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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - DEBATE ON SOUTH AFRICASpeech by the Prime Minister and Minister
for External Affairs.

Speaking in the House of Representatives today on the resolution on South Africa moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Calwell, the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Menzies, said:-

The honourable member sentenced himself to half an hour's hard labour and has now performed the sentence. He began and ended by, I suppose he would say, twitting me for being so ignorant of the alleged fact that this matter was before the United Nations a week ago and implied that I am as out of date as I can be. It is a great pity for the honourable member to become too eloquent about a matter of that kind unless he gets his facts right. The fact is that the Security Council sat for the first time to deal with this matter, or to determine whether it would deal with it, at 5.30 o'clock this morning, Australian time, and the first business which had to be discussed by it would be, of course, whether this item should be inscribed and then discussed in substance. We have, of course, no opportunity to know since 5.30 this morning, Australian time, what the result has been - as to whether it was inscribed - but we do know that that was the first appearance at the United Nations stage of this matter and so it is a pity that a great deal of this rhetoric turns out to have been wasted.

As to South Africa's attitude, I would have thought that every schoolboy knew that South Africa's attitude is one of complete objection to this matter being dealt with by United Nations. Somebody says they are agreeable, but that is a great effort of imagination. The fact is that they have opposed this matter coming before the United Nations. I have no doubt they have once more stated the view which their Prime Minister stated only yesterday in the Parliament at Cape Town, that it is a domestic matter and that they do not recognise the jurisdiction of the United Nations in relation to it. And incidentally, since the honourable gentleman now says that it is not the shootings so much but the policy of apartheid that we want to deal with I may tell him that yesterday, in the Parliament at Cape Town, the Prime Minister stated the position of the Government in relation to jurisdiction, which is the great question that I was addressing myself to. He stated that the views of the Government and those views were specifically concurred in by Sir de Villiers Graaf, the Leader of the Opposition; so there is a bi-partisan position on this question of jurisdiction in the South African Parliament. In these circumstances, where you have the party of the present administration and the party which was the party of Smuts at one mind in South Africa on this question of jurisdiction - they are by no means of one mind, probably on the question of internal policy - when you find that position, I simply say that this Parliament as a parliament and this Government as a government would be accepting a grievous responsibility if it sought to invade these policies of a domestic kind in another country of the British Commonwealth. That after all, is the essence of what I have said from beginning to end. But, Sir, I will not take up too much time on these little imaginary exercises that the honourable member engaged in. I must want to say this; the motion is much more violent than the speech. The speech was almost tender at times. The motion, which has already had great publicity was deliberately designed to stir up all sorts of feelings of hatred in this community.

The essence of the motion is, of course, its purely political quality. That is shown by the fact that at no time during the massacres in Hungary or the widespread killings in Cyprus or the great loss of life occasioned during the Mau Mau attacks in Kenya—where 13,000 lives were lost—did the Opposition ever submit any resolution or even ask for one. This time, they think that they see an opportunity of embarrassing the Government by fanning hatred where there is already too much, and by encouraging differences in the Commonwealth at a time when mutual understanding was never more important. That is a broad statement but it is completely demonstrated by clauses 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the resolution about which I propose to say something.

Clause 3 says that the opinions expressed by me—quite plainly and temperately I thought—in this House will be construed as Australian condonation of the South African Prime Minister's statements and attitudes. That is a most remarkable proposition. Even as a piece of English it has fantasy in it. I do not know what these statements and this attitude are that have been referred to. I have heard a variety of statements by the Prime Minister of South Africa. I have heard or read of other things attributed to him. What these things are that are referred to in the motion is not made clear, but one thing is perfectly clear, and that is that the South African Prime Minister has done what I venture to say an Australian Prime Minister would do under similar circumstances. He has promptly ordered a judicial investigation of these incidents and has appointed two Supreme Court judges of the highest repute to conduct this investigation.

