

Past quotations used against Labour leader

By Hugh Noyes
Parliamentary Correspondent
Westminster, Tuesday

18/7/73

The massacre at Wiriyamu seemed sadly not to be in the forefront of most MPs' minds today as the two sides of the Commons set about each other's throats with a ferocity that would have done credit to the wildest freedom fighter.

As the debate neared its end, with Mr Michael Foot, from the Labour front bench, bellowing across the table and Tory MPs hissing, yelling, and jeering back at him, it seemed that the Chamber was being transformed into an inferno of volcanic proportions.

The House had long ago polarized into two camps—those willing to accept almost anything evil of Portugal and the Portuguese, and those who would strew rose petals before Dr Caetano at every opportunity.

Mr Wilson set the tone of the debate on Mozambique when he delivered a number of hostages to fortune by calling, in effect, for Portugal's expulsion from Nato, an international cordon sanitaire around the shores of Portuguese Africa and for support for the freedom fighters, presumably Frelimo, "against their oppressors".

But whatever the rights or the wrongs of the Mozambique atrocity, there was no doubt that today it was Mr Wilson who was massacred.

To loud Tory cheers, Sir Alec Douglas-Home said that he hoped Mr Wilson's suggestion that Portugal should be thrown out of Nato was the same sort of promise that he had given when he had said he would revive the Nassau agreement.

Sir Alec went on to tell the House that from the reports received by the Government from Britain's representatives in the area, although there was evidence of clashes between guerrillas and Portuguese troops, there was no evidence of a massacre on the scale suggested. Then, with some of the most lethal quotations to have been resurrected for some time against the Labour leader, Sir Alec demolished Mr Wilson's great crusade.

"Portugal is, of course, an old and loyal ally within Nato. This does not mean that we support her policies in Africa", was Sir Alec's first quote from Mr Wilson in 1969. That was precisely the present Government's position, the Foreign Secretary told the House to loud Tory cheers.

As Mr Wilson sunk deeply into his seat, as is his wont when he is squarely in the sights of the enemy, Sir Alec brought the second barrel on to target. On the My Lai massacre just before a visit to the United States, Mr Wilson had said: "To suspend judgment on that is neither cowardice nor moral

evasion. I do not regard it as a right reaction to jump to premature conclusions about a friend and an ally."

That, repeated Sir Alec, also was the Government's position. "What kind of intellectual agility is it that allows him to make such an eminently sane judgment himself and then to denounce others who say precisely the same thing."

To add to Mr Wilson's discomfiture and the clear embarrassment of Mr Robert Mellish, Labour's Chief Whip, Mr Eric Heffer jumped up at this point to remind Sir Alec that many Labour MPs, whatever their leader had been saying, had been continuously urging Britain to have nothing whatsoever to do with fascist Portugal.

"I acquit Mr Heffer of double standards, but not Mr Wilson," the Foreign Secretary replied.

Inevitably, the role of *The Times*, as the first newspaper to print the massacre reports, was much discussed by MPs in both camps. Mr Wilson told the House that he believed that the editor in a matter of such moment would not have printed these reports at this time if he did not have good reason to believe them.

The contrary view was put by Mr Stephen Hastings, Conservative MP for Mid-Bedfordshire, who said he was not at all certain that *The Times* had sent anyone to corroborate this story. This would have been the established method of evaluation which should be known to the editor of any main newspaper.

Mr Wilson told the House that Labour condemned the whole lifestyle of Portuguese fascism at home and repressive colonialism abroad. Everyone must form his own judgment on the reports in *The Times*. These had been widely supported by other reports accompanied by a great amount of detail—circumstantial—but circumstantial in the sense that to reject them meant an assertion of total and calculated dishonesty on the part of the priests and others concerned.

Mr Wilson wanted to know whether the House was being asked to believe a proposition that the fathers of Burgos, other Spanish missionaries, Portuguese priests, the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty joined with the Committee for Freedom of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea had formed a conspiracy to fabricate the evidence to harm the Portuguese Government on the eve of Dr Caetano's visit. No one, went on the Labour leader, after the recent reports, could possibly justify either Portugal in Nato or the feting by Mr

Continued on page 9, col

Continued from page 1

Heath of the Portuguese Prime Minister.

From the Tory front bench Sir Alec argued that to have cancelled Dr Caetano's visit on the basis of *The Times's* article, which was at best questionable at second or third hand, would have been to jump to premature conclusions, to prejudice the case against an old and loyal ally.

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

It was left to Mr David Steel of the Liberal Party to make the most sensible suggestion of the day. The case, he said, was not

proven, but equally there was a case to be answered. The most important demand from the Commons should be for an independent inquiry by some impartial internationally respected body.

The Opposition motion on Dr Caetano's visit was rejected by 299 votes to 271. Government majority of 28.

Lisbon, July 17.—Dr Caetano's controversial visit to London took up a large part of the Lisbon press today but there was little official reaction or newspaper comment.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said Dr Caetano's visit, bitterly attacked by part of the British press and left-wing groups over the massacre allegations in Mozambique, "seemed to be going very well".

Of the demonstrations in London against Dr Caetano, he said there would be a lot of noise for a while, "then they get tired".

The spokesman shrugged off the British parliamentary debate on the visit, with a curt remark: "Portugal is one of Mr Wilson's phobias."—Reuter.