

PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION CONFERENCE GIVEN BY
THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT AT TOWNSVILLE
(AMBERLEY AIR FORCE BASE)

23rd October, 1966

MR. HOLT : This has clearly been a most successful visit and far exceeded my own bright expectations of it when I knew it was to come about. The Australian people have responded magnificently and, of course, both for the President and Mrs. Johnson this has been a great personal triumph. I am sure most Australians feel that they have a much more realistic ^{appreciation} of both these wonderful people now they have come close to them in the course of this visit. I want to speak now, not so much of the personal side of it but of the significance and implications for this country, for the United States itself, for other friendly countries, and indeed for the world as a whole, because what has happened as a result of this visit to New Zealand and Australia - and I have no doubt that as the President proceeds through the rest of his extensive and arduous itinerary, we shall have accentuated what I am about to suggest. That is that there will have been a concentration in these various parts of the world on this area, on the problems we are trying to cope with, on the meaning of the Viet Nam conflict itself. That can't fail to be useful, I believe, in making for a deeper understanding of our objectives and how we are going about them. It will also encourage attention to the Manila Conference itself. Never in the history of this country that I can recall has there been such concentrated attention through the public media on an official visit, and with more than 90 per cent. of the Australian people able to take advantage of televised programmes, they have been able to keep close to the events. You people in all sections of the public communications media have done a wonderful job. You have conveyed faithfully to the Australian people, and to that wider audience beyond Australia just what has been happening in realistic, exciting, interesting terms that has made its great contribution to the success of the visit. But we will have, as I say, this concentration on the area and its problems. Inside Australia itself, I am sure this will be of value as bringing wider support for the undertakings of the Government and our actions in relation to these obligations. It will make more clearly known American purpose and that of our allies in relation to these problems. And I speak not only of Viet Nam in the sense of resolving a military conflict there, but in Manila we shall be thinking, after we have reviewed the current military situation, of the positive and constructive opportunities that will be open to us to better the lot of the South Vietnamese even while hostilities proceed; but as we talk together, I am sure we will be thinking also of what can be done in relation to the area as a whole - how these age-old enemies of mankind, not the human enemies but the enemies of which the President spoke so eloquently - poverty, disease and short life expectancy and illiteracy, the lack of the amenities of life that have meant so much to us. These are things which I know he wants to be dealing with in a practical and helpful way. And if the conference succeeds in developing along these lines, then I believe it will have made a notable contribution to human advancement which could, in its consequences, become a quite historic landmark in the history of mankind. It is encouraging to know that the Australian view of how the conference should run, its agenda, the objectives we should be seeking, are so closely in line with those of the President and his advisers. I am sure that this is true also of New Zealand. I have just welcomed the Prime Minister of New Zealand who, with his official party, will be joining me on the aircraft we have chartered to take the Australian party to Manila. We have hopes, but not, I think over-optimistic hopes.

MR. HOLT (Contd.)

We realise how difficult it is in a few short days to produce practical results, but I am sure this will be a valuable forward step. We can't fail to develop a more significant and deeper understanding of each other's viewpoints and recommendations, and to this extent, there will be an advance made in our common objectives.

I hope when I come back in a few days and report, perhaps through many of you here today to the Australian people, that I shall have news for you and be able to indicate that real progress has been made. Thank you.

MR. EGGLETON : Gentlemen, just one or two questions perhaps.....

Q. Do you think that the visit of the President has given you encouragement for the Manila talks, Mr. Prime Minister?

MR. HOLT ; It certainly has. I think Australia was a tonic and an encouragement to him. As you know, I have been travelling with him, at his own request to these functions and to the various cities he has visited and we have been able to have much good talk together. And he has reacted in a most positive way and in a most obvious way - so far as I have been concerned anyhow - to the warmth of the welcome he has received. It has been a remarkable welcome, capped by this visit to Townsville which holds so much sentimental meaning for him. I knew all along that this would be on his itinerary - not because he had said so, but from what I knew of the man, I felt he could not come to Australia and not pay a visit to a city which had meant so much to him. This was apparent right through this morning's proceedings. Of course, the warmth, the friendliness, the enthusiasm which he has felt as he has gone around, on his admission to me has far exceeded anything he has known in the United States. And for a political leader, even a great political leader, it is comforting to know that you are popular and that what you are doing is so widely supported. It has been a success not only from our point of view, but a success in many ways from his own point of view.

Q. Mr. Holt, you have selected the similarities between your view and that of the United States. Are there, at this stage, any points of difference between you?

MR. HOLT : Not that I am aware of. We shall perhaps discover, as we hold our discussions together, that there are differences of emphasis. One of us might want to spend more time on one aspect of the agenda than the other, but I didn't detect any differences which were significant enough to be noted in our talks together. In fact, I could say quite frankly that there were no differences I could bring to mind and mention to you here.

Q. Are you more confident now about your prospects for the general elections than you were, say, last Thursday morning?

MR. HOLT : Well the short answer is "no". I don't think it has done us any harm, but I was confident of victory long before President Johnson came to this country.

Q. Do you think it has changed the views of the Australian people on Viet Nam?

MR. HOLT: I wouldn't claim that, but I do think it has brought a better understanding for many of those who may have been in some doubt about the rightness of our objectives. This morning, the President himself made pointed reference to the fact that in a democracy, the views even of a minority must be treated with respect and assured of public mention. And this has been done in Australia. No-one could deny that. Ours is a robust, forth-right democracy and the people have had an opportunity to consider

MR. HOLT (Contd.) both sets of views. But what does, I think, come into the situation is the fact that this State of Queensland has always struck me as being more conscious of the threats which can come to Australia than have the more southern parts of Australia. You are closer, in your experience, to the threat of invasion. You have known of the activity which developed in Townsville itself during the last world war, and there is the fact that the Coral Sea Battle was fought so close to the people of this northern area. He was impressed by that I know - the warmth and enthusiasm and friendliness without - so far as I could detect in Townsville - one sour face being encountered, or one critical banner being displayed.

MR. EGGLETON: I am sorry, gentlemen. Our aircraft is waiting so that will have to be all.
