



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH REGIS FAUCON. TELEVISION FRANCE CHANNEL ONE, 31 January 1987

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FAUCON: How bad are the relations now between France and Australia?

PM: You would really have to address that question to Monsieur Chirac. As far as I am concerned we have done nothing to strain the relations. My attitude and the attitude of the government and the people of Australia towards the people of France is one of very considerable admiration in so many ways. We share a great deal. We have fought together in two wars - the blood of thousands of Australians is in the soil of France. WE have the same commitment to the concepts of free parliamentary democracy, liberty for the individual. WE have a great admiration for the cultural heritage of France and the great contribution it has made to the world. And so the things that unite us are infinitely stronger than those on which we have differences. There seems to be some inability on the part of this government of France to understand that two countries can have great respect for one another, share so many things, but in a mature relationship can differ on particular points of policy.

FAUCON: From your point of view what is the most disturbing problem. Is it the nuclear test, the French nuclear or New Caledonia?

PM: We have concern about both. ON the question of testing at Mururoa we and our fellow nations in the South Pacific have taken the view that we don't argue with France's right to make a decision according to its perceptions of its own interests, that it needs to have an independent nuclear force. That is a decision for France to make. But if they are going to conduct nuclear testing in support of that policy and they say it is safe - and they assert that it is - then let them conduct the testing in metropolitan France. It follows as a matter of logic that if it is safe, do it there. On the question of New Caledonia. We do have very considerable concerns there. WE understand that this is a difficult problem because the Kanaks are in a minority and as President Mitterand said to me when I was talking with him in 1983, he said you must understand that New Caledonia is not Zimbabwe. There it is easy to transfer power, it is not easy in New Caledonia.

FAUCON: And it is not Algeria.

PM: And it is not Algeria, correct. I am just using the analogy that he used. What we were hoping to see and what we thought we saw in the Mitterand/Fabius plan was a process whereby there could

PM cont: a gradual constitutional development which would recognise both the rights of the Kanaks and of the non-Kanaks. And let me emphasise that we recognise the rights and the interests of the non-Kanaks as well as the Kanaks. We saw that being able to develop in a way which could lead to a constitutional development which could encompass an independence in association with France. The problem we see now is that the Kanaks are going to repudiate the processes of the present government. They are not going to associate

themselves with the referendum. In that situation, it seems to us and to our friends in the South Pacific that the likelihood in those circumstances that the tendencies within the FLNKS which see merit in some association with Libya and that sort of association will be strengthened. So we are very concerned about those potential developments.

FAUCON: Is there a better way than a referendum to get the advice of the population - since it is on a one man, one vote system.

PM: I suppose the answer to that is that the previous government thought there was a better way of handling the process than Australia and Australia and the other South Pacific nations saw more merit in the previous French approach.

FAUCON: You know what the French say, if I may use this expression, that it is not your business and you make things worse. What do you say to that?

PM: If we are going to conduct international relations on the basis that it is the business of no other country in terms of what one country does, I suppose it follows from that that what the Soviet Union does in Afghanistan is nobody else's business. I don't accept that. I think that what happens in other areas is often the business of others. Let me make this point. We can say in respect of ourselves that we are not asking of France a process that we didn't apply to ourselves. When it came to our de-colonisation process with Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Cocos Island, we deliberately invoked the committee of 24. We saw merit in being assisted in our processes of getting a lasting and peaceable resolution of that decolonisation by involving others. So we are not suggesting nor are the South Pacific nations suggesting something which, as far as we were concerned, we weren't prepared to do ourselves.

FAUCON: If the referendum says no to independence, what are you going to do. How far are you ready to go yourself?

PM: I wonder whether I could turn the question around to you and say what are you going to do if the whole of the Kanaks boycott the referendum as they say are going to and they turn to other measures, what are you going to do.

FAUCON: Did you find a change of attitude when there was new majority elected in France last year?

PM: I think I am a reasonably intelligent bloke - that is Australian for person, male person anyway - I would have to go on the evidence that since there has been the change of government there have been decisions taken by this French Government that weren't taken by the previous one. Let me be precise. There has been now the banning of our Consul in New Caledonia. There has been the rejection

FAUCON: How did you react to that?

PM: In addition to that there has been the colourful language by your French Prime Minister about my lack of intelligence. I always thought that the French were elegant, mature, sophisticated in the handling of their affairs. I would simply say that I wouldn't regard those actions as consistent with elegance and maturity. And we won't be reciprocating.

FAUCON: So how do you react when the French say that you are in a bad position since you didn't do too well with the aboriginals?

