

**October 31, 1973**

**Record of Conversation with Premier Zhou Enlai and  
Prime Minister E.G. Whitlam**

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**Summary:**

Australian Prime Minister Whitlam offers Zhou Enlai an overview of his country's foreign policy interests. Analyzing the international relations among key nations in East and Southeast Asia.

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## AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, PEKING

## RECORD OF CONVERSATION

MR. P. R. R. R.

Conversation with : Chou En-lai, Premier of the State Council  
Chi Peng-fei, Wang Hai-jung, Wu Fan-wu, Kao Chien-chung  
on : 31 October 1973

Officers Present : The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Australia  
and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia; H.E. Dr S.A.  
Main Subject(s) : FitzGerald, Sir Keith Waller, Mr A.P. Renouf, Dr P. Wilenski,  
Mr R.W. Cottrill

Chou formally welcomed the Prime Minister and members of his party to China and went on to explain that, in accordance with Chinese custom, he would ask the Prime Minister to speak first, putting forward any points which he would like to take up in further discussions. The Prime Minister expressed appreciation for Chou's welcome and for the warm reception accorded his party at the airport and in the city of Peking.

In accepting Premier Chou's suggestion that he should make the first contribution, the Prime Minister gave a brief account of the significant policy changes introduced by his Government. Very soon after taking office the Government had restored relations between Australia and China and shortly thereafter had established relations with North Viet-Nam. The Government had immediately ceased any military assistance to South Viet-Nam and to Lon Nol. As a party to the five-power defence arrangements, Australia had continued the process of consultation with Britain, New Zealand and Malaysia and Singapore, but the Government had also set in train the process (which would be completed this month) of bringing home to Australia troops formerly stationed in Singapore. The Prime Minister stated that his Government did not consider it appropriate for any country to have troops stationed in another country. Chou indicated firm support for this view.

The Prime Minister went on to explain that in the United Nations and other international bodies Australia had cooperated in moves against policies of colonialism and racial discrimination. In particular Australia had changed its voting pattern on questions concerning Portugal and South Africa. ASPAC had been completely suspended and the character of SEATO had been changed.

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Chou remarked that it must have been rather difficult for Australia to change its position on such questions as Portuguese colonialism and racial discrimination when previous Australian Governments had for so long given them support. He enquired whether New Zealand was acting in co-ordination with Australia on these questions, particularly in its attitude towards South Africa. The Prime Minister confirmed that there was co-ordination on this question.

The Prime Minister explained that Australia had preserved its close relations with Britain and the United States. These relations drew strength from historical ties, similarities of political systems, shared language and culture and strong trading patterns. The Government had also sought, however, to broaden and strengthen our relations with countries of major significance to Australia. For this reason, the Prime Minister had visited New Zealand, soon after taking office, and made visits to Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and then Britain (for reasons relating to certain constitutional matters). He had also visited Commonwealth countries in the South Pacific and India. In connection with his visit to the Commonwealth Conference in Ottawa in August, the Prime Minister had visited Mexico, (the first visit by an Australian Prime Minister to a Latin American country) and then Washington and New York. In his present tour he was visiting Japan, as well as China. In addition, the Special Minister of State had made a tour of the Commonwealth countries in Africa.

Regarding the persistence of traditional ties, the Prime Minister commented that he had taken office at a time when our traditional associates were in a process of introducing basic changes in their attitudes. The United States had realised that there was no point in further attempts to contain China; President Nixon had made his visit to Peking and subsequently a Liaison Office was established; the People's Republic of China had been admitted to the United Nations as the legitimate representative of China; and Britain joined the European Economic Community.

The Prime Minister said that there was a strong desire that he should visit the ASEAN countries, as there was some feeling that he seemed to be putting more emphasis on Indonesia, Japan and China than on some former British colonies (Malaysia and Singapore) in our region. He said that he would visit Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Burma at the end of January or the beginning of February next year. He mentioned that some difficulties arose from the fact that none of the five ASEAN countries have active diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The Philippines and Thailand still recognise Chiang Kai-Shek as the President of China; Indonesia had always recognised the People's Republic but its relations were now in suspense; and Malaysia and Singapore, through their status as former British colonies, presumably recognised the People's Republic of China, but had never established relations. The Prime Minister stated that our action in establishing relations with China had been understood by the ASEAN countries, but there was still some reluctance on their part to face up to the new situation. While Australia could not appear to be an advocate for China, the development of our relations with China would clearly be a factor in the thinking of these countries. One of the reasons for our seeking closer relations between China and Australia was a desire that these countries might see the development of significant and friendly relations and so be reassured that a Chinese role in the region is to be accepted and welcomed.

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The Prime Minister mentioned that he was also being pressed to make a visit to the Soviet Union and indicated that he might make such a visit in June next year. The visit would not be much concerned with Brezhnev Collective Security Proposal, which did not seem to have attracted significant support in the region. Australia and the Soviet Union had annual consultations at official level and he suggested that more substance could be given to Australia's relations with China if there were more ministerial visits between the two countries and meetings of officials. These discussions should not become a matter of routine, but there should be consultations between Australia and China as close and significant as we have traditionally had with Britain and the United States and similar to discussions we now had annually with Japan at ministerial level and with the Soviet Union at the officials' level.

