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

House of Commons

MR HAROLD WILSON (Huyton, Lab.), opening a debate on the Portuguese Prime Minister, said the Labour Party’s (Constitutional) objection to this visit was declared months ago. It was not a belated response to the cancelling of Portuguese atrocities. (Conservative interrup’ions.) It was a condemnation of the whole life style of Portuguese fascism at home and regressive colonialism abroad.

The reports last week led to the Opposition’s renewed demands for concemnt by other reports again important issue affecting the shape of reports and statements calculus dishonesty on the part accompanied by a great amount of

Mr Wilson. So has the Prime Minis’ter. I have the Foreign Secretary to say he will table this report. It is highly relevant.

We are dealing today with an important question, the standing of Britain—(Conservative interrup’ions)—and we are not dealing in the small change of the petty minds of Conservative MPs.

These reports have been widely supported by others reports again accompanied by a great amount of detail. Circumstantial it is true, but circumstantial in the sense that unless one asserts total and complete unconsciousness, the part of the priests and others concerned, one cannot avoid giving a great deal of chapter and verse and going beyond the possibility of being monographing 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 missionar’ies, the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty and other independent observers. There has been reports in the overseas press of parallel atrocities.

Two Catholic priests had been held without trial for 17 months. They were not in custody. It was claimed that these priests had not been produced before now to say exactly what they saw.

The spokesman was prejudging the case (Conservative interrup’ions)—“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 Barren van Niekerk, Professor of Law at Natal University, Durban.

The reports in The Times (he went on) had been challenged. We have to form our own judgment of whether the matter of such moment for international re-lations as the standing of the world of Portugal and Britain, would not have printed these reports at such a time unless he had good reason to believe that (Conservative interrup’ions) ‘What is the reason?” and “You tel us what the reason is?”

We are dealing today with an important question, the standing of Britain—(Conservative interrup’ions)—and we are not dealing in the small change of the petty minds of Conservative MPs.

Even in the case of the investi-gation said to have been ordered by the Portuguese Government, and announced last weekend—what that would have been worth—yesterday they told 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 other 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 interrup’tions 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 these 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 complicity to fabricate the evidence to harm the Portuguese Prime Minister on the eve of Dr Caetano’s visit?

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

A case for prejudging a decision that a leave Portugal in the contemptible state of moral quarantine she shone for herself, would equally mean the transmutation into professional public perjurers—such have been made.

But more than that, unlike the colonial policy of Portugal, the 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 interrup’ions)

Wilson had been reponed in past months with the Portuguese authorities. 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 apply for any of us acceptance either of the nature of the regime in question or of acts in internal or international rights by that regime.

While we may abominate their political and social systems and the institutions of these states, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, the Portugal is not only a treaty partner of 60 or 70 years standing but is a member of the Western Alliance; she is a member of NATO.

But, more than that, unlike the colonial policy of Portugal, the 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 interrup’ions)

Had any MP been voting against the motion any confidence that the Prime Minister
Racialism

He knew Conservative MPs would listen to him in the House. They had shown that today. The House should draw a firm line on racial discrimination in Portuguese policy and from the Government's ceremonial commendation of that policy.

In Britain all parties were proud of the part they had played in the pro-West organization against the Britishness of a divided and isolated Portugal. He hoped the Prime Minister now felt there was more in (Mr Wilson) than he presented today than he showed when he lost his head last Tuesday. (Labour cheers and Conservative laughter.)

They knew Mr Heath to be a quickinger to anger and not over plentiful to mercy. One newspaper had compared him to Hitler as "the most dangerous of men." One would like to see (he said) and 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 black equality in Rhodesia for example and against Portugal's policy no.

Mr HEATH, Prime Minister (Beeston, C)—I have spent the last eight years fighting against racialism in this country. (Conservative cheers.)

One 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 and race and colour, occupy the centre of the stage, I suggest is both right and in our interests is, by every democratic and peaceful means, to attempt to help to international action, to provide a counterweight to the power of Portuguese Africa, and to support fighters for freedom against their oppressors. (Labour cheers.)

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 Mr Caetano's visit on the basis of The Times article. Some people would have been surprised that if hard evidence was produced the guilty would be punished. (Conservative cheers.)

The House would recall Vietnam when Mr Wilson would refer to it. They would also recall Nigeria. Mr Wilson would recall the wild statements, the untruths, the gross misrepresentations, the pocession of the Nigerien civil war which were later proved to be untrue.

Embarrassment sought

Mr Wilson did not jump to conclusions. Then we should not (he said).

Mr Wilson had not made this decision to jump on an anti-Portuguese bandwagon—Conservative cheers—and in favour of an alliance with other anti-Portuguese powers. (Conservative cheers.)

The Government believed they had nothing to lose by jumping on the Portuguese bandwagon. (Conservative cheers.)

Foreign policy and defence must not become matters of instant judgment. instant decisions, something still less to become a play thing. (Labour protests and 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 (Mr Heath's statement that Britain had real and substantial common strategic concern with the United Nations in the North Atlantic area. Britain had considerable trade with Portugal. exports to the three countries of eastern Europe which Mr Calhoun, Mr Callaghan and Mr Wilson was visiting at the moment. (Loud Conservative laughter.)

Whatever was taken of Portuguese policy in Africa. Portugal's policy in Africa was 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 jump on any anti-Portuguese bandwagon. (Conservative cheers.)