

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO DEBATE  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford):** Mr. Speaker, there is a matter that I think will receive the attention of many Members of this House, and indeed the public at large in Canada, and that is the absence of a debate on the subject of foreign affairs. During the last few weeks, and indeed months, questions have been directed to the Government, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs particularly and on occasion to the Prime Minister, requesting that at least one day, and preferably two, be spent in debating foreign affairs. On every occasion that I can recall upon which these questions have been asked, the Government has given assurances that there would in fact be a debate on foreign affairs. The answer has always been "Soon", "Whenever appropriate", and the like. This situation has continued now for weeks.

A number of events have taken place in the world recently that have aroused the anxiety of the people of Canada, and the Government's replies to questions asked on orders of the day or at press conferences have not shed sufficient light upon Government policy in this regard. Indeed, the answers that have been given in this House and at press conferences on international affairs have been to say the least evasive, and certainly do not begin to give the public of Canada or the Members of this House a full picture of what is taking place internationally.

I should like to take this opportunity of requesting the Right Hon. Prime Minister to speak to his House Leader and the Members of the Government and try to set a day or preferably two full days, for discussion of foreign affairs. I am sorry to bring this matter before the House during the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who we all know is attending the spring meeting of NATO Ministers in Paris. Since this is the first opportunity we have had of raising this matter, I felt I should do so at this time.

Now, the questions in the field of foreign affairs that are causing great concern in this country are, of course, Viet Nam in particular and the general picture in Southeast Asia. In addition to that, in more recent days we have had a particularly explosive situation right on our own doorstep in the Caribbean, namely the state of affairs in the Dominican Republic. The general question of the relations between the Federal Government of

*Lack of Debate on Foreign Affairs*

Canada and the Republic of France has been of public interest for some time, and a few days ago was again aggravated. I shall deal with this in some detail in a few moments.

Over and above all these other matters, Mr. Speaker, the thing that is concerning the people of Canada is the general picture of our relations with the Government of the United States, our closest neighbour and presumably our best friend—at least, most of us regard that country as such. In this regard, I say again that we have not had a debate on this subject. It is true we had the Throne Speech debate, during which this matter could have been raised. However, it has not been the custom in this House to raise such an important matter during the Throne Speech debate. I again request the Prime Minister to speak to the Members of his Government and try to arrange a two day debate on this subject just as soon as possible.

I think, among other reasons, the Government would be greatly assisted by an expression of views from all Members in this House in the various opposition parties. In this way the Government would hear what the public at large think of Government policies, or the lack of them in some cases, with regard to foreign affairs, and particularly those situations to which I have referred. I cannot help but feel that the Government not only would be helped by receiving advice from Members in the various parties, but also that the Government might be assisted in many cases by being backed up in its policies by the opposition groups. I feel this would be very helpful.

Somebody has suggested, perhaps facetiously—at least I trust facetiously—that the reason a debate on foreign affairs has been delayed has been that the Federal Government and the Government of Quebec have not reached some agreement as to which Government is going to conduct the foreign affairs of this country. Perhaps that is the real reason, I do not know. In any event, I again ask the Prime Minister to give consideration to this matter.

The first trouble spot I mentioned, and about which the public are greatly concerned, was Viet Nam. The Members of this House would like a full and considered statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, if he should be back within a few days, as to just what is happening in Viet Nam. We read many newspaper reports and we hear all