communication with the French Government. No, not with the French Government?

P.M.: No, not with the French Government directly. What's been happening at the official level is there's been an interchange of views and by the time we get to the Forum we'll be in a position to further discuss this matter more specifically. It will be after that that I imagine collectively and perhaps individually there'll be a communication to the French Government of the position of the countries of the region.

JOURNALIST: Are you saying Mr Hawke that you'd be happy with an agreement for a nuclear free zone which allows individual governments to make a decision as to whether or not they allow nuclear ship visits?

P.M.: No, the question of being happy with it, that's what we've had as our position consistently from the beginning.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke in Geneva Mr Hayden suggested that Australia might have to have another look at its position on the bases if progress wasn't made by the Americans towards disarmament. What is your comment on that.

P.M.: I've seen the reference to that. In fact I've spoken with Bill Hayden today by phone and there is no story here. What Bill said in his speech in Geneva was precisely what he has been saying from the time we've been in Government and that is that we have, as an independent Australian Government, a view - a strong view - about the necessity for moves by the great powers towards nuclear disarmament. And we have used our position, I think our particular position, with the United States to put that view. And of course we've already had, as it were, a positive result from the exercise of that influence. You will recall that in November of last year we were able to persuade the United States to change what had been its previous view of opposition as to the work of the Committee of Disarmament to enable the Australian sponsored resolution for work on a comprehensive test ban treaty to proceed. And the United States, as a result very substantially of our advocacy to them changed that vote from opposition to abstention. And then just in June of this year we got their agreement to the form for a draft memorandum of approach on this issue. So what

P.M. cont...: Bill was saying in Geneva was really that we will be continuing to put that view. And in the conversation I had with him today he indicated to me that the American representative in Geneva had expressed their approbation of the view that was put. And I am confident, as is Bill Hayden, that with that reaction from the United States we'll be able to continue into the future what we have effectively done in the past. And that is being a constructive and positive ally with the United States in the ANZUS relationship still to establish that we are not a nation which simply accepts automatically what any other nation or any superpower does. We maintain the right which we've exercised to put our view strongly and it's a matter of pleasure to both the Foreign Minister and myself that we have been able to use this special relationship with the United States to achieve those positive results since November of last year, and we'll continue to do that.

JOURNALIST: But the Australian position is, is that it will review its attitude towards the bases if there's not satisfactory progress by the U.S. on disarmament.

P.M.: No, that's putting the emphasis the wrong way. There will be a continuation of the position that we've adopted now, to this point. And that is that we will push in all the relevant international forums and in our discussions with the United States the necessity for positive action to move towards reducing the level of nuclear armaments. And we have received to this point positive responses from the United States. So the question of review of the bases situation doesn't arise. Mr Hayden had been responding in hypothetical situation and as he pointed out to me the facts are that the United States has indicated since his speech in Geneva a very positive response to what he had to say.

JOURNALIST: Did you contact Mr Hayden or how come you were speaking to him today.

P.M.: Yes I contacted him by phone.

JOURNALIST: Over this matter?

P.M.: Yes I wanted to talk to him about that and some - we often speak to one another while he's away.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister do you think the Americans in any way have been dragging their feet on this disarmament issue.

P.M.: I don't think we can just stand up and say they've been dragging their feet. I mean there are two superpowers involved in this situation and both Mr Hayden and I are satisfied from the discussion that we've had at our various levels of the administration that they do want to see positive moves in this area. They haven't always received the degree of positive response from the Soviet Union that you would like to see.

P.M. cont...: Now we are going to continue to press our position both with the United States, with whom we have a special relationship. We'll also be putting the view to the Soviet Union and particularly in regard to the development we've been able to achieve on disarmament in regard to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. What's required there to enable that work to proceed is a positive response from the Soviet Union. And as we've said recently we will be putting to the Soviet Union that there should be a positive response from them.

JOURNALIST:..Mr Hawke if you are satisfied with the approach that the Americans have been adopting why were Mr Hayden's remarks seen as necessary?

P.M.: What you've got to understand is that there are two stages. Mr Hayden made his speech and then he was asked hypothetical questions following that speech. And he responded to those hypothetical questions - what he's made clear to me, what the actual position is, what the response of the Americans has been. And he believes that that response which they have made to him will be one which will become clear publicly.

JOURNALIST: Was it wise for him to be responding to hypothetical situations given your own attitude to hypothetical questions.

P.M.: Well that's almost a quasi-hypothetical one itself. It will have been quite clear to you, as I'm sure it has been to everyone else at any rate, from the time that Mr Hayden has been Foreign Minister that we have a very close co-operation. And I have on many occasions as well as privately, publicly, gone out of my way to express not only my confidence, but my wholehearted satisfaction at the way he's discharging his job of Foreign Minister.

JOURNALIST: On New Caledonia in the discussions during today's talks with other leaders what position did you put for Australia.

