



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, PAN PACIFIC HOTEL, 24 OCTOBER 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Margaret Thatcher said she was appalled at your attack on her in the session yesterday. They're very strong words. What's your reaction?

PM: Yeah, they are strong words and they're inaccurate. The facts are quite simple, that we put our position in the full session before going to Langkawi. My Foreign Minister and her's were there in the negotiating session dealing with the draft that was to come to Heads of Government. As I said concessions were made by us and by others there and there was a clear understanding on the part of everyone at the retreat that agreement had been reached in the clear terms and then on Mrs Thatcher's motion, that was accepted. After that having been done and Mr Mugabe for instance being cut short and amendments he was proposing on the basis that Mrs Thatcher said look, there is no need to argue this, we accept it. Now, when there was a position after that of repudiation of the agreement arrived at, then as far as I was concerned that could not be let to be passed in the full conference when we returned. I put that point, fully supported by Mr Mulroney. I believe that Mrs Thatcher has subsequently said that we were the only two to speak. She attempts to draw some conclusion from that. The fact is, that every other, every other Head of Government supported the position put by Hawke and Mulroney. Every other one of them.

JOURNALIST: She says your attack was futile too.

PM: Well, all I can say is if you judge by the normally placid British press, that is, placid towards Mrs Thatcher, you could hardly draw that conclusion. The British press have rightly drawn the conclusion that the behaviour of their Prime Minister was less than adequate. I mean I'm not getting into vicious language. I'm not getting into an attack on Mrs Thatcher because we consistently play this game inside the conference. We don't come out and say: wins, losses, someone knocked down, someone on a pedestal. We've never played that game. We've left that to others. I notice that it was in the British press that the first proposition was major victory, as it was put, for Britain. Now everyone knows, every single journalist here knows that that is a load of codswallop!

JOURNALIST: Did you ..?

PM: And the fact that it is a load of codswallop, I think has led to some of the subsequent behaviour of Britain, because when it was realised that the interpretation that they'd put out, that they had won a position and turned the Commonwealth around, when everyone realised that that was a manifest nonsense, then the media understandably, had some things to say. And then there was some attempt I think to backtrack or retrieve ground by Britain. Now that's their business. All I'm saying is that we conduct our affairs inside the conference. We don't seek to lambast afterwards and say there's been wins or losses. I do get a little bit annoyed when there is this really rather grievous misrepresentation of what everyone else knows are the facts.

JOURNALIST: She's also suggesting that you in some way ambushed her with the five-point plan, that at the breakfast meeting there was no mention of the plan and then several hours later that it materialised.

PM: Well this is a nonsense of course. I had John Bowan there with me, she had a person and I said: well we'll be talking about South Africa and we had a general discussion about it and I said we'll obviously have differences on this, we can't agree on it; our differences are well known and that was it. We were in the process of finalising our formulation - there was no obligation on us to say this is precisely a plan that we're putting. It was a clear understanding between us, having discussed the matter, that we were going to have different positions.

JOURNALIST: With hindsight would it have been better to have drawn her into that process?

PM: There was no way, there was no way you could draw her into it. Did you think that if I said to Mrs Thatcher: look Margaret, I'm going to be, here's the details of what I'm putting, I'm telling you that I'm going to be in favour of increased financial pressures if something more is not done by South Africa. I mean, her position is known. I respect it. The attitude I adopted in the breakfast meeting with her was one of respect. In other words, it's not as though we were coming de novo to this issue. We had traversed the ground, we knew that we have had difference of emphasis. I said to her we will have different positions on this.

JOURNALIST: Has she betrayed your trust then?

PM: No, no, no. There is no betrayal of trust.

JOURNALIST: The South Africans have taken comfort from Mrs Thatcher's stand. Do you find that offensive?

PM: No, no. The question of Mrs Thatcher's position on South Africa is for her and who draws comfort from that is also a matter, in a sense, for her and those who do the drawing of comfort. The position is, and really in the end you get down to this: that of the whole Commonwealth, the whole Commonwealth, the Commonwealth has said: we embrace and endorse Hawke's position, and that's been what's done. There is one person out on that and I just think as a matter of logic and of reasonable intellectual assumption, it's just a fair possibility that the Commonwealth as a whole minus one, may be right.

JOURNALIST: Are you disappointed, Mr Hawke, that the CHOGM had to end so acrimoniously?

PM: Well, I mean I don't accept that it has ended acrimoniously as far as the Commonwealth as a whole is concerned. There is one member of the Commonwealth who apparently is expressing some upset at the fact that the rest of the Commonwealth has taken a view about its behaviour. Now if you have 99 per cent taking a view unanimously and effectively and you have 1 per cent saying that they don't like what's happened, then I don't think that that's acrimony. I mean, it is better described as one being out of step.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke you've used the meeting to put a plug for the Melbourne Olympic Games. How has that gone?

PM: Well, in my bilaterals, I've said to people that Melbourne is very, very well placed to handle and conduct the Olympics in 1996 and there's been, I think, a fairly favourable reaction to that.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister can I ask you one other question about the communique - does the wording of the communique mean that Australia now supports the idea of mandatory repatriation of Vietnamese boat people, because the communique makes no reference to voluntary repatriation.

PM: Well the wording of the communique is essentially no different from the June Conference in Geneva on this matter. Australia's position hasn't changed on this. We've got a position which the essentials of it are: it is recognised by Australia and other people that we've moved from a position where people were political refugees to essentially where they're economic refugees and that creates a whole different ball game. You can't expect either countries of first asylum or resettlement countries to have the same position towards people who are simply economic refugees saying that they don't like in economic terms, the regime, and are looking for somewhere else, better in economic terms.

