

External Affairs in Parliament

Statement by the Prime Minister

The following statement was made in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, on November 28 :

Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement commenting on one made yesterday in Paris by General de Gaulle. . . .

I said in my statement of July 25, 1967, Mr. Speaker, commenting on some earlier remarks of the President of the French Republic, that Canada had always had a special relationship with France, which was the motherland of so many of its citizens. I said we attached the greatest importance to our friendship with the French people; that it had been and remained the strong purpose of the Government of Canada to foster that friendship. I should like to confirm those words today. . . .

I do not propose to deal in any detail with General de Gaulle's statement of yesterday, a statement very carefully prepared and made to the press. General de Gaulle's statement will obviously arouse discord in Canada. I am sure the people of this country will be restrained in their response to it, as I am in mine today, so as not to serve the purposes of those who would disunite and divide our country.

I believe the statement distorted some Canadian history, misrepresented certain contemporary developments and wrongly predicted the future. This statement was not merely a commentary on Canadian domestic or foreign policies, which could have been ignored; it was an intervention in those policies by the head of a foreign state. As such it remains unacceptable. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, in this case it is intolerable that a head of a foreign state or government should recommend a course of political or constitutional action which would destroy Canadian Confederation and the unity of the Canadian state.

The future of Canada, Mr. Speaker, will be decided in Canada, by Canadians.

I have confidence, and I know all members of this House have confidence, in the ability and good sense of all Canadians, French-speaking or English-speaking, to make the right decision. They will do it in their own way and through their own democratic process. I believe this decision will require further constitutional changes to bring our federalism up to date and to ensure, among other things, that French-speaking Canadians who form one of our two founding cultural and linguistic groups, or societies if you like, will have their rights accepted and respected in Canada.

I agree also that the Federal Government — any Federal Government — should encourage and promote special and close cultural relations between French-speaking Canadians and France and other French-speaking countries.