

Statements by Ministers

Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) the tribute to what is, indeed, a remarkable and fascinating institution which was born in colonialism and dependency and has now emerged into full blown maturity as an association of free and independent countries able to share common concerns across a wide variety of different points of view.

Our commitment and dedication to the Commonwealth is important at this time in the history of the world because there are increasing signs of a retreat of commitment to the concept of multilateralism and internationalism. Various countries are retreating into forms of regional blocks, alliances, and continental associations. There is a diminishing support for the necessity of bringing the world closer together, not only in pure economic terms but in terms of communication. We see threats of terrorism. We see threats of the antagonisms which have grown up. We see retreat into the forms of preferred trading arrangements which do not allow for the entire scope of world activities to take place.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that the key issue facing the Commonwealth in the weeks ahead will be South Africa. The Secretary of State properly referred to the statements made by himself and by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) at Nassau and the United Nations. Opposition Members supported the intent and objectives of those statements. However, the clock is ticking. The six-month timetable which was set by the Government comes to an end in early April. At that time some very difficult decisions will have to be made. We will have to decide what kinds of very clear decisions we will make on sanctions and diplomatic representation. Thus far, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the contingency planning which would allow us to meet those commitments and timetables.

● (1110)

The Minister speaks of leadership and that is a very important quality which Canada has and should exercise in the Commonwealth. It means we should be bringing various countries together to look at what could result from the mass movement of refugees in the front line states around South Africa. We should be looking at the representations and responses which would have to be taken, not just in the Commonwealth but in the UN and other world bodies. In other words, the clock is ticking and the time draws near.

This Government should be preparing itself for a number of serious steps which will have to be taken. We know for a fact there has been no improvement in South Africa. There has been no change in the position of the South African Government regarding apartheid. There has been no substantial progress made. Therefore, when the deadline is reached, and it is in the offing, then we in this House will be forced to make a difficult but important decision to take the final step and tell South Africa we will not accept apartheid any longer, that this Government will take every action necessary to make sure it does not continue. We will provide the necessary leadership in the Commonwealth and elsewhere. There will be a time to stand up for principle, and action will certainly be more important than words.

I want to comment on one further aspect of Commonwealth affairs. It is prompted by the release on February 17 of the new proposals for economic co-operation in the Caribbean. We all recognize that the Caribbean is one area where Canada can provide the most positive kind of leadership and support for an important group of Commonwealth nations. The statement of February 17 falls substantially short of that. The exclusion of a number of important areas from the agreement does not represent the kind of commitment we would like to see this Government make. I hope that in next week's meeting between the Prime Minister and the President of the U.S., the Government of Canada will be very forthright and strong in its approach to promoting a much broader and more effective economic program for that part of the world and that part of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I need all the help I can get today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deans: I cannot even get started for the applause. I want to join with both the Minister and the Liberal Party critic in recognizing today as Commonwealth Day. As I prepared to say a few words on this subject I could not help but think that every year we rise and extol the virtues of the Commonwealth. Then 12 months pass and we rise again and extol the virtues of the Commonwealth. That may be a little unfair, but we do not pay as much attention to the Commonwealth as we pay lip service to our concern for the Commonwealth. It is time for Canada to evaluate very carefully the role it can and ought to play as leader in the Commonwealth. We have 49 states with a common bond. The bond takes on many different dimensions but it is exemplified in the movement of people around the world. There is within that movement a very close relationship between Commonwealth countries. In my own case, coming to Canada from Britain, the choices were quite narrow; you went to Australia or Canada. That was because of the Commonwealth tie. It was a sense that we belonged to the same family of nations. We had many similar if not identical standards in our daily lives.

In looking at the shifts which have taken place in the world, the one constant factor has been, at every international conference I have attended, that the persons who came most quickly and most closely together in seeking solutions to difficult problems were those of the Commonwealth. They always seemed to be able to find common ground. They came together in a group not to bully others but to look for solutions to international problems. As you travel around the world you find that in Commonwealth countries there is a tremendous amount of respect for Canada. If you were to ask people in the Commonwealth countries who they look to for leadership and guidance, almost without exception the name Canada comes up early, if not first, in the responses. We have to constantly bear that in mind because with that recognition goes tremendous responsibility. We have to be prepared not only to be a voice among many but to be a leading voice in seeking solutions to the very difficult problems which exist both within