

REPORT FROM THE HILL



The 34th Parliament resumed its second session on 3 April with the reading of the Speech from the Throne by the Governor-General. The emphasis was on the economy and trade, but a lengthy section discussed the environment and a smaller one, Canada's international role.

Middle East Changes

■ On 30 March just prior to Parliament's reactivation, the government upgraded its level of contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), repeating its support for Palestinian self-determination without recognizing the PLO itself. The decision permits higher-level Canadian diplomats (to the ambassadorial level) to meet PLO representatives. According to Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark, it will allow Canada to press the PLO to follow a moderate path and to foster peace negotiations. Mr. Clark noted: "There can be a difference between the right to participate in negotiations [about the future of Palestinians] and the right to have a separate, independent state.... We do not prejudice the results of those negotiations."

Parliamentary Committees

■ Parliamentary Committees were also reformed in April. The total number of committees was reduced, but those pertaining to peace and security issues were largely unaffected. The House Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade (SCEAIT) – its membership expanded by one to a total of fourteen (8 Conservatives, 4 Liberals, 2 NDP) – elected former House Speaker John Bosley (Don Valley West) as chairman. The House Standing Committee on National Defence also gained another

member to total eight and will now also cover veterans affairs issues. Alberta farmer and veteran MP, Arnold Malone (Crowfoot), was named chairman. During May both committees examined the government's spending estimates for 1989–1990 while preparing plans for more extensive studies later in the year.

The Senate Special Committee on National Defence also renewed its study of Canada's land forces, and is expected to conclude its work some time during the summer. The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee is pursuing extensive investigations of specific aspects of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement.

Patrick Boyer (Etobicoke-Lakeshore) and Jean-Guy Hudon (Beauharnois-Salaberry) were named Parliamentary Secretaries to the Secretary of State for External Affairs and the Minister of National Defence respectively.

Peacekeeping Activity

■ Three distant parts of the world were the subject of peacekeeping news early in April, all involving Canadian participation. It was announced that Canadian peacekeepers would fill the gap following the 4 April agreement between the governments of the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot communities to withdraw their soldiers from three observation posts in Nicosia, the most tense part of the buffer zone dividing Cyprus. The agreement marked the first military withdrawal by the two sides since the Turkish intervention on the Mediterranean island in 1974. The latest effort to reunify the island and end the impasse that has divided the communities since 1962 remains deadlocked.

On 5 April the governments of Vietnam and Cambodia invited Canada, Poland and India to form a monitoring commission to verify the withdrawal of the 50,000 to 70,000 Vietnamese troops remaining in Cambodia – troops Vietnam

claimed would be removed by the end of September – fifteen months earlier than previously promised. Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia began in December 1978 when its forces toppled the Khmer Rouge government and installed the present regime. Joe Clark said that Canada will consider participating only if several conditions are met, including confirmation by all parties to the dispute of their full support for an international peacekeeping force with a clearly-expressed mandate and a limited time of operation.

The most dramatic events concerned Namibia and the initial collapse of the ceasefire, between South Africa and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), which came into effect on 1 April. The government had agreed to send almost 250 Canadians in support of the one-year, 4,650 person UNTAG operation to supervise the withdrawal of South African troops from, and the independence process in, Namibia. Following the SWAPO incursion that set off the fighting, the Canadian government agreed to a UN request to hasten its troop deployment and provide additional air support for the entire UNTAG force.

On 12 April Defence Minister Bill McKnight rose in the House to deposit an Order in Council approving the deployment of the Canadian troops. Liberal External Affairs critic André Ouellet, while supporting the Order, criticized the Minister's silence about the actual situation in Namibia as well as the inadequate strength and tardy deployment of the UN force. External Affairs Minister Joe Clark had himself been critical both of SWAPO and of the UN for its lengthy debate over the costs and size of UNTAG, which, he said, had delayed the force from establishing a presence in Namibia before the transition to independence began.

(For more on the Namibia peacekeeping operation, see Report from the Security Council, page 14.)

Lebanon

■ On 20 April External Relations Minister Monique Landry addressed the House about the latest round of violence in the fourteen-year civil war in Lebanon. Joe Clark had already made a statement on 30 March calling on all parties to redouble their efforts to achieve national reconciliation, but Landry fleshed out the general expressions of concern with specific Canadian actions to assist in the emergency: continuing support for the mediation efforts of the Arab League Ministerial Committee, the UN Security Council, and President Mitterand of France; a special \$500,000 grant to the Red Cross for humanitarian assistance; temporary suspension of the deportation of unsuccessful refugee claimants back to Lebanon; and the dispatch of an immigration officer to Cyprus to handle additional cases.

Federal Budget

■ The government opted for fiscal restraint in a deficit-cutting exercise that had a major impact both on the Department of National Defence, which suffered a variety of cuts to defence programmes and to the Canadian International Development Agency which saw funds for foreign aid substantially reduced.

Previously, the government had set a target of 0.5% of GNP for official development assistance (ODA) and had promised to attain a goal of 0.6% by 1995. The budget reductions will mean that ODA will drop to 0.43% in 1989–1990, with the ratio increasing to 0.45% the next year. It also postponed the achievement of the 0.6% target indefinitely. The effect of these cuts on actual programmes will take several months to work their way through the system. □

– GREGORY WIRICK