In those circumstances, the question of repatriation assumes different proportions and you've got to be looking at them going back. That was recognised at Geneva. It was recognised in the language here today.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, it's the last day of CHOGM, would you like to sum up how this one's gone and where it leaves the relevance of the Commonwealth as an institution?

PM: There obviously can't be any question about the relevance of the Commonwealth. I don't think there ever has been. I mean just lets look at it in terms of some of the things I talked about today. Where is the Commonwealth meeting going to be held next? It's going to be held in Zimbabwe. How has Zimbabwe emerged as a sovereign independent nation in the world? It emerged through the processes of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was uniquely placed to handle what was a potentially disastrous situation there in the dismemberment of what had previously been Rhodesia. It was uniquely the capacity and the influence and the processes of the Commonwealth which brought that potential tragedy to an end and has Zimbabwe emerging as an independent nation. It's therefore in a sense very, very appropriate that the next meeting should be held there because Zimbabwe is living proof of the relevance and the capacity and the uniqueness of the Commonwealth.

Here at this meeting I think it's been particularly useful, if I can put it from Australia's point of view and I think also the interests of the Commonwealth as a whole. Obviously firstly, you go to South Africa. Now you've heard me quoted before on the statements coming out of South Africa itself on this issue. There can be no intelligent argument on this because you have the Minister for Finance, the ex-Governor of the Reserve Bank saying the two things that I've mentioned: one, that the sanctions have imposed intolerable strains and constraints on South Africa's economic development and secondly from that, it is imperative in their judgement, that to deal with that economic constraint they must change the political situation. So we've seen again the Commonwealth committed to an intensification of this situation, not as I've said for the sake of sanctions as such, but to keep the pressure up to bring the South African regime to the negotiating table. So there, as the results of the Commonwealth action in the past, been demonstrated and the commitment to continuing those processes.

Secondly, of course you have uniquely now, the Commonwealth Plan of Action on the Environment. At the initiative of a developing country here, Malaysia, that we were able to get a unanimous position which will mean not just some pious statement, a collection of words, but a commitment to interchange knowledge and technologies within the Commonwealth, which means that those

of us who are fortunate enough to be more developed, to have experienced new technologies which are relevant to a range of environmental issues and concerns, pledging ourselves to share those technologies, that knowledge with those countries in need. A very dramatic, practical illustration of the unique capacity of the Commonwealth to be relevant to issues of vital concern.

Then of course, on the issue of Cambodia, a confirmation of the position of Australia and the ASEAN states and fourthly, on the Uruguay round, picking up on the economic part of the communique the importance that the Commonwealth attaches to the Uruguay round being successful. I think the Commonwealth countries are going to be able to play a role in now pressing ahead in this decreasing amount of time we've got, because the round finishes at the end of next year, the Commonwealth committing itself to play its role in freeing up and liberalising international trade.

In addition to those issues of course we had a recognition in the discussions and reflected in the communique on Antarctica and we're very pleased that that has happened. Also a reference to and confirmation of the importance of my Asian Pacific Economic Conference initiative. That has been welcomed and we're pleased about that.

We also have the confirmation of what we've done in the South Pacific out of the Forum, most particularly in regard to the worldwide ban we're seeking on driftnet fishing. We had the endorsement of the Australian initiative in regard to the Government and Industry Chemical Weapons Conference and in regard to our approaches to disarmament generally. So if you look at those whole range of issues, they are ones where the Australian position has been welcomed and endorsed and in which the Commonwealth has embraced the plans of action and approaches which will enable the Commonwealth to be of assistance in all those matters.

In addition to all that, within the framework of the conference, I've also had the opportunity of significant bilateral meetings and they have been good, without being exhaustive about them, the long meeting with Benazir Bhutto, the very long meeting yesterday morning with my friend Rabbie Namaliu, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, as of course I had with others. We also were able to use the meeting here to have discussions between myself and Prime Minister Mulroney and that was followed up by meetings with the officials where we have resolved now that the impasse that had developed on the issue of canned fruit exports from Australia into Canada in the context of the Canada United States.

JOURNALIST: How will that now affect the industry Mr Hawke?

PM: It will mean that we're now going to be put into a more competitive position in the context of the Uruguay round negotiations. There will be a phasing down of the tariffs on Australian canned fruit going into Canada and this will be welcomed by the industry to put them into a more competitive position.

JOURNALIST: Margaret Thatcher has just said that - and I'm quoting directly - I am in step with the South African people and in practical terms the Commonwealth is in step with me. How does that sit with you?

PM: Well, really, it is amusing because what you've got is a situation that every other Commonwealth country here, every other Commonwealth country, has identified itself with the Commonwealth proposals on South Africa. It is one country alone which has expressed its reservations on that issue and that's Britain. Now if out of that you want some twisted logic which is saying the one person is in tune and all the rest are out of step, well then that's alright if Mrs Thatcher wants to say that but you know and every media commentator that is here knows what the facts are and the facts are not as Mrs Thatcher put them. Now that's unfortunate but I say all those things without any rancour. I mean it's Mrs Thatcher who is getting very, very upset and using extravagant language now in the terms of the dilemma in which she's found herself. Now I'm sorry that she feels it necessary to use that rancorous language but you often find that when people have created a problem for themselves they tend to use extremes of language.

JOURNALIST: Where does it leave relations between Australia and Britain? Is Mrs Thatcher the sort of person who could be trusted to do business with?

PM: As far as I'm concerned, on every other issue than this, we have had productive relations. Her visit to Australia was welcome and productive. My return visit there earlier this year was similarly constructive, relevant, productive and I have no intention of allowing that relationship to be in any way adversely affected by our obvious difference on this issue and I trust that that will be the view and the position of Mrs Thatcher.

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