

## Cancellation of Dr Caetano's visit on the basis of article in 'The Times' would be to prejudge case against an old and loyal ally—Foreign Secretary

House of Commons

MR HAROLD WILSON (Huyton, Lab), opening a debate on the visit of the Portuguese Prime Minister, said the Labour Party's categorical objection to this visit was declared months ago. It was not a belated response to the latest revelations of Portuguese atrocities. (Conservative interruptions.) It was a condemnation of the whole life style of Portuguese fascism at home and repressive colonialism abroad.

The reports last week led to the Opposition's renewed demands for cancellation. They did not affect Labour's repeatedly stated view that the invitation should never have been made.

Last week there was published in *The Times* reports of the most outrageous and bestial atrocities, revolting even in a world which had become inured to war and genocide.

The reports in *The Times* (he went on) had been challenged. We have to form our own judgment. I believe the Editor, in a matter of such moment for international relations and the standing in the world of Portugal and Britain, would not have printed these reports and at such a time unless he had good reason to believe them. (Conservative shouts of "What is the reason?" and "You tell us what the reason is".)

We are dealing today with an important issue affecting the standing of Britain—(Conservative cheers)—and we are not dealing in the small change of the petty minds of Conservative MPs.

These reports have been widely supported by other reports again accompanied by a great amount of detail, circumstantial it is true, but circumstantial in the sense that unless one asserts total and calculated dishonesty on the part of the priests and others concerned, it is evidence giving a great deal of chapter and verse and going beyond the possibility of rumour-mongering by second and third hand parties.

### Supporting evidence

The House must take into account, and every MP judge for himself, the supporting evidence before and since last week in the shape of reports and statements from other priests and missionaries, the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty and other independent observers. There had been reports in the overseas press of parallel atrocities.

Two Catholic priests had been held without trial for 17 months. This was not in question. It was claimed that these two priests witnessed the alleged atrocity. On the BBC on Sunday a Portuguese information spokesman was asked why these priests had not been produced before now to say exactly what they saw.

His reply was a classic: "These priests have been imprisoned and they will have a fair trial in September, I think. They have been accused of collaborating with terrorists and we know of many facts and cases that they did so".

The spokesman was prejudging the trial. (Conservative shout of "Who are you prejudging?") It was that kind of judicial morality and suppression of evidence which Conservative MPs would be voting for tonight.

Information about the events which formed the subject of the report in *The Times* reached Amnesty International from January onwards. In March and July the chairman of the Amnesty International executive wrote to Dr Caetano asking for a meeting with the Portuguese authorities. His intention was to raise these matters, and other aspects of the case of the imprisoned priests who had been the subject of a report to Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, following an investigation by an African lawyer of unimpeachable legal authority—Professor Barend van Nierkirk, Professor of Law at Natal University, Durban.

I have his report (said Mr Wilson). So has the Prime Minister; so has the Foreign Secretary. I invite the Foreign Secretary to say he will table this report. It is highly relevant.

Was it suggested that all statements were fabrications for some political purpose, that priests had been turned by some malevolent transmutation into professional perjurers? (Conservative interruptions.) They would not convince one another across the floor of the House, but each MP had a duty to satisfy himself from the information available.

He really prepared to rely, in spite of what had been said by priests, on the word of a professional public relations representative of a fascist regime, whose first attempt on British radio at repudiation began by denying the existence of the place mentioned and who later purported to tell the world where it was. (Conservative interruptions.)

Even in the case of the investigation said to have been ordered by the Portuguese Government, and announced last weekend—for what that would have been worth—yesterday they read that the Governor of the Province was said to have told British journalists that he had not heard of the investigation. Today they had read that the Portuguese Embassy spokesman in London had said the Governor had asked Lisbon for a clarification rather than for an official inquiry.

