

*Statement on Commonwealth Conference*

Minister and the British government. This seems to me another disastrous application of the theory of quiet diplomacy, another example of irritating ambiguity which makes no one happy except the person who is determined to avoid forthright commitment.

I do not want to take longer than I have, Mr. Speaker, although all of the comments have been rather lengthy today, I feel the same way as the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) does about Nigeria—Biafra. I notice that the Prime Minister in reporting on that point today told us merely about the first undertaking of the Nigerian delegation in London to meet with the Biafrans without pre-conditions, but I presume because he has not yet been brought up to date he failed at the same time to remind the house that the leader of the Nigerian delegation in London had stated the next day that he would not meet with Biafrans to discuss any ceasefire, that he would only meet with them to demand their surrender. That was hardly a readiness to meet with the Biafrans without pre-conditions. I also echo the hope that the Prime Minister will pursue a little more actively than in the past the objective of peace in Biafra-Nigeria.

I believe in the potentialities of the Commonwealth precisely because it is informal, precisely because it reverses the attitude of the empire, precisely because it does represent so many parts of the world. But if the Commonwealth conferences in the future are treated by a leading government like that of Canada in the same innocuous and irrelevant way as was instanced in the last one, then I suggest to you that association in the Commonwealth will become meaningless and frustrating for many of its members; and I remind the Prime Minister and other hon. members that nothing leads faster to alienation and disruption than does frustration. I therefore hope our attitude will change in the future.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, may I say a word about the Prime Minister's report on his visit to Rome. I am sorry to have to carp about this without even expressing the hope that I don't sound carping. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) have made a great deal out of the fact that they seek to involve the people of

[Mr. Lewis.]

Canada in the review of international policies, and yet here is a very important step, an important step in terms of the Canadian community, and without any warning to the people of Canada, or indeed to members of this house. Without anything but indirect warning, apparently a decision is made and the Prime Minister goes to Rome and says we are anxious to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

It may be a very good idea; but I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that one of the reasons the Prime Minister is reported as having given for that step is certainly the worst possible reason one could present. The Prime Minister was reported to have said that just as we are interested in other French speaking countries, because we have a large number of French speaking people in Canada, so we are interested in some relations with the Vatican because we have a large number of Roman Catholics in Canada. I cannot think of a more irrelevant reason for taking an important international step. If it is useful to have diplomatic relations with the Vatican—as it well may be, because the Vatican is a good listening post and provides us with a good international association of value to Canada in our role in the world—then by all means let us have it, but not on the basis of religious division in Canada or across the world.

• (2:50 p.m.)

The Prime Minister was certainly in one of his less cautious moods when he made that statement, although I am not sure his caution makes me feel happy about the future of my country. Finally I say it is still not too late to have an involvement in this matter, to have participation, certainly by members of this parliament. I am beginning to suspect that the Prime Minister's talk about participation really amounts to an opportunity being presented to him to explain his position rather than a two-way participation; but it is still not too late.

In order to avoid the kind of divisive results which have plagued the unity of our country for so long in various ways, and in order that the step of establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican may be made on the correct basis without divisive repercussions in Canada, I appeal to the Prime Minis-