

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker. The position Dr. Head adopted was that which was expressed to the British government in a letter from myself to Prime Minister Heath several months ago. The purpose of the trip was to explain that position and to indicate that we hope that some accommodation can be reached within the framework of the Commonwealth which would permit each country to have, of course, jurisdiction over its own internal affairs but to make sure that its decisions were compatible, in so far as possible, with the maintenance and subsistence of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Lewis: Does the answer of the Prime Minister mean that, if some African members of the Commonwealth should so object to the British resumption of the sale of arms as to threaten to leave it, the Canadian government may change its position in the sale of arms to South Africa and find some compromise, or will we stand firm?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must point out to the hon. member that his question is hypothetical.

Mr. Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, Your Honour knows that the Prime Ministers' conference will take place in January and the Prime Minister of Canada will be out of the House at that time. What I am really seeking is information on the position which the Prime Minister and the government will take at the Prime Ministers' conference, and these are the final days on which the Prime Minister can be asked that kind of question.

Mr. Speaker: I realize that the matter is urgent and of national importance, but I was suggesting to the hon. member that his further supplementary appeared to be hypothetical. If I am wrong, perhaps the Prime Minister should be allowed to reply. I must point out to hon. members that the question period is moving along quickly, and if there are quite a few supplementaries at this time it will prevent hon. members on the back benches asking questions which they may want to ask later.

Mr. Lewis: May I rephrase my question, Mr. Speaker. At the Prime Ministers' conference of Commonwealth leaders to be held in January, does the Canadian government intend to stand firm in its opposition to the sale of arms to South Africa, or will it seek some kind of compromise?

Mr. Trudeau: When I go into a meeting of any kind, Mr. Speaker, I generally know the kind of results I would like to issue from that meeting. But I would not go so far as to say that I would go into a meeting, even the Commonwealth meeting, with a closed mind and not prepared to listen to arguments from all sides.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: If these arguments were to convince me that the position of the Canadian government was wrong, I hope I would have the courage to correct it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Lewis.]

PROPOSED SALE OF ARMS BY BRITAIN TO SOUTH AFRICA
—CANADIAN POSITION AND VIEWS OF COMMON-
WEALTH SECRETARY GENERAL

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I wish to ask the Prime Minister whether the position put forward by the Prime Minister's representative was taken after consultation with Mr. Arnold Smith, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, and whether the representations made by the Prime Minister's representative were fully consistent with the views of Mr. Smith?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the government has not made any attempt to make sure that Mr. Smith has any kind of veto over our position. If our position should be inconsistent with his, I am sure the House would not object to our having the right to express it. But if the Leader of the Opposition is asking whether we are in contact with Mr. Smith and aware of his efforts to assure the good health of the Commonwealth, the answer is yes. I have seen Mr. Smith and so had Mr. Head in the weeks preceding Mr. Head's visit to Africa.

PROPOSED SALE OF ARMS BY BRITAIN TO SOUTH AFRICA
—REQUEST FOR TABLING OF LETTER FROM PRIME
MINISTER TO U.K. PRIME MINISTER

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): I have a supplementary question in view of the rather unusual procedure regarding the letter written by the Prime Minister to the Right Hon. Edward Heath, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in connection with the problem in South Africa and the sale of arms. As this letter was leaked in Ottawa almost before it was received by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, will the Prime Minister ascertain from Mr. Heath when he is in Ottawa whether he has any objection to the tabling of that letter so that hon. members will know the exact stand taken by the Prime Minister of Canada?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the right hon. member would like to correct the erroneous statement that he made. If he checks the facts he will see that the letter was not leaked in Ottawa, as he stated, almost as soon as it was given to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Diefenbaker: When was it leaked?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Members of the opposition are applauding the right hon. gentleman because, when found at fault, he asks a question. I do not think there is anything particularly astute about this. I repeat that the facts as he stated them were wrong, and perhaps he would like to correct them.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not withdraw at all. The Prime Minister did something which he had no right to do in the interests of the Commonwealth; he sent a confidential communication.