PM: I would say it is not an analogy. I have given you the analogy. We had a colonial relationship with Papua New Guinea. WE didn't seek to impose an outcome. The characteristics of the de-colonisation process in which Australia was involved was one of consistent, patient negotiation and discussion with the representatives of Papua New Guinea including as I say invoking the assistance of the relevant United Nations agencies. WE thought that we could be helped by others. And we were. I don't accept the analogy. If you want to ask me a question about the aborigines. In a relevant sense I am more than happy to answer.

FAUCON: Personally I know the problem very well.

PM: You accept that it is not a relevant analogy. If you want an analogy -

FAUCON: I am not working for the Chirac Government.

PM: I am not suggesting that your are.

FAUCON: You are saying that Chirac is anti-Australian

PM: I am not saying that he is. I don't make assertions where I don't know the facts. All I can say in respect of the facts that I do know is that he has done things which don't seem to be consistent with a very cordial relationship towards us.

FAUCON: You disagree, but at least you should talk.

PM: Yes, of course. That is my view - domestic, political and economic affairs and it is my attitude in regard to the relations between nations. It is much better to talk than impose bans. If you can.

FAUCON: France says that the truth is that Australia wants to get rid of any French influence in ...

PM: It is a nonsense and a palpable nonsense. And I don't know why people come to stupid conclusions without evidence ... suggested that we want to take the place of France. Let me say to you and if I may, indirectly through you, to Monsieur Chirac. I and my Government have our hands completely full in conducting the affairs of Australia and in handling, within our limit of economic resources the amount of aid that we were able to make available to the countries in the region. We have neither ambition nor capacity to take the place of France in the region. And I must say that any view that we want to do that is both a misapprehension and if I may say so borders on the paranoia.

FAUCON: You are in Europe and you are not going to visit France. And if you are invited tomorrow by Chirac to visit him what would you do?

PM: I would say the invitation was a bit late.

FAUCON: Next time?

PM: Tomorrow I am with President Mubarak and I am not going to offend President Mubarak by saying "President I am whipping over to Paris".

FAUCON: Are you ready to see Chirac?

PM: I would always meet with Prime Minister Chirac. Let me say I am not prejudging the future.

FAUCON: How do you see the future? Do you think it can go so far as break up the diplomatic relations?

PM: Not on our part. I would hope that in the light of the things that I have said that the French Government would understand that it is non productive to conduct affairs in this way. I simply don't believe it is appropriate to insult the intelligence of leaders of other countries. That is not the way Australia -

FAUCON: Do you feel insulted?

PM: I think I have seen an inaccurate statement when the Prime Minister of France describes me as stupid. I don't feel terribly insulted. I just feel I am the object of inaccuracy. I don't think it is a very elegant, mature, sophisticated way of conducting relations, any more than I think it is elegant, mature or sophisticated to demand the withdrawal of the consul on false grounds - the suggestion that they weren't aware of what the consul was doing when in fact there is written evidence of transmission by the consul to the French authorities of what he was doing. And in return, written correspondence indicating the acceptance of that. So this is not the way for intelligent, mature people to conduct themselves. I hope that they won't go any further. France will not be finding any reciprocal sort of attitude from us.

FAUCON: Yes but it is really a dead end street. What can happen now?

PM: It is not really a dead end street. WE are still trading. Last year we had \$670 million imports from France, we export \$710 million worth of Australian goods to France. I think that will go on. I think Australians will travel to France. I hope French people will travel to Australia. There is no better country in the world for them to travel to. So we hope those things will go on. And this, if I can describe it as this, hopefully passing paranoia will disappear and we can have the maturity from France that we have come to expect from them.

FAUCON: You tend to make a difference between the French and Mr Chirac. Your problem is with Mr Chirac?

PM: I haven't got a problem. Do I look as though I have got a problem. I don't feel problem-ridden in regard to -

FAUCON: With Australia, the problem is Mr Chirac?

PM: Again, I wouldn't want to exaggerate a sense of Australian problems with Mr Chirac. It seems to me that Mr Chirac has a problem either with me or with Australia. I have tried to explain that his problems are ill-founded. And there will be nothing that we will be doing which would be seeking to exacerbate those problems. I say this to Mr Chirac, as I said at the beginning of this interview, I, the Government and the people of Australia have enormous admiration for the people of France, for France. WE have certain differences of opinion and intelligent, mature people, certainly where those two people share so much in common, ought to be able to handle differences of opinion in a more mature way.

FAUCON: On the economic side, aren't you afraid that France may influence the Common Market with more ... on your agricultural exports?

PM: I don't think they would be silly enough to try and do that, on the one hand. Nor do I think the rest of the community would be unintelligent enough to respond to those pressures if they were to be applied.

FAUCON: Will you send somebody to the OECD meeting in Paris, I think it is in May?

PM: WE have always done it in the past, why would we not do it now.

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