

Supply—Trade and Commerce

it may be a rather lengthy one. However, the opportunity to make these statements has not presented itself. Nevertheless I think the policy should be fairly clearly understood. This government is in favour of increasing Canada's trade. There is no doubt about that. This government—and I stated this at Geneva—favours remaining within the general agreement on tariffs and trade. We think that has been a good agreement and we are subscribing to it at the present time. With regard to other matters, this government thinks that steps should be taken toward increasing our trade within the commonwealth and diverting some of our purchases from the United States to the United Kingdom.

That, surely, is a distinct indication of the policy of this government. We do not want to see any restriction on trade. The hon. member for Rosthern was quoting from my statement just a few minutes ago in which I said we were not intending to interfere with trade with any country—again, a statement of policy—and he very fairly said this must mean that we are not intending to raise high tariff barriers.

With regard to increasing trade within the commonwealth several steps have already been taken. At the conference of prime ministers in London our Prime Minister raised the question concerning a commonwealth trade and economic conference. As a result of that imaginative point of view the finance ministers of the commonwealth assembled at Mont Tremblant to discuss whether or not there should be a trade and economic conference. That was the purpose of that gathering. There were some who doubted that agreement would be reached on that particular subject but by the time the conference was nearing its end there was unanimous agreement that a commonwealth trade and economic conference should be held next year. It is our hope that the conference may be held in Canada. Some of the preliminary steps for that conference will be undertaken early in the new year. That, I think, is an achievement with regard to fulfilling the statement of government policy.

There has been some misunderstanding with regard to the Mont Tremblant conference. I regret that my friend the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River and my friend the hon. member for Dauphin should have fallen into error with regard to this question but both of them have fallen into error. As reported at page 1974 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River mentioned the trade proposal of the Mont Tremblant conference from the British delegates and the hon. member for Dauphin in

[Mr. Churchill.]

speaking of the Mont Tremblant conference, as reported at page 1976 of *Hansard*, said:

—an offer was made by the government of Great Britain through its representative, and the Canadian government absolutely ignored that offer.

There were various press comments in which it was said that the representatives of Great Britain had come fully prepared and that the Canadians had not done their homework. Of course, all of this is just utter nonsense. The Mont Tremblant conference was called for the express purpose of determining whether or not there should be a commonwealth trade and economic conference. That was the matter under discussion and it was decided upon. No offer was made by the British representatives at Mont Tremblant. A press conference was held and questions were asked of a distinguished visitor from Great Britain and answers were given that related to a free trade area as between the United Kingdom and Canada.

Mr. Benidickson: With our Minister of Finance present, I believe.

Mr. Churchill: The Minister of Finance was there; I was not. Had I been at the press conference and had those questions been asked of me I would have been compelled to say in truth that I had no knowledge of any such offer. The rumour goes around that this offer was made, the Canadians were unprepared for it and consequently it was rejected. I say that is utter and complete nonsense.

There was also a conference held at Washington and four of the cabinet ministers from Canada attended there. We had a two-day meeting of frank and free discussion and although there were many problems bothering the members of the United States cabinet at that particular time they stayed throughout the two-day conference. Again in this case we have had statements to the effect that nothing was accomplished there yet anyone who understands the different constitutions of Canada and the United States would know that documents could not be signed under the circumstances. However assurances could be given and were given and the one in which I was chiefly interested and on which I still place reliance was the assurance that the United States in its surplus disposal program would not continue its barter deals which interfered so much with the sale of Canadian wheat last year.

Mr. Stick: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to interrupt the minister but he spoke about assurances that were given in Washington. Does the minister have those assurances in writing or were they just verbal assurances?