

NEW ZEALAND TOUR 1967

** *****

TELEVISION INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,

MR. HAROLD HOLT, AT WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

3RD FEBRUARY, 1967

Q.: Prime Minister, I would like to begin by referring to a statement you made yesterday and then repeated today. You said a visit to New Zealand was the first of your priorities for this New Year. Now, among Australia's foreign policy commitments, how high does the relationship with New Zealand rank as a priority?

PM: Very high, because we are linked as partners and allies in such agreements as ANZUS and SEATO, which bear on the security of both our countries in this area of the world. We work together in such schemes as the Colombo Plan. We are in the Asian and South Pacific Association of Countries, and the Asian Development Bank. We are working together on the Commission in the South Pacific. In so many directions we have common interests, common purposes to serve. At gatherings of Prime Ministers, Australia and New Zealand usually have rather similar attitudes - in fact, very similar attitudes - to the issues which arise there, so it becomes very desirable that with so much to be served in common we should work as closely together as we can.

Q.: Does this working closely together go as far as seeking the advice of one country or another before you make a major foreign policy decision?

PM: It does on matters which concern us both. We keep in very close touch with this country.

Q.: To perpetuate the following up of these common purposes to which you refer, do you see any value in setting up some sort of permanent consultative machinery, like a Secretariat?

PM: There was thought given to that, as you will recall. Back in 1944 there was a suggestion for a regular process of consultation. I think, though, that the subsequent developments have largely nullified the need for this, because we do come together for so many of the other purposes that I have mentioned - at various levels of Government, Ministers, Prime Ministers, and Officials - for such matters as those I have mentioned, and I think what we need is not so much the formal machinery for consultation but a desire and expression of that desire to be in closer consultation, regular consultation with each other. I may say that so far as the Prime Minister and myself are concerned we met last year on three sets of meetings, and we developed a process of telephone consultation which I think was useful for both of us.

Q.: This does raise a point, doesn't it - the personality issue. If, for example, you did not get on well with Mr Holyoake, cooperation between Australia and New Zealand might not be as great as would be desirable for both countries, and that is why, surely, there is one reason for setting up some sort of permanent machinery so that the consultation is always there and not

dependent on personalities.

PM: First of all, I think it highly unlikely there would not be a friendly feeling between the leaders of our two countries - and this is irrespective of politics, I might say. Australians get on well with New Zealanders, and vice versa. But there would be consultation of an official kind at the various levels involved in all these activities - Colombo Plan, Development Bank, ASPAC, and whatever else is in discussion at the time.

Q.: In the past and now, of course, as you have just outlined, Australia and New Zealand have often forged general policies and, going back to 1944 again, for example, in the Canberra Pact there was a definite attempt then to get a joint policy so that both countries could hope to exercise some sort of influence on the great powers. Now, I wonder if you would agree with the argument that both countries to a certain extent have lost some independence in foreign policy-making because of their wish to shelter under the American Nuclear Umbrella?

PM: Well, any less independence now than we used to have in the days when the British Navy protected us both? I can remember a charge being levelled against a Government I supported that we were clinging to the skirts of Downing Street, and now people are saying that we are going American: as I said the other day at an Australia Day gathering, we are not going American we are going Australian. Any country which is not able to protect itself from its own resources, I suppose, could be said to have sacrificed some degree of its independence, but isn't that true of every country which goes into the United Nations? It is influenced very considerably by the discussions and the decisions which come from the United Nations. It is a little old-fashioned now, I think, to speak in terms or think in terms of complete independence in what is becoming an increasingly interdependent world. On the other hand, I am quite certain that both Australia and New Zealand are able to exert an influence out of all proportion to our numbers on the great powers, certainly on the United Kingdom and the United States.

Q.: Because they agree with the United States or the United Kingdom and tend to participate in the policies that both of these powers are enunciating - for example, the presence of Australian and New Zealand forces in Viet Nam?

PM: No, I think it is because of the special position we occupy in this region of the world - the fact that we can form a bridge of cooperation and understanding, sometimes in situations where the great powers cannot. I could illustrate this by our situation with Cambodia. We represent the United States in Cambodia, and we represent Cambodia in South Viet Nam. Now, no great power would have been as welcome to Cambodia for this purpose as we have proved to be. There is a feeling amongst several of the countries of this region that we do not possess the legacy of a colonial power past, that each of our countries is striving to develop resources and thereby set some sort of an example to others who have their development ahead of them. It is known that we are on good terms with such powers as the United Kingdom and the United States. All of these things help to build our influence on the other countries, and that influence on them makes us a valuable ally for the United States and the United Kingdom.

Q.: Over the last two or three years especially there has been a marked increase, it seemed to us here, in Australian activity in Asia, and this too has coincided with greater American interest in that area, and it would appear at least it has coincided with a declining British influence in the area. Do you think these three factors are all intertwined together?

PM: I would not regard our interest as being so much a product of American interest. I would claim that American interest has increased in Asia because of the discussions and influences that we have been able to bring to the United States. I had a very good illustration of that last year when in the space of a fortnight I had two visits to Washington, and in between those visits, I having stressed the value that the other countries on the periphery of Asia were deriving from the American participation in Viet Nam, the President invited me back, and just before I returned he made a very significant speech which I think took the United States further into Asia than any American President previously had done, not only in a military sense, but a virtual assurance that in the positive tasks of peace America would be giving constructive and substantial assistance.

Q.: Finally, Prime Minister, do you see Australia as taking over the role in Asia that Britain seems to be abandoning?

PM: I doubt whether Australia has the resources to do this. We are trying to do a great deal, but after all we are a developing country ourselves: we are a capital importing country. We see a growing involvement for ourselves in Asia and would expect to be making a growing contribution, preferably in circumstances of peace but if necessary towards the security of the area. But after all, we are only a people of less than 12,000,000 at the present time, and while I said, talking at the lunch at Parliament House, that because of our productivity we do rate very much higher than numbers would suggest, still we do not class ourselves as a major power.

Interviewer - Prime Minister, thank you very much.
