



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN REDHEAD, BBC RADIO 4, LONDON, 20 JUNE 1989

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REDHEAD: The whole world I think heard and witnessed your deep concern and upset about China. For a man who's been in politics a long time, why were you so personally concerned about it?

PM: I had a lot of myself invested in China. In a sense, as I put it in talking to some of my close friends, a little bit of me died when that happened. I've spent very, very many hours with the Chinese leadership but most particularly with Zhao Ziyang in Australia in '83 and then in China in '84 and '86 and what has been happening in China before this tragedy is many senses one of the most significant things in the century because we have there this population of over one billion people coming out of an irrelevant system, a closed society, to a position of significant economic reform which meant much to the people of China, meant much for the region, meant much for the world. To see the possibility of that war being closed down and being done in a way which involved the massacre of innocent young people who had no crime other than to seek a freer society with a tragedy of immeasurable proportions.

REDHEAD: Can Australia help in any way offering perhaps sanctuary, not only the people from China, perhaps to people from Hong Kong, perhaps the Vietnamese boat people?

PM: Well you're mixing up the number of issues there. As far as the Chinese nationals are concerned we have some 15,000 of them in Australia, including some 10,000 students, which on a per capita basis is more than anywhere else in the world I think. I made the decision, we announced that as far as those people in Australia are concerned we've extended by another year their visas, their time when they can stay without concern in Australia and we will review that position later if it's necessary. So we're doing all that we possibly can to give a sense of safety and security to those who are within our borders. As far as the question of Hong Kong is concerned, we've had for some time a migration program which has attracted people from there,

PM (cont): including under our Business Migration Program. That will be continued as far as the question of the Vietnamese people are concerned, it's a quite different issue because the essential characteristic of those who are leaving Vietnam now, is that they are not political refugees, they are economic refugees and that demands different criteria from all of us and we were prepared to operate where you had a situation of genuinely a political refugee ...

REDHEAD: Does Australia want to increase its population? Would it help Australia to be a more populous country?

PM: We obviously have an immigration program which is directed to that end. We are running an immigration program with approximately 140,000 a year. We obviously want to increase our population. I mean immigration has been the life blood of a growing Australian economy in the period since the end of the war. We had seven million people at the end of the war, we are now nearly seventeen million people which has been predominantly influenced by our immigration program. We are going to continue to do that.

REDHEAD: But very controlled?

PM: Well only controlled in terms of your economic requirements. There is no element of race at all in our immigration program. The figures that we set for annual intakes are done essentially in terms of an assessment of our economic capacity to absorb. The elements of our immigration program are these. There is the occupation of shortage category, if I can put it that way. There is the business migration element whereby people with a significant amount of capital and the prospect of ... businesses are welcome. We have family reunion and we have a refugee component. All of those elements are then brought together in terms of the umbrella criterion, if you like, of the economic capacity to absorb.

REDHEAD: But has it the great economic capacity to expand? In the Pacific basin which everyone says is going to be the future of manufacturing in the world, will Australia be a poor neighbour or a very strong neighbour?

PM: We are a strong neighbour and if we continue to make the sensible economic decisions - which under my Government are made - which you couldn't guarantee under a successor - but there won't be a successor, we'll continue in Government - if we continue to make those decisions we will be a very strong partner in the most rapidly growing, most dynamic region of the world.

REDHEAD: I turn to the environment. You still talk of Australia as the country of what is it, the flying fox in the drifting sand. So in a sense you had awareness of the environment before other people of the damage that man could do.

PM: Well yes we live in what has been historically a harsh environment. That is those who've settled in the period of European settlement I refer to, since 1778 those who've opened up the continent have had to battle with the harsh realities of our environment. We haven't always been sensible in the way we've handled the issue. In fact one of the incredibly important environmental issues for Australia, which I'll be significantly addressing in a major environmental statement I'll be making soon after my return, is the whole question of soil degradation. We haven't been sensible in doing all those things that are necessary to retain your top soil. So we're going to have to do more about that and we will.

REDHEAD: As setting an example to others?

PM: If there are things that we can do which set an example to others, well and good. I mean the unobvious area where we have just recently set an example I hope to the rest of the world is on the question of the Antarctic. We made a decision that we would not sign the Minerals Convention and I'm very pleased to say that just in the last two days we have acquired very significant support. Firstly, Rajiv Gandhi of India has indicated support for the Australian position and I've just come from Paris, where as a result of very interesting discussions I had with Prime Minister Rocard and President Mitterrand, France has joined us in what will now be a joint mission to try and persuade other nations to work for the establishment of an international wilderness reserve in the Antarctic to make it free from the deprivations of mining and other unacceptable forms of human activity.

REDHEAD: Now what particularly, and this is a final thought, what particularly do you want to talk to Mrs Thatcher about?

PM: Well there are many things that we'll be talking about. I suppose the most central continuing theme of the days that we will be here, which will be reflected in my talks with her and the talks between our other Ministers and her Ministers and in the 300 odd Australian and UK businessmen seminar that we'll be having, will be the ways in which we can strengthen economic and trading links between our two countries. That will be the single most continuing and dominant themes, but there are so many other issues that we'll be talking about as well covering bilateral relations,

PM (cont): regional issues, international political issues and environmental issues.

REDHEAD: And will you have time to go to the Test Match?

PM: I will have time to go and deliver on the program that I indicated to the Australian captain Alan Border, before the start of the first test. We sent a cable wishing him luck. I said you will win the first test, I will see you at Lords on Friday when we go into that Test one up.

REDHEAD: Somebody said I also ought to ask what's going to happen to somebody in Neighbours, but I'm not a Neighbours fan - who is she - Daphne. What's going to happen to Daphne in Neighbours?

PM: I try and keep my fingers on the total Australian pulse and I have to say that I must confess an ignorance of Daphne's impending fate.

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