



## PRIME MINISTER

16 February 1997

### TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND DOORSTOP INTERVIEW REDWOOD GROVE - ROTORUA

E&OE.....

**BOLGER:**

Can I just say thank you for coming. Prime Minister Howard and myself of course have had an informal chat that has continued since we met at Ohakea yesterday morning and, as anticipated, there are certainly no big issues between us. We've got a number of issues that we have a common interest in and we will continue to discuss those over the next 24 hours or so, but it's been a very, very pleasant opportunity to talk to John about the issues that are important to Australia, about the issues that are of importance to both our countries, and for me to perhaps explain how we are bringing together the new Coalition Government and all of that. So, good chat.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister Howard, what sort of issues have you so far talked about?

**HOWARD:**

Oh, just about everything.

**BOLGER:**

Yes.

**HOWARD:**

We had four-and-a-half hours of very friendly, very informal, very informative discussions. One of the good things about our association at a personal level is the

capacity to range over the whole gamut of domestic and foreign affairs issues. Jim Bolger, of course, was the first overseas leader to speak to me after the election. We've seen each other on three occasions since, we've spoken regularly on the telephone. Through that association, there's the basis of strengthening in every way the already very close association between our two countries. I certainly find the opportunity to compare notes on domestic political issues and also to look at our joint efforts within the region. In most areas we have a very common view, although on some occasions inevitably there's a different emphasis here and there because of the different interests of our countries, but I thought last night was about as good as it ever gets, as far as the informality and the friendly exchange of experiences that you can get between two political leaders. Of course, Jim and I share, through our respective parties - the Nationals in New Zealand and the Liberals in Australia - many common values and common philosophies, and we also exchanged a few notes on the vagaries of Coalitions, which is something that I'm a veteran of - Coalition Governments.

**BOLGER:**

That's right, yes. More experienced than us.

**JOURNALIST:**

Did you discuss the Australian experience of gun control, in light of recent tragic circumstances here?

**HOWARD:**

We touched very briefly on that last night. I imagine that will come up. That, of course, is - I'm only too happy to talk about the experiences that we had but, as in all things, that's a matter for the New Zealand Government. But if I can be of any help in that area and if any of my experience of last year and the experience of the Australian people following Port Arthur is of any help in current circumstances in New Zealand, well, I would only be too happy to help.

**JOURNALIST:**

Are you concerned at New Zealand's defence spending, how it's sort of dwindled over the past eight years?

**HOWARD:**

Oh look, I haven't come here to sort of give lectures to people. We have our attitudes and I'll be saying something in the more formal setting of the discussions tomorrow in the address that I'm giving, but we will be talking about that in the discussions, along with a lot of other things, but I'm not a - I don't come here as 'lecturer Howard', I come here as 'allied friend Howard'.

**JOURNALIST:**

Mr Bolger, would you like to follow Australia's lead on gun control?

**BOLGER:**

Well, at the time of the tragedy last week, of course, we already had in train a review of our gun laws. So, no doubt, whatever lessons may be learned from that tragedy, whatever might emerge in terms of the discussions that follow and the inevitable trial, will no doubt be taken into account in New Zealand, but you may be aware that we changed and tightened our gun control after the Aromoana tragedy of 1990. So, we had moved quite substantially to control the use of multi-weapon, multi-firing bullets, multi-firing guns, the old AK 47 lookalikes and all of those. So that's already very tight in New Zealand. But if there's anything we can learn from Australia, if there's anything we can learn from the report that's being conducted now by a former High Court Judge, well, we will certainly do so.

**JOURNALIST:**

Mr Howard, have you discussed whether - is there something Australia can learn from New Zealand in that area - and just one quick one on - after the talk the other day, there was concern from some of the parties that your hope of doing it by Easter could be ambitious. Are you flexible on that?

**HOWARD:**

Well, I don't want to talk about domestic issues specifically here. Look, on the question of shared experiences with native title issues, we in fact did spend a lot of time talking about that last night. In fact, it occupied as much, if not more, time than any other subject. The experience of New Zealand and Australia is different. The legal basis of the relationship between the indigenous people of New Zealand and the indigenous people of Australia has been quite different. I thought we had a very - for me, that was a very valuable discussion. I suppose in all of these things you can learn things from each other's experience. We are endeavouring in Australia, of course, to see if there is the basis of an agreed outcome and that's the purpose of --

**BOLGER:**

All of us are ultimately controlled by the ...(inaudible)...

**HOWARD:**

Having initiating discussions. I don't want to get into any discussion at this stage about the relevance of dates. We still have a long way to go, and I'm under no illusions about how difficult it is. But the New Zealand experience has been very different, and because of that different legal starting point, and, of course, the relative size of the indigenous population has also been a major factor as well.

**BOLGER:**

Can I just say on that. I think we had, as Prime Minister Howard said, an excellent discussion on what is one of the most complex issues for both our countries, and that is how we deal with the indigenous people's rights and aspirations, and the range of that discussion, I thought, was tremendous.

**HOWARD:**

It was excellent.

**BOLGER:**

In terms of just looking at it in a totally non-partisan, non-doctrinaire way and saying, look, there are issues. We were talking about our New Zealand experience, John Howard is talking about the Australian experience as it's emerging now, the involvement of the courts in both countries and setting some parameters and some guidelines for governments. It is a complex issue, dare I say it, and we in New Zealand know that and you in Australia know that.

**JOURNALIST:**

Gentlemen, did you discuss your differing views on a Republic?

**BOLGER:**

No, we didn't, but we did discuss the fact that Australia, of course, is going to have the Convention that John Howard promised beforehand, and that we, of course, are in the process of a constitutional change of some enormous significance here, with the move to proportional elections and now the first elected Coalition Government for 60 years, so we certainly had general discussions on political structures, and they were interesting. I have to say I find that whole constitutional debate an interesting development in both countries, and I'd have to say I don't think we've heard the last of it here, and I surmise not in Australia.

**JOURNALIST:**

What about on the Social Welfare front? Are you looking at legislation to make ---

**BOLGER:**

Didn't get onto that, Duncan.

**JOURNALIST:**

A two year stand down period? You haven't talked about that?

**BOLGER:**

No, we didn't.

**HOWARD:**

Oh, we didn't discuss that last night.

**BOLGER:**

No, no.

**JOURNALIST:**

It's not on the agenda?

**HOWARD:**

Well, anything's on the agenda that either Minister - it's the sort of relationship that if there's anything on Jim's mind that he wants to raise, he will. If there's anything on my mind that I want to raise, I will, but that specifically was not discussed last night.

**BOLGER:**

No, I think you've got enough now for today. Look, you've done extraordinarily well.

**HOWARD:**

That's right.

**BOLGER:**

You've got far more than I thought, and I feel like a walk. Thanks a lot.