The Prime Minister should have insisted (said Mr Wilson) that before Dr Caetano was feted in this country the Portuguese authorities should have agreed to an investigation by, for example, the Human Rights Commission—(Labour cheers)—the British Red Cross, the Save The Children Fund, a commission appointed by the Vatican or by the World Council of Churches or any other body—(Further Conservative interruption and Labour shouts of "Why not?")—in whose findings the world would repose confidence.

But this had not happened (he said). The Government and those who support them do not, I trust, base their case on the argument that if these atrocities did take place, we should still be prepared to welcome the Portuguese dictator to our shores?

### Harm in the reality

Is the House to be asked to believe a proposition that the Fathers of Burgos and other Spanish missionaries, Portuguese priests, the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty, joined with the Committee for

Freedom of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea, and formed a conspiracy to fabricate the evidence to harm the Portuguese Government on the eve of Dr Caetano's visit?

Harm was caused not by distortions in the mirror but in the reality which it reflected.

Then there was the argument that a decision to leave Portugal in the contemptible state of moral quarantine she had earned for herself, would equally mean the cessation of diplomatic exchanges with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe generally and China.

When we meet the Soviet Union or eastern Europe or China (he said) we do not do so as an ally. Such exchanges, whether by Government or Opposition or any MP or group of MPs, do not mean for any of us acceptance either of the nature of the regime in question or of acts in denial of human rights by that regime.

While we may abominate their political and social systems and they abominate ours, the search for peace, for nuclear disarmament, for better understanding and purpose of the European security conference must go on.

But these arguments do not apply in the case of this visit by the Portuguese dictator. (Labour cheers.) They have nothing to contribute to these arguments about security or nuclear disarmament.

But, more than that, unlike the countries I have mentioned, Portugal is not only a treaty partner of 600 years' standing. She is a member of the Western Alliance; she is a member of Nato.

Could Portugal's behaviour be justified under the terms of Nato? Every Nato signatory asserted his determination to "safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law".

Did one MP believe that Portugal at home or abroad fulfilled the requirements of membership of Nato?

MR DYKES (Harrow, East, C)—Why then, when he was Prime Minister, did he not ask for Portugal's departure from Nato? (Conservative cheers.)

MR WILSON—On the contrary, we were extremely vigilant about her behaviour in Nato in relation to the transfer of Nato arms for use in Africa. (Conservative interruptions and Labour cheers.)

No one, he went on, after what had been reported in past months could possibly justify either Portugal in Nato or Mr Heath's feting the Prime Minister of Portugal last night. (Labour cheers.)

In the absence of clear and indisputable repudiation not only of the alleged atrocities but also of other oppressive brutalities inherent in a colonial policy, Portugal no longer had any claim for Britain's support. (Conservative interruptions.)

It was appropriate since Dr Caetano was here that he should be left in no doubt of the strength, and not only of this country—~~and not only of this country~~ The House was also debating the affront to their common heritage founded on democracy and the rule of law, because of the stubborn persistence with which the Government had gone through with the visit to the bitter end.

Had any MP contemplating voting against the motion any confidence that the Prime Minister

could secure an assurance that today's debate in the Commons would be allowed to be reported in the Portuguese press? (Labour cheers and Conservative interruptions.)

## Racialism

He knew Conservative MPs would like to censor speeches in the House. They had shown that today. The House should draw a further conclusion from the Portuguese policy and from the Government's ceremonial condoning of that policy.

In Britain all parties were proud of their post-war record of decolonization. Against the British record they contrasted the record of Portugal. He hoped the Prime Minister now felt there was more in the case he (Mr Wilson) had presented today than he showed when he lost his head last Tuesday. (Labour cheers and Conservative laughter.)

They knew Mr Heath to be quick to anger and not overplentiful to mercy. One newspaper had referred to him as "bellowing with rage".

What we would like to see (he said) and I believe some of his own party would like to see, would be a situation in which he were just once to express the same anger on the other side—just once bellowing with rage against white racialism—(Conservative protests and Labour cheers)—in Rhodesia for example and against Portugal's policy in Africa.

