

# NEW ZEALAND TOUR 1967

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## FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON LEAVING NEW ZEALAND, CHRISTCHURCH AIRPORT

8TH FEBRUARY, 1967.

MR. HOLT: We have reached the last stage of this very interesting, enjoyable and informative visit to New Zealand and shortly we shall be taking off again for Australia. I am quite certain that for me and indeed for your Prime Minister it has been a most valuable visit. I have learned a great deal more about New Zealand and in our intimate talks together your Prime Minister and I have been able to exchange views on a wide range of matters, which will be of assistance to us both in our policy formation. The overwhelming impression I shall be taking back to Australia with me - and I am sure this is shared by all members of the party - is an overwhelming impression of the goodwill and friendliness we have encountered wherever we have gone about this country. There have been quite spontaneous little groups of people, sometimes pulled up at the roadside, sometimes in tourist buses. Wherever we have gone we have found that there have been cheerful smiles and happy friendly greetings. Frankly I haven't heard a sour voice since I left Australia. And this confirms the belief I brought to this country that our two peoples are close together, closer perhaps than any other two people in the world. Not only is there this definite friendliness and warmth of goodwill but our interests are so closely linked together that this will continue down the years ahead.

I didn't have a crowd in the Southland or South Island because Southland has a particular significance for you I know, and the only cloud was that that derived from the tragic episodes of the past two days. Even there our sorrow in Australia was so obviously shared by the people of this country and helped again to emphasise how close we are together. I have received messages of sympathy in respect of both these tragic events from your Prime Minister and I appreciate that, as I am sure will my fellow countrymen.

I am seeing something of the tremendous tourist potential of these Islands, and I shall be discussing with my own Minister for Tourist Activities ways in which the two countries can work more closely together. Your Prime Minister has from me an open invitation to visit Australia whenever he can find the opportunity to do so. I hope that there will be other visits by Ministers not necessarily accompanied by the same formality, but able as good friends can to meet informally with us and see for themselves what we are trying to do on our own great Continent. It has been, I repeat, a most valuable visit and I am grateful to the Prime Minister, his Government and to all those who have assisted so pleasantly in making this journey a profitable, informative and enjoyable one.

MR. EGGLETON: Gentlemen, any questions?

C. (Inaudible, but obviously relating to forthcoming visit by Mr. McEwen).

F.M. Well I expect him to be here very soon. I can't put a precise date on it but I had gathered from him it was likely to be some time in February, and as to the scope of the discussions there again I shall be leaving it in his hands very largely. I didn't gather from Members of your Government quite the same tone which I had detected in some of the editorials and some of the statements. I think there is a general feeling that the agreement has not been running for very long. I gave a public assurance that, from our point of view, we wanted it to work to the mutual benefit of both countries. We see in a developing, prospering New Zealand opportunities for our own trade just as we hope you will find in a growing, prospering

Australia opportunities for yours. If the agreement isn't working out in a way that is regarded by both countries as beneficial then you will find us helpful and constructive in our attitude towards it.

Q. Not only as far as Australia is concerned but defence, how closely will you see the arrangement between New Zealand and Australia?

P.M. I believe we have security problems in common in this area. We are the two countries of European civilization in this part of the world. We have opportunities, I believe, for trade with the growing economies of Asia and, in particular, South East Asia, and those opportunities will be more fully developed if there is an area at peace. It is the goal of both of us to do what we can to produce a negotiated peace that will be a just and enduring peace so that where we have to join with others in producing the framework for peaceful negotiations, then I believe our interests run parallel.

Q. This closeness of our efforts in so many cases, how is this going to affect our relations between our two countries.

P.M. I am sure we will come close together over the years. Indeed I am confident myself that this visit with an even deeper friendship between the two Prime Ministers will make its contribution, as will the contact made with the Members of your Government and your people. There will, I am confident, be a growing realisation that we must stand closely together if we are to serve our interests in the world.

Q. We have waited 15 years, something like that, for an Australian Prime Minister's visit, now how long will we have to wait before another one?

P.M. You must have been speaking with someone in the North Island. They told me in Christchurch they have waited 179 years for the first visit of an Australian Prime Minister. It certainly won't be anything like 179 and not even 15 before you have another, if I'm allowed to make a return to what have been very delightful centres that I have visited in the course of this journey. And, of course, after such a long absence I must include a visit to the North in any itinerary I follow on a subsequent visit.

Q. And finally, Mr. Holt, did Mr. Holyoake indicate any particular likelihood of any kind that he would take up your invitation of a visit to Australia?

P.M. No, not particularly, but he knows it is there and he doesn't have to make any long preparation or give us long notice. He will be welcome any time he feels he can make the journey. And that goes for his Ministers too.

Q. (Inaudible).

P.M. As soon as I heard the first outline of the disaster I telegraphed to the Premier of the State asking him if help was being given and if there was any way in which help could be given. I put a phone call through to him at the same time but found that Mr. Reece, the Premier, had been on a visit to the mainland at the time of the fire. I spoke to his Deputy, Mr. Fagan, and he gave me details of the loss as known at that point of time. There were then 20 lives lost and 15 to 20 people not accounted for. It was estimated that some 700 to 800 homes had been destroyed, as well as several factories, including the Carbide Factory and the Cascade Brewery. Emergency arrangements have been made to take care of the homeless in the depots, town halls and that kind of thing. I asked whether our Armed Services had been called in to help, but he said they had been very helpful yesterday and were continuing their help, although the fire at that point had been brought under control. Apparently yesterday there was a wind of 60 miles per hour blowing and a temperature of 103 which, of course, is very unusual for Tasmania. Since then I have learned from my own Office which I

contacted in Canberra that my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister, had made arrangements for one of our Ministers, Mr. Howson the Minister for Air, who is also the Minister assisting the Treasurer, to act as Commonwealth Liaison Minister for purposes of assistance, and we shall, of course, be looking sympathetically at what can be done in this matter. There will be problems of re-employment, re-housing problems - a great variety. It so happens that next week a meeting had been arranged of the Premiers of the six States with me, and this will provide a very convenient opportunity for me to discuss these matters with them and with the Premier of the State himself. But that is about all I can tell you at this stage.

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