P.M.: I'm glad you asked that question because there's some suggestion that it may not be clearly understood. The quick run down of what I said was in these terms - that I suppose of all the countries represented around the table there today, no country more than Australia had been engaged in the rather difficult situations with the French both in regard to testing and also, of course, in regard to the question of exports of uranium to France. ... positions of arguments. Having said that I said that one needed to understand the position of the French and I was in a position well to do that because of the meetings I had with President Mitterand in Paris last year. And I conveyed to the meeting what had been said to me by President Mitterand and I'm in a position to say that to you - essentially what the President said to me was that France had no economic or strategic imperatives to remain in New Caledonia. If they could they would rather be out of it now. He used the example - he said that if it was a Zimbabwe he said, we wouldn't be there, because of the ethnic composition of the country in Zimbabwe was quite clear. There were no problems and colonial power should have

P.M. cont...: been out. He said the unfortunate situation in regard to New Caledonia was that the Kanak population, with which he said his own historical association of being the closest rather than with the Colons, is nevertheless in a minority. They are about 43 per cent of the population. And if in fact France was simply unilaterally immediately to hand over independence it would be the Kanaks at this point who would suffer because they didn't have the arms, the arms were with the Colons. They didn't have at this stage the degree of professional and technical training that the Colons did. And a position of immediate independence would be one in which they would suffer. And what the French were about is to try in the intervening period to create a situation wherein the Kanaks would come to a position where at the time of independence they would be better equipped to benefit from it. And in fact the Statute of Internal Autonomy which would be passed by the French legislature in the near future is explicitly based upon the right of the Kanaks to independence. And the provision within that Statute the approach for the referendum to be held in 1989 is premised upon the intention of the French to create that situation. And so, as I said, I was in a position to judge the integrity of President Mitterand on this and I adjudged his integrity to be complete upon it - a view which was endorsed by colleagues around the table today. And I said all of that in the context of course that we were totally committed. I have consistently been and so has the Government to the concept of independence as soon as possible and one within which the Kanaks would have the opportunity to exercise their independent rights. And that in fact, that exposition which I gave, was one which was accepted without demur around the table.

JOURNALIST: Would your approach be seen as cautious.

P.M.: Well I don't know whether particular adjectives are, one particular adjective, is adequate to describe a complex situation. And what I would say, and the view that I believe was accepted and shared around the table, was that we all know that we want an end to colonialism in this area. That's clear and unequivocal. What we must be concerned about is that in the process of the end of the colonial regime which we want to see as coming as soon as possible, that you must try and ensure that the act of ending the colonial regime in fact happens in a way which is not going to be against the interests of the people with whom you're most concerned. Now if you describe that as cautious, well that may be the appropriate adjective. I believe it's realistic being based as it is upon a commitment to the earliest possible end of colonialism. And as I say that exposition which I put was, I believe, shared around the table.

JOURNALIST: Where's the next CHOGRM going to be held.

P.M.: In Malaysia, but no date has been fixed for it. I think what should be understood is that there was an acceptance of the value of the CHOGRM concept. It has a value particularly for the smaller states - the less developed states - who are embraced within CHOGRM. But there was a feeling that we shouldn't necessarily commit ourselves to an automatic meeting every two years. Dr Mahatir, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, offered to host the next meeting and when that will be held will emerge from a co-ordination of our views as to when it will be worthwhile. The practical work should proceed amongst the various functional committees that deal with issues of trade, agriculture and maritime issues. And when the functional work of those committees has reached a point where a meeting of the political heads of Government would be useful, that's when it will take place.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister are you satisfied that it is worthwhile that the South Pacific Forum, ASEAN and CHOGRM (should continue).

P.M.: Oh well, you're talking about quite different organisations there. But let me go to each one of them. There's no doubt about the South Pacific Forum. There's no-one who has any doubt about the usefulness of that organisation and the functional work that it does and its service in the South Pacific area. That is clearly useful and Australia willingly makes a substantial financial contribution to the work of the Forum because successive Governments have recognised the practical value of the work that's done there. With CHOGRM there may be a view in some quarters that that merely duplicates the work of the South Pacific Forum, but of course that's not the case. Because in CHOGRM in addition to the Pacific states you also have the involvement of some of the Asian Governments and that gives an opportunity of interchange of views and experience which doesn't become available through the Forum. And I think that what was accepted today is that there must be a concentration upon the functional committee work of CHOGRM. So it has that advantage and you've got to remember that there are the smaller nations who are, as it were, associate members of CHOGRM who don't get the right therefore of full involvement in the overall CHOGRM meetings. Those three are the Maldives, Tuvalu and Nauru. Now obviously for those three who are not full members of CHOGRM, CHOGRM has its significance. Now you mentioned ASEAN - well of course that is a quite different body and there is no question I think in anyone's mind either within ASEAN or outside it of the usefulness of that body. It has achieved a status and an efficacy which I think would have surprised even the original founders of it. And so its viability and usefulness is simply not in question.

* * * * *