MR HEATH, Prime Minister (Bexley, C)—I have spent the last eight years of my life fighting against racialism in this country. (Conservative cheers.)

MR WILSON—But not with the same vigour fighting against racialism in Rhodesia. (Labour cheers.)

He would like to see a little anger for once from Mr Heath. Britain more often than not in the last century was on the right side and was not afraid to face taunts of supporting men who might be called terrorists. Today they were debating another turning point in world history.

In a world (he said) where issues of freedom and self government, but still more of race and colour, occupy the centre of the stage, what I suggest is both right and in our interests is, by every democratic and peaceful means, leading I would hope to international action, to provide a *cordon sanitaire* around the shores of Portuguese Africa, and to support fighters for freedom against their oppressors. (Labour cheers.)

SIR ALEC DOUGLAS-HOME, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Kinross and West Perthshire, C), said that when Mr Wilson succumbed, as he did frequently nowadays, to spasms of political opportunism—(Labour protests)—it was always possible to answer him immediately with his own words and his own actions.

This was so today both in relation to Britain's relations to Portugal and to visits of Prime Ministers or other ministers in the context of massacres, proved or unproved.

On relations with Portugal, Mr Wilson said in the Commons in 1969: "Portugal is, of course, an old and loyal ally, within Nato. This does not mean that we support her policies in Africa."

That was the Government's position, too, and openly explained always to the Portuguese. (Conservative cheers.)

When (he continued) on this matter, Mr Wilson censures us, he censures himself. When he says that Portugal was "an old and loyal ally", the struggle between Frelimo and the Portuguese army was going on for years. There had been bitter fights. The United Nations at the time was passing anti-Portuguese resolutions, yet he rose in this House and he claimed Portugal as an old and loyal ally.

Again, and more pertinent to the visit of Dr Caetano, Mr Wilson recalled My Lai. Mr Wilson would remember that at the time of the first reports of the events of My Lai he was about to visit the President of the United States. Mr Wilson said about that and the question of whether such incidents were part of a consciously-followed policy, on December 8, 1969: "To suspend judgment on that is neither cowardice nor moral evasion on our part. I do not regard it as a right reaction to what this is, an offence against decency, even of this magnitude, to jump to premature conclusions about a friend and an ally." (Conservative laughter.)

That (he said) is our position too. But what kind of intellectual agility is it that allows him to make such eminently sane judgments himself and then to denounce others who say precisely the same thing?

MR HEFFER (Liverpool, Walton, Lab) said that some MPs over the years consistently had had nothing to do with fascist Portugal.

SIR A. DOUGLAS-HOME—I acquit Mr Heffer of double standards, but not Mr Wilson.

There was no doubt that large-scale massacres by the North Vietnamese took place at Hué, but that did not prevent Mr Callaghan going to North Vietnam.

On My Lai, Mr Wilson was even more specific about an inquiry. He said: "It is not for us to carry out our investigation or to prejudice others". That was the Government's position.

MR WILSON said he was referring to a court-martial under the proceedings of the United States, which was a democratic country. There was a vigil in the Senate and Congress.

What assurance he asked he said the Foreign Secretary that there will be judicial proceedings in relation to anything proved in Mozambique, or that there is a democratic parliament to insist on it?

SIR A. DOUGLAS-HOME—Here is Mr Wilson falling into the same trap again. He is prejudging. (Labour protests.) He is saying that the Portuguese are incapable of holding an objective inquiry.

## Premature

To have cancelled Dr Caetano's visit on the basis of *The Times* article, which was at best questionable at second or third hand, would have been in Mr Wilson's words to jump to premature conclusions and to prejudice the case against an old and loyal ally.

How can he talk in this context of judicial morality? When people talk of hypocrisy, Mr Wilson really cannot complain. (Conservative cheers.)

