



10

## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JANA WENDT, A CURRENT AFFAIR  
13 SEPTEMBER 1990

E & OE - PROOF ONLY

WENDT: Prime Minister, thank you very much for your time this evening.

PM: Pleasure Jana.

WENDT: You are heading off to Tokyo to try to convince Olympic Federation members that Melbourne should get their vote. Are you convinced that a Melbourne Olympics would be a profitable venture for Australia?

PM: Yes, I believe so. The last two have been and there has been very very meticulous planning gone into this, not only at the governmental level but importantly, from the point of view of the business sector as well. Melbourne's very well placed to conduct a successful and profitable Olympic Games.

WENDT: Your former Finance Minister, Peter Walsh, says that Australia would actually lose money on this. What do you say to that?

PM: Well Walsh is a professional pessimist. If you look at the reason he gave, it's contradicted by the facts. As I said in the Parliament, Peter Walsh never lets a few facts get in the way of his well-honed prejudices.

WENDT: You say that you are confident in the unions' ability in Victoria to deliver on all of this. Are you prepared to go so far as to give a guarantee that any works that are undertaken would be completed on time for any Olympics?

PM: Yes indeed, and that's what I'll be saying at the meeting in Tokyo.

WENDT: I did want to raise with you another persistent and more senior Labor critic of yours, and that is former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. He's criticised you on the basis of our Gulf commitment, he's criticised you on the basis of Aboriginal land rights, on privatisation, on education, on arts spending. It's a long long list. Do you take any of it on board?

PM: No, I don't. As I said before, when it gets to the area of economic criticism it's equivalent, as I said, to getting advice on firefighting from Nero. I would've thought that the last area that Mr Whitlam would want to be talking about would be anything that involved Australia's relations with Iraq. I don't want to develop that point but anyone who knows anything about the politics of this country knows exactly what I mean.

WENDT: His track record on that isn't exactly good, is it?

PM: Well you said it Jana.

WENDT: I'd like to move on a bit to our involvement in the Gulf.

PM: Sure.

WENDT: In retrospect, and leaving the principle aside, do you think that you may have been hasty in committing us in the way that you did?

PM: Absolutely not. I wouldn't have done one thing differently.

WENDT: Can I get just some of the chronology straight. Did the United States ask us to commit to the Gulf?

PM: No, I made it quite clear. What happened was that discussions arose in Washington about the issue of forces in the Gulf. There was no request from the United States nor offer from us out of the discussions that went on in Washington and the discussions that went on here. I came to the conclusion in discussion with my relevant Ministers that it was appropriate in terms of Australia's interests and in terms of Australia's global responsibilities that we should be part of a multinational naval force.

WENDT: So there was no formal request from the United States?

PM: No, the issue just came up in discussions about there were going to be multinational naval forces and in those discussions the questions arose of, well, Australia could be there. When it came to me for consideration and decision, I had absolutely no doubt as to what the right decision was and neither did my Ministers.

WENDT: There has been a degree of confusion about the terms of engagement. Today we hear from Senator Ray that our ships will have to contact him before they fire. How practically will that work?

PM: How practically will it work? I mean we have modern and very swift means of communication. That's how it will work. And may I say that this has been worked out

in full conjunction with and co-operation with and endorsement of the Royal Australian Navy.

WENDT: But literally, how practically does it work. Is Senator Ray attached to the phone all day long, or how does it work?

PM: You know, we live in a modern world with ... marvels of communication are there. This is the way it should happen. It's the way the Navy expects it to happen.

WENDT: Prime Minister, I'd like to move on again, to China. In the wake of the Tienanmen Square massacre your Government imposed severe restrictions on Parliamentary visits to China. Why did you do that?

PM: Because we had to give an immediate indication to China of the fact that what had occurred was unacceptable and like the rest of the world we made a range of decisions to register our protest.

WENDT: Why then give your blessing to the visit of a Federal Minister, Dr Blewett?

