

a job which I consider to be fundamental. It is important to Parliament that it should continue to do that job.

Hon. Paul Martin: Honourable senators, I agree with what Senator Connolly (Ottawa West) has said and the assessment he has made of the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. I join with him in congratulating the members of that committee, and in particular the chairman, for the work they have done in their examination of Canadian-Caribbean relations and their current examination of our relations with the Pacific Rim.

I thought I should participate in this debate for a few moments, not only because of the fact that as a former Secretary of State for External Affairs I would be expected to have an interest, but also because in the absence of my colleague, the present Secretary of State for External Affairs, who is in Europe at the present time, I act in that capacity. So, on behalf of my colleague, as acting minister I should like to say that the Government considers that parliamentary committees such as this serve a valuable purpose. In the long period of time that I have been in Parliament there has been an outstanding complaint, sometimes justified, that the Government did not provide enough opportunity for the discussion of foreign affairs. Certainly when I was Secretary of State for External Affairs it was a charge often levelled against me as minister.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: Is it valid?

Hon. Mr. Martin: There was a valid excuse on most occasions. An excuse that can be offered by governments, frequently legitimate, is that today the Government's program is so heavy that it is not easy to find time in the other place for discussion on foreign affairs. It may not always be a justifiable excuse, but generally it is. However, in this chamber that excuse is not open to any one of us. It is not open to the Government, nor is it open to any individual senator. Since becoming a member of the Senate I have felt that one of the opportunities available to us is in constituting ourselves as a forum for the discussion of public issues both domestic and foreign. We have an opportunity that is not open to private members in the other place in either the domestic or foreign affairs field.

This does not mean that we have to resolve questions by vote every time an issue is raised. That is not the most effective way of settling a foreign policy question, but it is valuable in a free society that there be discussion of foreign affairs as a means of obtaining information, promoting self-enlightenment, trying to influence government policy, and participating generally in the great decisions affecting the world at the present time.

We therefore owe Senator Aird much thanks for initiating a foreign policy discussion today. It need not be only on the particular report he has launched. Perhaps it could be open to him and to other senators from time to time to take advantage of the Senate and to debate matters of importance and concern in this field. There are many questions that could be discussed: our relations

with the Middle East and problems affecting that area. Canada has a concern in such problems. Our interest in what is happening at Helsinki and Vienna regarding the strategic arms conference might also be a subject for discussion. We may not be a member of that body, but as a member of the 18-power commission on disarmament in Geneva we have a vital interest. What do we think about that kind of question?

Therefore I take advantage of this opportunity to suggest that regardless of the experience any one of us may have in a particular area—and all of us have had experience in one field or another—we owe it to our country to participate in public discussion of these matters, and there is no more available official public forum in Canada than the Senate. There is no upper house in the world that has the opportunity for discussion of these matters that we have.

Hon. Mr. Connolly (Ottawa West): Except the House of Lords.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Even in the House of Lords there are limitations. Although they have a good deal of discussion on foreign problems, as can be ascertained from an examination of their debates, they do have rules which are not as generous as those available to us.

An Hon. Senator: And they keep them.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Senator Aird has directed our attention to recent events evolving particularly in Asia, including the quiet diplomacy of a group of ping pong players from a certain North American country.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: Are you very good at that game?

Hon. Mr. Connolly (Ottawa West): Yes.

Hon. Mr. Martin: This is part of a development which, as Senator Aird has said, gives ground for encouragement that our outward looking policy may be developing. We have recently established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. This is an official stamp of approval on what has taken place during the past few days, and one which we hope is an indication of greater collaboration between that part of Asia and the rest of the world.

We say to the People's Republic of China that we recognize that this is a two-way street involving action not only by the Republic of China but also by other countries.

As Senator Aird has mentioned, we have as a member of this chamber Senator McNamara who, I suppose, has had more experience with commercial China than any other man in this country. I doubt whether many in the world, apart from those in some Asian countries, have had as much experience with the People's Republic of China as has Senator McNamara. I know of no greater service that he can render Canada at this time than in giving us the benefit of his rich experience as it affects past and future relations.

Senator Aird mentioned our relations with Japan. He referred to Japan as our third trading partner. It has