The Government do not know, nor do the Opposition, what happened in Mozambique at the time or at the place mentioned in *The Times* article. Some priests have made an accusation of a horrifying and large-scale massacre. The bishop refuses to be drawn into the controversy. Other people who know the area have been unable to corroborate it and have cast serious doubts on the story.

Frelimo, who might be thought to wish to blacken the character of Portugal, were unable to corroborate the story of the massacre. From the reports of our representatives in this area there is evidence of clashes between guerrillas and Portuguese Army troops, but no evidence or anything on this scale.

Everybody had to make up their minds on the evidence. Certain statements had been made on one side and substantial statements had been made on the other. Mr

Wilson did not seem to have taken these things into consideration at all.

MR THORPE (North Devon, L) said that leaving aside *The Times* article and Mr Wilson, there was a great deal of difference between a normal diplomatic exchange and a state visit with the Palace laid on and all the junketings accorded to close allies.

Very few would complain about normal diplomatic exchanges. They objected that this State visit and all the panoply it involved, was totally out of keeping with the feelings of the Government towards Portugal and would be misrepresented throughout Portugal and Africa.

SIR A. DOUGLAS-HOME said this was not a State visit. This was one of those visits made, for example, by Communist leaders. They had gone to the Palace.

The reason why the alliance should be celebrated was concerned with Nato.

The Portuguese had said a full investigation was being made according to their practice and that if hard evidence was produced the guilty would be punished.

The House would recall Vietnam where a massacre was proved. They would also recall Nigeria. Mr Wilson would recall the wild statements made at the time of the Nigerian civil war which were later proved to be untrue.

## Embarrassment sought

Mr Wilson did not jump to conclusions then. We should not prejudice now (he said.)

Mr Wilson had not made this demand for the ostracism of Portugal during the time he was in charge of the British Government. For six years he sent his Foreign and Defence Ministers to collaborate with their Portuguese opposite numbers in the Nato Council.

The conclusion was the Opposition had deliberately sought the maximum embarrassment of the Government at the time when Dr Caetano was a guest in this country. (Conservative cheers.) The Opposition had had many parliamentary occasions on which to put down votes of censure but they had not done so until now.

Only now did Mr Wilson say that Portugal should be expelled from Nato. He did not pursue this policy when he was in power. He accepted that Britain had real common strategic concern with defence in the North Atlantic area.

Britain had considerable trade with Portugal. Exports to Portugal in 1972 amounted to £114m. This was far greater than the total exports to the three countries of eastern Europe which Mr Callaghan (Cardiff, South-East) was visiting at the moment. (Loud Conservative laughter.)

Whatever the view taken of Portuguese policies in Africa, assemblies in Mozambique had been set up, elected on a common roll with considerable legislative powers.

There is in Mozambique today (he said) an assembly with a non-European majority.

He had told the Portuguese Government often that Britain disagreed with their policy towards Africa.

Portuguese policies in Africa were different than Britain's and Mr Wilson had made a forthright attack on them today. But the question before the House was not the African policies of the Portuguese; the question was whether Britain should disrupt Nato and cast away the alliance with Portugal and with it part of their own security just because they had a different concept of African policy than that of the Portuguese.

## Important role

Mr Wilson said on the BBC that Portugal were outside the pale of civilized society. Presumably he meant Britain should have no contacts with her at all—unlike Czechoslovakia. (Conservative cheers.)

The Government believed they should not throw away the valuable ties Britain had with Portugal, in a fit of self-righteous indignation based on no foundation of fact.

The Portuguese role in the security of Europe was important. That being the position and convinced opinion, it would be the height of hypocrisy not to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the alliance. (Conservative cheers.)

Foreign policy and defence must not become matters of instant judgment and erratic change and still less to become a play thing. (Loud Conservative cheers.)

The House could have a double satisfaction. Members would be able to go into the lobby against one who would jump on any bandwagon—(Conservative cheers)—and in favour of an alliance which served the interests of Britain and Europe. (Labour protests and Conservative cheers.)