The Leader of the Opposition says, "We know all that we need to be told; we know how many people were killed or wounded". But what do we know about the circumstances? What do we know that enables us, at a comfortable distance, to sit in judgment on the events in this particular town on this particular day or night? How can we propose to say, "We know everything; we understand the facts perfectly. We sit in judgment. We condemn!" That is exactly what the judicial investigation will be for.

What I said in this House, was not that the Australian Government was condoning the events in South Africa. I said the very opposite—that we were following a policy of non-intervention in what is, though tragic and terrible, a domestic problem for the Union of South Africa. It is, to me, a novel and very twisted use of words to say that non-intervention implies condonation. The words, of course, are almost exactly opposite in their significance. When, as a government, we decide not to intervene, that means that we are not expressing a judgment on domestic policies. We may, as individuals, with the very limited information available to us, think those policies disputable, but as a government, we are not taking upon ourselves the grievous responsibility of the sitting in judgment on policies and on events of which we in Australia, happily, have no experience, being, as they are, matters of political dispute in South Africa itself.

I now refer to the policies or some of their manifestations. I emphasise that what I tried to indicate on Tuesday—and looking at the "Hansard" record I think I did say this—was that we are all entitled to our own personal feelings which, in the case of most of the people of Australia, are feelings of horror and apprehension. But one of the inhibitions that is laid upon the man who is the head of the Government of Australia is that his personal feelings are a luxury in which he cannot publicly indulge when the real problem is what political attitude the Government should take and express. This is a great responsibility. It requires calm judgment and a sense of responsibility to the future as well as to the present. That is why we agree with the statement which was made by the Prime Minister of Canada a few days ago in his own Parliament. He said that the conclusion of his Government was that at this time no beneficial purpose would be served by diplomatic protests nor by even more extreme measures to intervene.

Turning to clause 4 of the motion, I express myself with restraint when I say that this clause is proof of an absolutely scruffy political manoeuvre and, in itself, is a monstrous perversion of the truth. You have only to read the clause to see that that is so. The clause states that I drew a parallel between South Africa's treatment of the natives in South Africa and Australia's treatment of the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and its territories. Every member on this side of the House knows that that is an utter invention. At no stage did I say anything of the kind.

I know that there are people - some of them in Australia - who constantly foment the idea that this nation has ill-treated its aborigines. I deny this. It is a charge, not only against the Commonwealth Government, but against the various State Governments. The facts reject it. Nor did I, in my statement, talk about our treatment of aborigines in terms of what goes on in some other countries. What I said - let me remind everybody of it - was that if the domestic jurisdiction principle is abandoned in the heat of the moment, so to speak, we may live to see the day when other nations, whether in the United Nations or otherwise, will seek to discuss our aboriginal policies and claim as a precedent whatever action occurs in relation to South Africa. That is what I said. We hope and believe that we will never have incidents of the kind now under discussion, but all these things are matters of degree; and a point of principle, once surrendered, is not easily recaptured.

So far as our territories are concerned we believe, in this Parliament - and I think that most objective onlookers agree - that our policies and administration have been enlightened and progressive. We have clean hands in respect of our territories. But it is not difficult to imagine that, with the passage of time, some people who have no interest in orderly progression towards rising living standards and self-government will proceed to stir up trouble in those territories, and, having stirred it up, invite the intervention of other countries, treating the domestic jurisdiction principle as having been abandoned.

The clause is, therefore, grossly dishonest in its statement and deliberately damaging in its implication. I merely add that the reference to the carriage of passports by indigenous peoples, passports governing their movements inside their country, shows the length to which the Opposition will go in order to secure what it believes to be a point. First, the fact is that in the Soviet Union such passports are required, but the Opposition in this Parliament has never, to my knowledge, ever commented upon that or proposed a resolution about it.

Mr. Galvin. - Do you approve of it?

