

External Aid

would have to base our judgment on many non-governmental and non-Canadian sources for such information. Therefore, I would question also the provision in clause 5 of the bill which provides for obtaining the opinion of the International Commission of Jurists, which is only one of a number of reputable non-governmental organizations interested in human rights matters. Not only would the reliability of its information be open to question, since organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists frequently are not allowed to enter a country where violations are alleged to be taking place, but more significantly, to rely on such outside information would be to place important Canadian government policy matters in the hands of others rather than to accept responsibility at the level of our own government.

The bill gives rise to other questions too. Domestically, who would decide whether a given country is to be listed as a prohibited country? Would the government be prepared to designate a responsible agency? Would this be the governor in council, such as the cabinet, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Jamieson), or a group of ministers? What mechanism would be established so as to enable a country once designated to be removed from the prohibited list? What would be the criteria? For example, would a statement by the government indicating that it would try to improve its record suffice, or would there have to be some kind of tangible improvement? Would this improvement have to be maintained over a certain period of time before a country lost its prohibited classification? Would a simple change of government be grounds for removal from the prohibited list?

In conclusion, we consider that the proposed bill, despite the good intentions which it is intended to further, would be a radical and possibly even counterproductive departure from present Canadian policy. It would make human rights violations not merely one relevant factor in our aid and export finance policy, but an over-riding criterion which would determine action regardless of other important Canadian concerns and interests, as well as the interests of poor people in the countries concerned.

Human rights is an area in which the questions as to what can be most effectively done in particular cases are many and the answers are few. We shall continue to do our best to respond to particular cases in ways which we hope will express our concern for the fate of persons under unresponsive and repressive rule, but we do not consider Bill C-204 a useful mechanism to that end. Consequently, because of the reasons I have enumerated, the government is unable to support this proposed legislation.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) for bringing this very important bill before parliament in order for us to have an opportunity to discuss it. According to the procedures which have been followed in the past, unfortunately hon. members on the government side obviously will talk the bill out, so that it will never get to committee and form the basis of something which is very important in terms of our behaviour in the international community.

[Mr. Robinson.]

Having listened to the previous speaker outlining his objections to the bill, it seemed to me that is a famous cry over there: although they are very concerned about human and civil rights, they are not prepared to take tough actions which show leadership in this particular field.

I do not understand why hon. members can make such arguments as the ones we heard this afternoon. I have looked at the precedents set in terms of Rhodesia. This country embarked on an embargo respecting Rhodesia. Government agencies, such as the Export Development Corporation, were very proud to declare, approximately two years ago in a committee which I participated in, that they do not offer loans to companies operating in Rhodesia nor to the Rhodesian government. That is because the Rhodesian government is not recognized. The fact of the matter is that it was recognized that Rhodesia is beyond the ambit of Commonwealth nations. It is outside the Commonwealth. That precedent has been set. Canada participated with other countries in taking action against a country which has a rather questionable régime. Apart from the illegality of the régime, it is a régime which practises apartheid.

There have been other experiences in the western hemisphere. For example, there was the embargo against trade with Cuba. The United States placed an embargo on that island, and of course forbade trade between the United States and that country as well as any other country in Latin America which was a member of the Organization of American States. Indeed, the United States even tried to influence Canada with respect to participating in the embargo. Very often through their branch plants, the embargo law was observed.

I should like to deal specifically with South Africa. Often hon. members of the House have said that we cannot interfere by judging the political morality of a regime. I agree with that. I have no quarrel with that. It is a very broad area, and it is a very subjective one. It depends on the viewpoint of the person who is judging. That is very, very true. The regime in South Africa is based on the principle that the black man is not the equal of the white man, that in the creation of man, somehow or other God made the black man a lesser being than the white man. Obviously that is a philosophy which every single individual in the House rejects. That concept is false and inhuman. It is similar to the entire question of what happened in Germany prior to the Second World War. Of course, we all know the results of that. At that time we rejected the principle of a superior race, as we do now.

So what is the problem? Why cannot the problem of apartheid be identified? Indeed, it was the action of the leader of the Canadian government which resulted in South Africa being placed outside the Commonwealth. I am referring to the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). In 1961 he was the prime minister of Canada. At that time South Africa was placed outside the Commonwealth. South Africa still enjoys Commonwealth tariff preference. The Commonwealth agreement with respect to sugar is still in effect. We still give them a premium price for their sugar, and it seems to