**Q + A**

**Episode 29**

**JACINDA ARDERN**

**Interviewed by Rebecca Wright**

**JACINDA** We do use diplomacy to raise where we see individual issues having an effect on us. We do, like, for instance, steel and aluminium tariffs. I’ve raised it directly with the president. We’ve raised it in the past and will continue to do so. But ultimately, the best way that we can put forward the agenda of the multilateral approach, collectivism, rules-based order, is by talking about the merits of that from our perspective, rather than singling any individuals out, because, actually, there are a range of different nation states who take a different view to us, and that’s not new.

**REBECCA** But the United States’ position is new, isn’t it?

**JACINDA** Look, it is new for them. But some of the things that have given rise to why they’ve taken that position – that’s actually universal. You will have heard a number of leaders this week talk about the impact of globalisation on our individual nations. And it’s had an effect in New Zealand as well. The question is, really – how do we respond to that? In New Zealand, we’re trying to make sure that the benefits, for instance, of open and free trade are more evenly spread. You heard Theresa May talk about similar issues. It just so happens that some nations, like the United States, are taking a different policy approach in the face of those challenges.

**REBECCA** And is New Zealand’s position to sort of stand on the sidelines for this presidency and this sort of era of politics at the moment?

**JACINDA** Well, I don’t think we are standing on the sidelines. I think we’ve given voice to our values, and those values are hugely important to who we are. We’re putting them out there on the world stage and saying, ‘Regardless of what is happening around us, this is why we believe so strongly in, for instance, human rights. This is why we feel so strongly around multilateralism. This is why we feel so strongly about climate change.’ And, look, others will either buy into that agenda, agree with us, or they won’t. It doesn’t change our position.

**REBECCA** What about pushing for a meeting at the White House so you can personally make the case and do the work around tariffs?

**JACINDA** Oh, look, the work around tariffs doesn’t require me to individually visit the White House. That has been happening regardless. As I mentioned when I raised with the president the issue of aluminium and steel, he acknowledged that it was something officials had been working on and talking about. So I raised and said exactly what I would’ve said – had I visited the White House – right here in New York.

**REBECCA** I want to talk about what’s going on back at home a little bit as well – in particular, political management. It’s been a bit of a messy few months for you. One of those sagas sort of swept into the United Nations here with the Derek Handley release of emails this week. And at the time, you said that you handled that poorly.

**JACINDA** Look, my reference was to the appointment process generally. It has been upheld by the State Services Commission as being a robust process, but there’s no question; I mean, a minister has lost their job, and someone isn’t in post for the CTO role. Yeah, I absolutely acknowledge that there has been messiness around that. But there is no question around whether or not it’s been inappropriate or the likes. We’ve had confirmation and released the documentation to demonstrate that, in that regard, there’s been no question.

**REBECCA** It’s my understanding that when you got those text messages from Derek Handley that you didn’t reply because you were sort of brushing him off. Is that correct?

**JACINDA** Oh, look, it’s fair to say that when I received some of those early ones in November that we were getting a lot of offers of assistance. I just wasn’t able to directly respond or engage with everyone who was making those offers. And as I say, I get quite a few messages as prime minister. Later on, though, when I did get a specific message around the CTO role, look, it wouldn’t have been appropriate to engage on that.

**REBECCA** So why not just go back to him and be absolutely clear and forthright that it would be inappropriate to engage with him on that job via text message?

**JACINDA** Yeah, as I say, I get quite a lot of correspondence emails, text messages. From time to time, I just don’t have the opportunity to individually respond.

**REBECCA** Do you wish that you’d done that now?

**JACINDA** Oh. Look, in hindsight, in this particular case, there are a number of things that of course I would’ve liked to have played out differently. But ultimately, I think the big question here is, ‘Was it dealt with appropriately?’ Yes, it was.

**REBECCA** Do you think that in terms of your style of political management, there is work to do?

**JACINDA** This is politics, and politics is a sometimes messy business. For me, the question really is – are we achieving the goals that we set out to as a government? Are we making a difference in people’s lives? You know? Are we rolling out things like winter energy payments and changes to Working Families and building homes for people? On all of those measures we have a strong programme, and we are delivering. That’s the stuff that matters. These bits around the edges, I don’t think, make a difference to people’s lives. Yes, we’ve got to make sure that we deal with them appropriately as they arise, but I am really happy with the progress we’re making.

**REBECCA** But these little things can set to undermine the other good work that you’re doing and sort of eat away at credibility and public perception. So do you think that you have more work to do around political management? Would that be a focus for you when you get back to New Zealand?

**JACINDA** Look, you know, I’m constantly making sure that I deliver a government that is focused on its agenda, and, look, things around the edges can prove to be a distraction to that. And that’s not what I want. So of course we’re always striving to improve the work we do as a government, demonstrate that we’re focused. And I’m always asking for more of my ministers in that regard.

**REBECCA** To be strong but kind.

**JACINDA** Yeah, of course. To be strong, kind, compassionate, focused.

**REBECCA** Let’s talk about the oil and gas announcement this week that went down very well here. It hasn’t had quite as a rapturous reception in some quarters back home.

**JACINDA** Yeah.

**REBECCA** So why do you think that is?

**JACINDA** And, look, that’s a point that I’ve made here – that the climate agenda, everyone agrees with. But it does take us making decisions that are difficult decisions. And this was not a decision we took lightly. But it’s one where we’re absolutely committed to a just transition. And what does that mean? That means creating and providing for future industries that are sustainable, that have decent job prospects around them, and also fulfil our commitments around climate change and becoming carbon neutral. That’s the long-term signalling we’ve tried to provide through making this decision. We’re making it now so that we don’t have that jarring effect on people’s jobs and people’s lives.

**REBECCA** Are you taking industry with you on this?

**JACINDA** Yeah, look, we know that with our food producers, with the energy industry, that of course we have to keep that dialogue going. But it was no doubt always going to be hard to transition those working in the fossil fuel space because it does mean doing things dramatically differently. What we can do though is give them assurance that where they hold existing permits, where there’s existing investment, that we will not pull the rug out from under them. Those permits hold. But in terms of the future, we’re not issuing any further permits. So that gets the balance right from our perspective. It gives long-term planning and gives signals to the market about what our intentions are.

**REBECCA** Julia Gillard, just finally. Last night you did a forum with her.

**JACINDA** Yes.

**REBECCA** Did she have any tips for you on being a woman in power?

**JACINDA** I think, probably when you get two women in a room who have had a role in leadership, particularly in our corner of the world, then, really, you just share stories and have a discussion. We both have different, unique circumstances and environments. You know, I think our political environment is very different to Australia. I’m quite grateful for our political environment, relative to Australia. But it was really nice to catch up with her.

**REBECCA** And looking forward to that flight back with Neve?

**JACINDA** Oh, mixed anticipation. My hope is that we can provide other passengers with the same amount of peace we did on the way over.

**REBECCA** Jacinda Ardern, thank you.

**JACINDA** Thank you.

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