

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

BY

The Rt. Hon. HAROLD HOLT, M.P.,

ON

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 31st March 1966]

Mr. HAROLD HOLT (Higgins—Prime Minister) [9.28].—Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs (Mr. Hasluck), dealt comprehensively with the matters that the House has been debating. However, I believed that it would be convenient if I were to take the opportunity provided by the motion that the House take note of his statement to deal with the three major matters that have relevance to the greater part of the debate that has taken place. Understandably, most speakers have concentrated a good deal of their attention on the issues that arise in South Vietnam and in South East Asia generally. I hope to discuss three particular matters in the limited time that I have available. First, in response to remarks made by the honorable member for Fremantle (Mr. Beazley), who, in a thoughtful speech, urged that the Government state its aims in South Vietnam, I shall state those aims. This has been done on other occasions by numbers of my colleagues, I believe, but I shall make a statement on the subject in response to the honorable member's appeal. Secondly, I wish to establish beyond the doubt of any reasonable man that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) misled the House wilfully and seriously when he assured honorable members that at the 1965 Federal Conference of the Australian Labour Party there had been no change of substance in the Party's defence policy. Thirdly, as the Leader of the Opposition has referred to the demonstrations which occurred at my

public meeting on Monday night as being an expression of the pent up feelings of Australian youth and purporting to convey some atmosphere of spontaneity about that operation, I shall bring to the attention of the House a copy of the "Newsletter" from one of the principal organisations concerned, which will show how highly organised these demonstrations are at the present time.

Turning to our war aims in South Vietnam, I shall list the objectives of our intervention there. Our first objective is to help the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, at its request and in the light of our own assessment of the nature of the conflict in Vietnam, to resist the armed aggression of Communist North Vietnam against the South—an aggression waged through the Communist agencies of the Vietcong and the National Liberation Front and by its own regular armed forces. It is aimed at taking over the South by a campaign of force, terror and subversion and thence reunifying the country under Communist administration. Our second objective is to free 15 million people of South Vietnam from the threat of oppression and terror which would be their lot under the domination of the Communists of the North, and help establish conditions under which they will be able to choose and develop free from coercion of any kind the forms of government and society which they themselves want. The third objective is to leave no one in doubt that we in Australia are prepared and resolved to honour our treaty commitments and our alliances and to stand firm with

our allies in the face of aggression, whether direct or disguised as it is now in Vietnam under the label of a "war of liberation" or a "people's war". Fourthly, by denying victory to Hanoi and Peking in South Vietnam we will ensure that the spread of Communism in South East Asia is checked and we will give encouragement to those moderate elements in the various countries of the region whom we are already supporting in the work of modernisation and economic and social progress. Fifthly, we do not seek to overthrow the regime in North Vietnam or to destroy the livelihood of the North Vietnamese people. We simply want the North to stop its aggression. We seek no widening of the war. We seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict through negotiations. We think that a peaceful settlement can be negotiated on the basis of the Geneva Agreement.

Our basic aims are not only clear and limited—they are sound. What, for example, would be the consequences of our abandoning these objectives and withdrawing, as honorable members opposite suggest, with our allies from the struggle and from the defence of the independence of South Vietnam? South Vietnam, a country of 15 million people, would become a Communist state. This would not be because the people of South Vietnam want Communism. It would be because they were unable to resist the armed power of the Vietcong supported by North Vietnam.

The lives of millions of people who have resisted Communism, the security of their families and their properties would be in jeopardy and opposition in South Vietnam would be wiped out. There would be a repetition of the liquidation of the so called class enemies, which occurred when the Communists took over the North. The political and psychological impact of our withdrawal would be felt, not only in the countries bordering Vietnam, but throughout the whole of South East Asia. The path of the aggressors would be smoother as the countries of the area lost their faith and confidence in the forces of the United States and of the free world to protect their independence and sovereignty. The American guarantee would come under challenge in other parts of Asia and Communist China's long term aim of driving the United States out of Asia and the Pacific would have had a significant success. In those countries which

have entered into a security partnership with the United States—Korea, Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines—the opponents of the American connection would gain new strength. Conversely, successful resistance in Vietnam will contribute to security and to peaceful co-existence in the region as a whole.