At this point Chou asked about Soviet purchases of grain from Australia last year and pointed to the Soviet role in lifting world prices. The Prime Minister commented that the Soviet Union had bought very cheaply from the United States and Chou remarked that the United States had not done well in its sales.

The Prime Minister recalled that we had taken early steps to act upon new situations which had arisen in Europe or South-East Asia. It was appreciated that China's political, economic and social significance in our region was very great. We sought to follow up on instances of real or genuine detente, but at the same time to ensure that there was a proper recognition of the individuality and identity of the peoples of the region.

We would hope that giving substance to the relationship between Australia and China would give encouragement to the regional countries to follow a similar course. The kind of substance which could be added to the relationship would include, in addition to diplomatic and commercial aspects, exchanges in the scientific and cultural fields. The Prime Minister mentioned that his party included some advisers who could take up these questions during the visit. He also mentioned that in view of the increasing number of Australians seeking to visit China there would be advantage in having agreed rights of consular access. As there were many Australians of Chinese descent, who had relatives in China, it would also assist if Chinese authorities could facilitate procedures for allowing these relatives to enter Australia either to visit or take up residence with members of their families. Chou mentioned that his interpreter's (Tang Wen-sheng) father had visited Australia during the Second World War. He was now a Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Secretariat (Tang Ming-chao). Chou said that China now tended to advise overseas Chinese to stay abroad and take the citizenship of the country in which they resided. There was no need for them to seek to return to China any more than one would expect all those of European descent, for example from Latin American countries, to seek to return to Europe, but he said overseas Chinese tended to be conservative and, even after a long period of residence, seldom assimilated well with the local community.

Chou said that agreement could be reached at once on the question of procedures for processing requests for travel to Australia by relatives of Chinese Australians: in any case where an Australian citizen of Chinese descent, or overseas Chinese, indicated to the Embassy that relatives in China wanted to migrate to Australia, and those relatives themselves expressed a desire to emigrate, the relatives would be free to leave China, if the Embassy approved

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their entry into Australia. If they had difficulty in meeting travel expenses, some assistance might also be provided. Chinese who went to Australia in this way would be free to return to China as they wished. For their part, the Chinese authorities would advise any Chinese in this position to remain in Australia. Chou added that the conditions he had outlined would apply to family reunions irrespective of the kind of family or marriage relationship involved.

Chou expressed his appreciation for the introductory remarks the Prime Minister had made. He agreed that there should be a separate series of discussions between Australian ministers and officials and their Chinese counterparts to discuss economic matters, the question of scientific and cultural exchange and the drafting of a communique or news release. There could be further discussion on this question between the Ambassador and Chinese officials the following day.

Chou said recent initiatives in Australian foreign policy had opened up a new situation. Australia was not limiting its contacts to the two countries with which it had traditionally enjoyed close relations, but was now broadening its relationships to include new areas and continents. Australia's attitude towards Africa had undergone a very significant change and China welcomed our support for the movement for national liberation in Africa and our opposition to racialism. Chou noted that in Western Europe there had been some expansion of the Common Market and some movement towards integration but the process would require considerable time. He contrasted Britain's support for European integration with its attitude to the issue of South Africa and suggested that Australia might be able to exert some influence on this question in the Commonwealth context.

The Prime Minister replied that this would not be an easy task because Britain, like France, believed that South Africa was a very good market. Both Britain and France actively promoted trade with South Africa through the minority racist Government of South Africa.

Chou suggested that if the black majority of South Africa were emancipated the country might even be more economically prosperous and thus provide a more attractive market. Mr Whitlam tended to agree but suggested that the present British Government seemed to believe in leaving trade matters as much as possible to private companies who in turn did not generally object to the system operating in South Africa. Some British companies might believe that the low wages paid to Africans ensured a better return on investment. The United States Government rejected such attitudes but some private United States companies were more tolerant. The Prime Minister recalled that the British House of Commons had a committee investigating this question and he felt that public opinion in Britain was becoming aroused on this subject. Mr Crean mentioned the recent visit to South Africa by a trade union delegation led by Mr Vick Featherand. He suggested that even some businessmen in South Africa itself were slowly realising that the country could not achieve its ultimate destiny without full racial integration.

Regarding the maintenance of Portuguese control of the colonies such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and others, Chou asked whether the Prime Minister believed this control could be continued without foreign assistance, particularly from NATO countries. The Prime Minister did not venture an opinion on this question but pointed out that Portugal had a colony quite close to Australia, on Timor. Indonesia did not seem particularly concerned about this colony and it had never become an issue in our region. Consideration was

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now being given to the position of Guinea-Bissau and we would want to take into account particularly the views of our neighbours, the ASEAN countries. Some friction in relations with Portugal had been created by the recent visit of a trade mission to Australia. The Government had given the mission no official assistance and there had been some demonstrations against it. He suggested, as a tentative view, that these frictions could possibly come to a head over the issue of Guinea-Bissau.

In response to Chou's question, the Prime Minister said that there did not seem to be any movement for independence on Timor.

Chou recalled that the Chinese had felt that it was not necessary to have a communique, but after taking into account the views of our Ambassador they had read our draft. There seemed to be many differences of view although it would also be possible to find a good deal of common ground. Chou suggested that further discussions be held between Chinese and Australian officials on this question.

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