



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SNOW, ITN TV -  
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E & O E PROOF

SNOW: No-one imagined that Hong Kong would be a particularly high priority on anyone's agenda, but it is certainly for the British Government and China, for you - you have a certain number of dissidents in your Embassy in Beijing. Do you sense at all that the West is already a bit inclined to go back on its horror and just get back onto working terms with the Chinese?

PM: No, its not correctly put, as simply as that. I believe that - and I base this on discussions I have already had in Paris, and assessments that I am getting from other parts of the world - that what the West is saying is that we in no way qualify the expressions of abhorrence and repugnance at what happened on the 4th of June and what is continuing in terms of creating an atmosphere and the practice of repression. But there is a view, which I share, that it would be an act of irresponsibility to the people of China as well as to the people of the region and the rest of the world if we were to act simply in a way which would drive China inwards upon itself. Therefore we have to walk, in my judgement, this careful line between leaving no impression with the leadership of China other than that we totally reject and repudiate what they have done and what they are doing. But at the same time leaving them with the knowledge that what the world wants to see is a continuation of economic reform within China. Now we can't have that wish that economic reform continue, and adjure from an involvement in the processes of economic reform. It is my judgement that economic reform must inevitably carry with it in some point in the future significant political reform. That was something that was fully understood by my friend Zhao Ziyang, with whom I've had lengthy discussions on these issues going back over several years. And so we, as I say, have that fine line to walk. It will require delicate judgement, responsible judgement. I think, as I understand it, that view that I've expressed will be the view of the West.

SNOW: You sense then that ..... of the Japanese will come with you in that?

PM: I haven't yet had the opportunity of talking to the leadership in Japan. I think that they will not, significantly at least, want to move out of kilter with what the West will be doing. They of course have significant economic interests but I don't think it would be in the interests of Japan to get out in front and take what might be seen as an opportunistic position. I hope that the sort of balance of considerations that I have outlined will be the ones which will guide all the nations that have already interests in any of China.

SNOW: In practical terms, I mean we've already got the West saying no arms supplies, no ..... sale. But for example if they came to you wanting grain, would you sell it?

PM: We've got arrangements with them, not only in the area of grain, but we have existing agreements covering many sectors of their economy and particularly in areas which involve the welfare - and they obviously involve the welfare of ordinary people - grain - they can't feed themselves, yet then it would seem to me that they should be fed. .... it requires a balance, it requires that where we do continue to try and involve ourselves in their processes of reform, that they be in no doubt at all about what we say as to what they've done politically and where they should go politically.

SNOW: Now obviously what this has turned up, for the British Government in particular, is the problem of Hong Kong and the right to eventual abode here in Britain should the worst ever happen. Is there any way in which you can help in this? Do you think that perhaps at the next Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur it would be possible, say, to offer a Commonwealth position where perhaps a number of countries would come forward offering rights of abode?

PM: I think we all have some responsibilities in these areas. We of course are able to speak on this issue with the cleanest of hands. If you look at the question of the settlement of refugees from Vietnam, on a per capita basis Australia has the best record in the world. We've accepted a 118,000 refugees from Vietnam since 1975, which I repeat, on a per capita basis is more than anyone else including the United States. So we have exhibited a preparedness and a competence to accept responsibilities in this area. Of course, the major initial responsibility is with the United Kingdom. And I think others - if the United Kingdom itself, particularly, adopts a properly compassionate role - will not find itself without friends.

SNOW: Has it, in your view, adopted a properly compassionate role?

PM: I don't think they've made their final decisions on this matter. I've only at this point had the opportunity of having the briefest of discussions when I was met at the airport by them with Sir Geoffrey Howe. I believe that your country is in the process of coming to its decision and it would be presumptuous for me at this stage, before those decisions have been made, to make judgements.

SNOW: But Mrs Thatcher has made it pretty clear that we cannot be expected to offer all 3.25 million Hong Kong people the right of a vote.

PM: I doubt very much whether you will be faced with a situation where the 3.25 million will be making that request.

SNOW: Can I ask you then about Kuala Lumpur?

PM: Of course you can.

SNOW: Clearly Hong Kong will be at issue there, but ....

PM: I wish you wouldn't keep putting Hong Kong as the number one issue - China is the number one issue, Hong Kong is a residual of China and so China will certainly be an issue.

SNOW: Well China will be an issue, but of course the residual issue at the Commonwealth conference is almost eternally southern Africa. Do you see perhaps ...