Of course I do not approve of it but I do not interfere in the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union if that is the way in which they want to run their country, well and good. There are a few people who think that it is a very good way, but I am not one of them. Not one word has ever been said by a member of the Opposition protesting against the carriage of domestic passports in the Soviet Union. They cannot squirm off this hook. And yet they have the strictest rules applying over a great area of the Soviet Union, and these rules have, if anything, been more and more intensified during the last four years. It is interesting to note that the penalties for infringement of the passport rules in the Soviet Union range from six months "corrective" labour to two years deprivation of freedom.

Now I come to clause 5 of the motion. Clause 5 emphasises that my "gratuitous and maladroit" references to the policies of Australia in regard to its native peoples may be construed in Asia and Africa in a manner most damaging to this country.

Now, Sir, that is just about as unpatriotic and damaging a clause to put in a motion as I have ever read in my life. What were these references by me to the policies of Australia in regard to its native peoples? The Leader of the Opposition will be hard put to it to find them in my answers in this House. My references to our own problem - I have already said something about this - were made in the setting which I have just elaborated. These policies are, I repeat, honourable and good, and I have yet to learn that they are the subject of criticism either in Africa or in Asia. The Opposition here, while piously expressing its fear that my references to these policies may be construed in Asia and Africa in a manner most damaging to this country, is plainly expressing its hopes that they will be. How could they possibly be construed in any other country in a damaging sense unless other countries are persuaded by people in this House that they are damaging?

Sir, our policies in relation to native peoples, either inside Australia or in the territories, are - and let me emphasise this - our business and our responsibility and they have been pursued, as even the Opposition would scarcely care to deny, in a clear and honourable fashion. May I, having regard to the eagerness of some people to become engaged in South African politics, repeat what I have said about our policies? Our policies are our business and our responsibility, and we are not transferring them to other people. My answer, Sir, on Thursday was - and I quote it -

If we are too free in asserting that what happens in South Africa is a matter of international jurisdiction, we may well step out of the light into the darkness on this matter. We may well find that, the door having been opened in that way, somebody will be willing to assert at some time or other, in some circumstances, that we, in relation either to our own internal population or to the population of our territories, are also subject to international condemnation and international jurisdiction.

This is what the honourable gentleman professes to fear, but his near-deputy leader, at once interjected, when I had made that remark, and said - "And so we should be!"

Mr. Reynolds. - If we do wrong.

Oh! if we do wrong. Mark the words that I used - and I think I was quite audible. I said that somebody might be willing to assert that we are "also subject to international condemnation and international jurisdiction". And immediately I said those words a prominent member of the Labour Party said "And so we should be". Of all the pieces of humbug that I have met with in a long experience of politics, this is the supreme example. One of the most prominent members of the Opposition has said publicly in this House that we ought to be condemned for our administration of our policies in regard to native peoples, that we ought to be dragged before an international jurisdiction. This very same Opposition brushes that to one side and says, "How terrible that the Prime Minister should even hint that there is a subject of this kind and so should attract the hostile attention of other countries".

Now, Sir, we come to clause 6 of the motion. Clause 6 is the one that refers to the United Nations and the forthcoming Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. Australia is not a member of the Security Council. Therefore, the decision as to whether the South African question should be there debated and made the subject of some decision or direction, is not ours. I have stated in public, on behalf of this Government, our view on that matter; but it is not our decision. The Security Council, as I say, sat early this morning our time, and is presumably discussing the matter at this moment. I have also, Sir, stated as dispassionately as possible the principle to which we have adhered for years in relation to the internal affairs of other countries. This is not a matter that has suddenly cropped up.

This is a problem which has come up time after time, almost year after year, and we have consistently taken the view that we are not going to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries; and so far as I know, Sir, our actions on all those occasions have never been seriously challenged in this Parliament.