Australia has a vital interest in the effective presence and active participation of the United States as a great power in the area of Asia and the Pacific. We have an obligation to support the United States in this role—an obligation arising from our treaty relationships, from our role as an ally in supporting the United States in international diplomacy and politics, and from the fact that our international interests are directly involved in preserving South East Asia from aggression and from Communist domination. Can anyone doubt that the South East Asia region under Communism or Chinese domination would be a socially, morally and economically impoverished and degraded region?

I hope that that statement is a clear enough indication of where this Government stands. If the people of Australia support that kind of statement of objective, then they cannot hope to secure the support that they would seek from honorable members on the other side of the House. I have made a study of the resolutions and the policy discussions which, as the Leader of the Opposition said, were conducted in the full light of publicity and which were reported, not only in the daily Press, but also in the Press of the Labour Party itself. They have subsequently been the occasion for discussion by members of the Party opposite. Honorable members will recall that the Leader of the Opposition told us that there had been no change of substance. I shall give the precise language because I think it is important that I should. I have pointed out—

Dr. J. F. Cairns.—Why does not the Prime Minister quote from a Labour Party document?

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—I have the documents here if the honorable member wishes me to do that. I had them here yesterday when we were discussing this matter.

Dr. J. F. Cairns.—If the Prime Minister is going to discuss the matter now, we would expect him to bring them in.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—I had it in "Hansard" and I thought that was authoritative enough. I quoted the precise words from the Federal Platform of the Labour Party, as reported at page 669 of "Hansard" of 29th March—

Labour will honour and support Australia's treaties and defence alliances.

Those words have been dropped from the defence section of the Labour Party's document. The Leader of the Opposition said that they had reappeared, at least in substance, in the same sense, in the foreign affairs section of the document.

Dr. J. F. Cairns.—That is correct.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—I am glad to hear the honorable member say that because the document states—

Australia must periodically review its defence treaties and alliances to meet new circumstances as they arise.

Does the honorable member claim, with the trained mind which he brings to bear on these matters, that the words "honour and support" are the same thing as "review" from time to time? That is what the honorable member is saying. That was not the view taken by members of the Labour Party at the time. I wish to refer now to the issue of the Labour Party journal "Fact" for Friday, 20th August 1965. The editorial states—

Important, too, is the new look at defence and foreign affairs whereby, for instance, Australia can face her nearby neighbours on a friendly basis rather than as a warring opponent as has been caused by the Menzies Government intervention in Vietnam's private affairs.

Mr. Uren.—That is all right.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—Yes, that is all right. These things accumulate. Just give me a little time. Then in the August 1965 issue of "Labour", the official journal, the following appeared—

Despite a strong Press campaign and threats from the Deputy Leader, Mr. Whitlam, and the A.W.U., the recently concluded 26th Federal Conference of the Australian Labour Party was highly successful.

The Conference refused to be stampeded on foreign affairs and by an overwhelming vote of 30 votes to 6 reaffirmed its support for Mr. Calwell's nuclear-free zone proposals which were originally adopted by the Labour Party two years ago.

A number of recommendations from the Labour Party Foreign Affairs Committee were

not accepted by the Conference who were obviously determined not to be intimidated by the Press to drop some of its more forward-looking peace policies.

The Conference expressed concern for military aspects of S.E.A.T.O. and suggested that new security arrangements in South East Asia should be considered by Australia, under the auspices of the U.N.

The Conference decided by a large majority, after hearing a speech by Mr. Calwell (Victoria) who moved an amendment, to retain the nuclear-free zone policy. The Foreign Affairs Committee had recommended its deletion. Only the six New South Wales delegates voted against this policy. By so doing, they ignored the 1963 New South Wales Labour Party Conference decision supporting the nuclear free zone.

