

*Commonwealth Day*

government of consensus and consultation. Accordingly, I am not prepared to agree to the proposal put forward today.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

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**COMMONWEALTH DAY**

## OBSERVANCE OF ANNIVERSARY

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, today Canada and other Commonwealth countries encircling the globe are observing Commonwealth Day. It was a Canadian proposal made ten years ago at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Jamaica that one day should be set aside each year to mark our membership in this singular organization. The second Monday in March was chosen not to be a holiday but to be an occasion when most children would be in school and could participate in special projects to increase their understanding of the Commonwealth. Its continued vitality depends upon the interest and involvement of all of our citizens, but particularly of younger Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The United Nations has declared this year the International Year of Youth. The Commonwealth countries are planning to organize a number of special events, the main one being a gathering of young people from all Commonwealth countries who will be coming to Ottawa in June to discuss the challenges of the 80s.

The number of Commonwealth bursaries offered by Canada has been raised from 300 to 500. Since the program was established in 1959, when it was first suggested by the Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time, Mr. Sidney Smith, more than 20,000 Commonwealth students have been able to benefit from these bursaries.

Canada remains convinced that this program and other training programs are useful because our country sees the youth of the Commonwealth countries as a guarantee that the Commonwealth will remain in the same excellent condition it is now.

[*English*]

We live in an age, Sir, of hardening ideologies, of increasing economic disparities and growing cultural nationalism, yet the Commonwealth association cuts across all of these barriers. Its 49 members represent every geographical, political, economic and social group in the world. Nevertheless, it has many things in common; a shared working language, the heritage of common law and parliamentary traditions and, most importantly, the tradition of a frank and pragmatic approach to problem solving. The latter part of this century has been called the "era of negotiation" but it is witnessing a crisis in the world's multilateral system. We believe that the Commonwealth, with its special qualities, can be an example to other international bodies.

With this in mind, it is fitting, Mr. Speaker, that we commemorate this unique family of nations and reaffirm Canada's commitment to the future of the Commonwealth.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to join the Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) in stressing the importance of this anniversary for Canada.

[*English*]

As everyone knows, Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth is a very unusual association. In that organization are people of different cultures, different languages and different political orientations; yet when we meet at the conferences there is a sense of fraternity which is very useful. It is another forum where we can play a different role.

I am glad to hear the Right Hon. Minister speak about the Commonwealth as a valid proposition because Canada should not think only in terms of being more or less the fifty-first state of America. I just want to use this occasion to remind the Minister that it was not very pleasant the other day in London when, at the same time as the Commonwealth was toasted, one of the Ministers toasted the United States of America, and this was done in front of British guests. I believe the Commonwealth is something we belong to. We must make sure that we keep our position in the world and not become more and more close to the United States, losing our traditions such as our association with the Commonwealth and with the francophone countries. We must make sure that Canada keeps its proper and definitive role internationally.

I am glad that the Hon. Minister took this occasion to talk about this organization which extends to some students of the Commonwealth the opportunity to come into Canada and to learn here. That is not only good for them, it is good for us, because when they go back to their respective countries they are in a position to know more about Canada. Very often they become leaders of these nations and this helps very much to establish political, social and economic links with Canada.

● (1520)

I am glad the Right Hon. Minister took this occasion to make a statement. It is very rare that we have statements in the House. The Minister had a private press conference at 1.30 in his Department today relating to important commitments on national defence. Making this announcement outside of the House did not give us an opportunity to comment on the Government spending another \$100 million on national defence in Europe. I find it very awkward that the very day negotiations on disarmament are starting the Minister announces a greater contribution to defence in Europe. I think that when people start to talk about disarmament it is not the time to announce an increase in our contribution to armaments. But that will be for another occasion. I just want to tell the Hon. Minister that we would have liked to have an announcement in the House on national defence and external affairs too.