PM: Of course it isn't a residual issue - with respect, you haven't got it right again. South Africa - to the Commonwealth it will never be a residual issue.

SNOW: It's an eternal issue though isn't it?

PM: Yes, you said eternal, but then you said residual.

SNOW: Either way, an issue. It is going to be South Africa. Do you think that with the changes in the leadership in South Africa - with the demise of the Botha government - that we're possibly moving into a new era of unease, maybe we'll even find a greater unity inside the .... a unity that may even include Mrs Thatcher?

PM: Let me say this John, I certainly hope that with the new leadership there that there will be a more responsive attitude than has been reflected in the intransigent position that Botha and those around him exhibited. But one of the great tragedies is where the Commonwealth held out its hand through the eminent persons group, it was repudiated and I make the point about that because I don't think it's been properly understood. That initiative which was mine, and which was adopted by the Commonwealth, we were not seeking, as we've put it, to bring South Africa to its knees, but to bring it to the negotiating table. No-one, particularly myself, sees any merit in sanctions for the sake of simply imposing sanctions - an instrument to try and bring South Africa to the negotiating table. I think that what's happened, since we have in the last few years been concentrating on this issue, we are getting further evidence of the impact of the sanctions that have been imposed. The ..... world by the Governor of the Federal Bank in South Africa has acknowledged the impact of the sanctions, particularly in the financial area. I would hope that the new leadership would firstly understand what we are about. And essentially what we are about is this - as I say, to bring them to the table, not with a view to eliminating the white population, white investment, white enterprise in South Africa. The reality which must be grasped by the new leadership in South Africa is a simple one and an irrefutable one. It is that the leadership of the ONC is a front line status. That leadership still wants to see a democratic, racially free South Africa within which there is a continuing effective white presence and certainly continuing white economic presence because that South Africa of the future will be the richer if that white presence continues. But the danger that they are increasingly facing is this - that the younger generation, the blacks. They are taking a much more militant, aggressive view. They are questioning their own fathers, their own leaders, saying "what are you doing". Now, South Africa must grasp this chance while it exists - the attitude that we want you to be there, we want your presence, we want your involvement - that's the real issue.

SNOW: Let me ask you finally about how you see that meeting going ahead. You go there as an elder statesman, so does Mrs Thatcher. It's always said that you're one of the few people who manage to stand up to her in a meeting and get her to listen to a different point of view. Can you characterise how these sessions go and do you think that this one perhaps will be a less divisive one?

PM: These sessions - you have to divide them. There are the public sessions and then there are the discussions that we have in the smaller groups. And certainly that's been true when we have dealt with the issue of South Africa going back to the Bahamas in 1985 and then to Vancouver in 1987. In terms of the relations in particular with Margaret Thatcher, it has been quite true that we've had a different position. I don't question the integrity of Mrs Thatcher's abhorrence of apartheid. The difference has been about means and I think that we have a position and Mrs Thatcher respects my integrity and intelligence on these issues and so I hope that in Kuala Lumpur that we will be able, again from the basis of a mutual respect for one another's integrity, to examine what's happened since we last met intelligently to appraise the impact of the action that has been taken not only by ourselves but by others, including the United States, and to assess the statements of the critically important meters within South Africa like the Reserve Bank and say now does that lead us to the conclusion that with the continuation or some adjustment of these pressure we may be able to bring the leadership of South Africa to the negotiating table. So I think that the relationship in this regard, particularly between Mrs Thatcher and myself is one, as I say, of intelligent, responsible people who share an abhorrence of apartheid and what we need to try and get is a convergence on action. I think one of the things that is going to be significant in this respect is that in the United States, I think we have now a position where the administration there has got to have a closer working relationship with the Congress. We do have a Congress there which is inclined towards action and so we may get a greater degree of support from there. I hope we can develop a more positive attitude on the part of the Europeans and if we can do that then the Commonwealth and the rest of the world together should be able to, with some optimism - and what we've got to understand when we talk about these things is if we look at the world at the latter part of 1989 and compare it to the world two years ago, there's been so much much change. There have been achievements that two years ago wouldn't have been thought possible - ....., Namibia, Angola, ..... Afghanistan, ..... Indo-China. So, we shouldn't go into these things with a sense of pessimism that nothing can be changed.

SNOW: Prime Minister, thank you very much.

PM: Thank you John.

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