

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO U.S. AND U.K.



Television interview between
B.B.C. Correspondent, John Osman, and
the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

7th July, 1966

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, what significance do you attach to Mr. Wilson's forthcoming visit to Moscow?

MR. HOLT: Well, I hope it will do something to improve relations. I said in America earlier this week that I thought we had to try every means we could to break the impasse which has developed around the world. As I said there, you can't go on thinking that the world is divided into "goodies" and "baddies" and all the goodies are on your side and the baddies are all on the other, because I am sure the other fellow is thinking just that way himself. We know there are intelligent people in both sections.

Q. You would welcome, would you, any reconvening of the Geneva Conference with Britain and Russia as co-chairman?

MR. HOLT: In respect of Vietnam?

Q. Yes.

MR. HOLT: I would want notice of that particular question but we are all working for a negotiated peace and if this is an effective way of securing it we would be glad to go along with it.

Q. But you are not altogether convinced about this

MR. HOLT: Well, I don't know what is proposed. It's a long time since I looked at the details of the Geneva negotiations but effective negotiations in which we secure a result which is not just a piece of plaster patched over the problem would be welcomed by us.

Q. Can you tell me how you feel about Mr. Wilson's disassociation of Britain from the American bombing near Hanoi?

MR. HOLT: Mr. Wilson has his problems and the view from here may be a different view from the view we see down under. But, from our point of view, we regard what is happening in Vietnam as a great critical struggle for people throughout the world, eventually reaching the people throughout the world, not just confined to South Vietnam itself, and for us it is part of the future of Asia which is being resolved here and a very important part of its future progress.

Q. So it would be fair to say that you are disappointed in Mr. Wilson's disassociation?

MR. HOLT: I recognise the problems that he has, but we would, of course, have liked this to be recognised as a necessary part of the policy which I had gathered the United Kingdom Government had given its general support to.

Q. Do you think that these obvious divergences in policy between you and Mr. Wilson are likely to have any long term effect on Anglo-Australian relations?

MR. HOLT: No, certainly not. The Anglo-Australian relationship is not only deep but abiding, and the fact that there will be differences from time to time - history doesn't stand still. Events are moving fast in our part of the world. I pointed out this morning that one in four of young people in Australia are migrants or people who have come there as the result of parents being migrants, and so it's not always the same Australia but always I hope there will be this warm relationship with the United Kingdom.

Q. Now you have said that it is a matter for regret that Australian forces for the first time in history are not fighting in association with those of the United Kingdom. Would you like to see greater British support for the United States in Vietnam, and I mean particularly men as well as materials?

MR. HOLT: We would like to see a United Kingdom presence there giving moral support. I don't think anybody will be looking for substantial British forces, but the United Kingdom Government has made its position clear on this and we respect the fact that they will have given their own full consideration to all aspects of the matter and they have come to their decisions as we have come to ours. I am only mentioning what we would like to see.

Q. What do you mean by a British presence there?

MR. HOLT: Well, if there were British troops, even in some limited number, present, as there are from other friendly forces around the area. The Thais for example are contributing a military establishment of quite limited degree, but at least the Americans don't feel they are being left to carry this tremendous burden for the world as a whole.

Q. You were reported under fire in a section of the Australian press for being what they call "chillingly naive" in your endorsement of American policy. What do you have to say about this?

MR. HOLT: Well, if I can remain chillingly naive after 30 years in public life, it just shows that one can preserve the freshness of innocence untouched, but really when I think back to the time when a Labour Prime Minister declared that Australia would be behind Great Britain in the military challenge of that time to the last man and the last shilling, I don't think he was being naive or fulsome in his support of what he believe in at that point of time.

Q. You are also accused, I must say in the same section of the Australian press, of an abject surrender of Australian initiative in foreign policy. Have you anything to say about that?

MR. HOLT: Well, I think it's almost too stupid to require an answer and I'm glad to feel from my own quite intimate consultations and communications, both with the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of this country, that the views that Australia expresses on matters of consequence are noted and are not without effect.

Q. Apart from Vietnam, the whole wider question of British commitment east of Suez is still the subject of speculation. Will you be seeking assurances from Mr. Wilson that Britain won't water down her commitments too much?

MR. HOLT: No, because I've already had the assurances which related to the arrangements we discussed earlier in the year. I'm much more concerned east of Suez in the positive developing economic sense. I don't think the United Kingdom can afford either to turn its back or remain aloof from the great developments which are occurring in this area which is stirring into activity to a very impressive degree.

Q. I understand that discussions are continuing between British and Australian military teams about the long-term possibility of establishing bases in Australia as an alternative to Singapore. How are those talks going?

MR. HOLT: Well, we've carried out our side of the bargain as we have discussed it with Mr. Healey earlier in the year. There have been good talks at the staff level against contingencies which could occur in the future. We feel it is desirable to maintain a British presence in the North and with us in association with British troops stationed there. We feel that not only is this defensively preferable, but it does help to provide this moderating, stabilising influence which is a great contribution which British character and prestige can contribute to the emergence of a more stable, more prosperous and more secure South East Asia.

Q. A final question, and on another subject. You are a former Treasurer and you will be seeing the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Will you be making any protest about recent British investment restrictions on developed Commonwealth countries?

MR. HOLT: No, protest is too strong a word. What I would hope to be able to show the Chancellor is that it is in the long term interests of the United Kingdom to encourage the development of my own country. We hold our reserves principally in sterling and, as Australia becomes stronger, more densely populated and more secure, not only do our reserves increase, strengthening your own, but we are able to play a larger part in the defence and international aid in that area of the world.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.