It is quite obvious that there has been a very significant switch in the strength of the Australian Labour Party under its Federal Executive in relation to these matters of defence and foreign affairs. There was a rejection at several critical points—if I had the time I would deal with them—of proposals brought forward by the then Foreign Affairs Committee.

The representatives who were displaced from the Foreign Affairs Committee recently were, as I think most honorable gentlemen know, the honorable member for Eden-Monaro (Mr. Allan Fraser), a former member for Darebin, Mr. R. W. Holt, who later became State President of the Party in Victoria, and Mr. Dunstan, the Attorney-General in the Labour Government of South Australia. The three men appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Australian Labour Party by the Federal Executive—and these are the men who would be carrying out the proposed review of Australia's treaties and alliances—are the honorable member for Yarra (Dr. J. F. Cairns), the honorable member for Reid (Mr. Uren) and Senator Cavanagh—and they threw in Senator Cohen for good luck. I intend no reflection on the honorable gentlemen I have named because I believe they hold their views as sincerely and earnestly as anybody else in this Parliament, but it is a matter of either public celebrity or public notoriety, according to one's viewpoint, that these men are to be found on the extreme left of thought on defence and foreign affairs within the ranks of the Labour Party. The Labour Press treated as a rebuff to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Australian Workers

Union the proposals carried at the 1965 defence conference. It was regarded by the Labour Press as a significant switch in attitude on these matters, and quite certainly it effected a reduction in the support that our allies, in particular the United States of America, might have expected from a Labour government.

The Leader of the Labour Party has shown significantly the difference in attitude that he brings to this matter. Anybody who studies the foreign affairs statement put out by the Australian Labour Party's information release No. 2/1965 of February last year on "The Situation in Vietnam", will notice a statement which, as to a great deal of it anyway, is very much in line with the general approach of this Government and its supporters.

Mr. Allan Fraser.—What arrant nonsense.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—Well, just give me 10 minutes more and I will establish to the honorable member's satisfaction that the situation is as I have put it. But from that the Leader of the Opposition has turned to a statement about the West, as he calls it, and the only country that fits that description is the United States of America. In the debate on Government policy the Leader of the Opposition used these words:

The West has no standards and apparently no scruples. The Americans have already supported eight so-called governments in Vietnam, and all of them have been military dictatorships, and all have been tyrannical and oppressive.

Mr. Uren.—Answer that proposition.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir John McLeay).—Order! The honorable member for Reid will come to order.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—I have said enough, I think, to show that the substance of what I allege regarding honorable gentlemen opposite and their leader has been borne out by recent developments.

Mr. Uren.—I want you to answer that proposition.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! I will not warn the honorable member again. I will deal with him.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—I have only three minutes left and I want to answer the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition that the events at my public meeting the other night resulted from an upsurge of the pentup feelings of Australian youth. I have in my hand a newsletter distributed by the Youth Campaign Against Conscription. It gives details of the names and addresses of the President and Secretary. I shall not read it in full, but if honorable members want to know some details of the demonstrations that have occurred they will find them set out here. More interestingly, I can give them advance notice of the demonstrations for Wednesday, 6th April, Friday, 15th April, Friday, 22nd April and Friday, 29th April. But in relation to Monday, 28th March, the night of my meeting, the document says—

7 p.m., Kew Gardens. Meet at the corner of Gellibrand Street and Cotham Road, Kew (just inside the gardens) prior to Liberal Kooyong Meeting at Kew Civic Centre, Cotham Road. This time, some will protest silently by standing around the Hall with signs on a given signal. Others will remain part of the audience and heckle and ask questions.

This was the spontaneous upsurge of Australian youth to which the Leader of the Opposition referred. I say in conclusion that the foolish people who take part in these demonstrations will find that they are having exactly the reverse effect to that which they intend. There are in this country ways in which people may demonstrate a political opposition to Government policies or the views of members of Parliament. But no Australian who values democracy in this country will accept as a reasonable demonstration the methods that were adopted on this occasion.