I think that I might have been able to regard this policy of non-interference as the accepted national policy of Australia, for I had never heard it challenged until the Opposition saw, in these moving, dreadful, dramatic events in South Africa the opportunity for cashing-in on a natural emotional reaction in the minds of most of us. But, Sir, the clause goes on to propose that the events in South Africa - not the policy of apartheid which the honourable gentleman has talked about this morning, but the circumstances of these incidents - should be taken to the meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers. Really, can anybody suppose anything more fantastic? In the first place, the motion indicates no understanding of what a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference is and how it works.

Mr. Duthie. - Nobody else has such an understanding either.

No, and you will be deprived of that experience forever. But, Sir, Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences do not have matters listed for discussion. They do not have an agenda. They do not have votes taken. They do not have majorities. They consist of, say, nine people sitting together, each of them the head of the Government of his own country, discussing matters of common interest, informing each other's minds, learning from each other's experience, getting to know something more about the problems of other men. These are not meetings where votes are taken. Indeed, I should like to tell honourable members that even the communique which emerges at the end of a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference - and it is always a harmless enough document, as you know - cannot contain anything to the inclusion of which even only one Prime Minister objects.

Now, it is a system that has continued and which I and other people too, think is one of the most important elements in the present Commonwealth structure - these regular meetings between the heads of governments of the Commonwealth. Yet, the Leader of the Opposition, who at one time had ambitions to attend a Prime Ministers' conference, seriously says that this matter ought to be listed. The Opposition says: "Put it down on the agenda. Bring along the Prime Minister of South Africa. Let him be put into the dock and let us all try to cross-examine him". How long does anybody suppose the Commonwealth would last if that was the way we went on? How long do they suppose the structure itself would endure if every time the head of a Commonwealth Government, or a parliament in the Commonwealth, or somebody in a Commonwealth Government or Parliament, disagreed with something going on inside another Commonwealth country and said "I want that listed for the next Prime Ministers' Conference"?

As a matter of fact, I would remind honourable members that in the past there have been tremendous problems in the Indian sub-continent - tremendous problems of refugees and vast loss of life after partition - grievous problems. One problem was left unsolved, the problem of Kashmir, a problem which has bedevilled the relations between India and Pakistan for years. I proposed at one stage, in London, that we might have some talks about it among Prime Ministers, just informally. But it was not listed. It could not have been listed because at least two or three heads of governments objected to this matter being made one for formal discussion by a Prime Ministers' Conference. The reason they did so was they they put on one side whatever might be their own views on this particular problem. They realised that when a meeting of the British Commonwealth Prime Ministers sets itself up as an adjudicator on disputes inside the Commonwealth then, as I say, the end of the whole structure is in sight.

It has been said - I do not know with what authority - that the Prime Minister of South Africa would himself have liked an opportunity of explaining his policies to his brother-Prime Ministers in suitable

circumstances. I have heard that said, - I cannot vouch for it - but it is primarily a matter for him. Personally I would welcome hearing something on the matter because I appear to be in a hopeless minority as I look at the Opposition on this matter. I confess that I do not know all about South Africa's domestic policies. I do not know all the implications of what has been called apartheid and I would like to be better informed.

Now my time has expired and I shall sum up by saying that this resolution is crude, it is misleading, it is dangerous. It will, I hope and believe, be utterly rejected in this House and by all thoughtful people with a sense of responsibility. But if, in all the circumstances which confront us and in view of the honest indignation and shock in the minds of our people, some resolution is required so that misleading comments may not be made on the outright rejection of the one now before us, I say "very well, let us have a resolution". It will need to be of an entirely different kind. I shall move the following amendment - That all the words after "that" be omitted and the following words inserted:-

"This House profoundly regrets the loss of human lives occasioned in recent incidents in South Africa, is distressed that such events should have occurred in a member country of the Commonwealth of Nations, expresses its sympathy with those who have suffered, profoundly hopes that order may be re-established as soon as possible and earnestly hopes that the adjustment of all disputes and differences will be achieved by orderly and lawful processes for the common benefit of the people of South Africa",

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