PM: Because as I said at the time, we in Australia, as indeed in the rest of the world, had to walk the difficult line, Jana, between continuing to let China know the unacceptability of their actions but also keeping open the lines of communication and economic co-operation. Because what's in the interests of the people of China, as it is as much in the interests of the people of the world, is that there be economic co-operation so that there be the opportunity for the further opening up of China to the rest of the world. The worst thing that could happen for the people of China and for those people in China who want to see change, would be to see the world cut China off.

WENDT: Gareth Evans conceded that the visit of Gough Whitlam to China would give the Chinese some comfort. What do you think was the propaganda value of Dr Blewett's visit?

PM: I have no doubt, Jana, that in some ways the leadership in China would try and maximise what value they could from it. But if you just said, and the other countries of the world just said well there is a risk that a visit would be propagandised, then as I say, we'd just close ourselves off entirely from China. That would not be in the interests of the people of China.

WENDT: Premier Li Peng has said that the clouds attempting to isolate China are dispersing. Have we been partly responsible for conveying that message to the Chinese?

PM: I can assure you that Dr Blewett was assiduous in detail in making clear to the leadership of China our continuing rejection of what happened last year.

WENDT: But Mr Hawke, when Mr Fischer in the Nationals was to go to China, your Foreign Minister flayed them for even suggesting it.

PM: Yes, and there is nothing reprehensible about that. We were in a stage where we had said from the beginning that the policy towards China would be one of continual review. We didn't believe it was for the Opposition to be taking an initiative in the area of foreign affairs which was inconsistent with what the country, through its Government, was doing.

WENDT: Mr Hawke, what is the difference? You have a top level mission going to China.

PM: The Government is the one which sets the policy for the country in regard to its relations with the rest of the world. It is appropriate that people and organisations within a nation should operate within the framework of the policy set by Government.

WENDT: Isn't it logical though that China would now assume that our memory of the Tienanmen Square massacre is fading?

PM: If you read precisely what Dr Blewett had said, and with a great deal of firmness to the leadership in China, including may I say a declining on the part of Dr Blewett to see Li Peng, you would understand that both by word and by deed there can be no misunderstanding on the part of the leadership of China about Australia's position in regard to the events of last year.

WENDT: If they are your Government's feelings, why reward them on a propoganda level with a visit by a senior Australian politician?

PM: Well obviously you've got your view Jana. You don't want to be persuaded by facts and there's nothing more I can say other than to repeat to you what I've said. You don't want to accept it but I'll say it again because its relevant to the question you put again, and that is that it is in the interests of the people of China, it is in the interests of the people of China, the people that we are concerned about and what in your questions I assume you are concerned about, it is in their interests, and it is so recognised by others, that the worst thing that you could do for the people of China, including those who want change, is that China should be isolated.

WENDT: Mr Hawke, wouldn't it also be logical to conclude that your own display of emotion on this was just in fact a display, if this is your attitude now?

PM: That is a despicable and contemptible observation because you have no reason to believe, and there is no reason in fact to suggest that my emotions were anything other than the totally genuine reflection of the abhorrence that I felt. I find your observation repugnant in the extreme.

WENDT: And yet you are prepared to hold hands on an official level with that government now.

PM: I'm not holding hands with that government at an official level in a way which says anything other than the repugnance that I felt last year is as deeply felt now. We continue to say to them that their record on human rights is unacceptable. As far as our judgement, and the judgements of others is concerned, that the best thing that we can do for the people of China in terms of maximising the chance that they will get a regime and a practice which recognises human rights more effectively, is that they are not isolated from the rest of the world. Those are positions which I've taken in total good faith.

WENDT: Would it be fair for an outsider to say that it looks like, well, we need them commercially so we'll jettison our values?

PM: Jana it would be fair for you to say that if you are absolutely intent upon not accepting the good faith with which I put my position.

WENDT: Mr Hawke, we'll leave it there. Thank you.

PM: Thank you.

ends