

countries in a climate of sympathy, generosity and understanding.

The situation in Central America is a good example of the problem which may arise when the social and economic needs of the people are disregarded. The tensions and terrible disturbances which occurred in Nicaragua two years ago, which are occurring now in El Salvador, and which may occur in Guatemala in the near future are only early signs of what may occur elsewhere in the world if the international community fails to soon take the necessary steps to meet the economic and social needs of developing nations.

I was quite pleased when the Secretary of State for External Affairs started by placing the issue in the larger context of the social and economic situation in Central America, both during the March 9 debate on the situation in El Salvador and today. He was quite right in insisting that Central American countries are in a transition stage between traditional authoritarian regimes, with the people at the top hardly concerned about the needs of their people, and new regimes of a different type little known in that area of the world, where the people at the top are more aware of the needs of modern societies and more eager to meet present challenges.

Unfortunately, these regimes are facing innumerable difficulties. On the one hand, there is the opposition of the old guard as well as of the political and economic interests which stubbornly refuse to accept change or to look to the future, or at least appear unwilling to do so, and which try desperately, sometimes resorting to force or violence, to hang on to their old priorities and privileges. On the other hand, the left and the extreme left in their attempt to exploit the legitimate grievances of the people to promote their own political objectives, seem to hinder the reform process in order to take over and assume power on a wave of popular dissatisfaction. These new regimes are also exposed to outside factors, such as oil and energy prices and their impact on the price of other imported goods as well as the fluctuating prices of their main exports.

Mr. Speaker, in the course of their history, most of the countries of Central America have known long and painful spells of military dictatorship and social shortcomings for which they are now paying dearly. It is in those countries that the highest rates of overpopulation and the greatest instability are found. The lack of health care, illiteracy and malnutrition relegate those countries to the lowest ranks amongst nations, while population growth is perhaps the highest in the world. They are also up against unequal sharing of income, persistent agricultural problems, unemployment, illiteracy, and systems of income distribution that create wide gaps between the rich and the poor, to the extent that people in the lowest income brackets under present circumstances, may never see any improvement in their lot. The unrest born out of those needs is fostering internal pressures for change in Central American countries, as well as the abuses and violence which shock us so.

International Relations

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Canada has traditionally no close ties with the countries of Central America: as I pointed out, our interests there are rather limited. I am happy that we should have been amongst the first countries to recognize the pressing needs of that part of the world and that we should not have rejected the whole question out of hand under the pretext that we were simply dealing with a demonstration of East and West rivalry. I am also happy that the modest assistance programs implemented in the last few years and our trade relations are increasing.

If, as some Canadians advocate, we should increase our involvement in Central America in terms of aid, trade and other areas, the government will have to invest more financial and human resources to this end. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, as far as El Salvador is concerned, that I hope the voices of reason will prevail in that country torn by conflicts and that militants, both right and left wing, will cease their fighting, kidnappings and slaughter in order that the government of El Salvador can get on with the monumental task of ensuring social reform and securing political democracy.

● (1750)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes I have before we adjourn for the six o'clock dinner hour, I should like to discuss briefly one particular item and then, after the dinner hour, possibly two others. I want to vary somewhat the context of my remarks from those of most other members who have spoken today. I do not intend to talk about El Salvador to any great extent. I think the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent) and the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) have dealt with that issue adequately.

There are three areas I should like to touch upon. I want to inform the House, and through the House the country, of the work which is nicely under way in a special subcommittee on Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, a committee of which I am a member. Then I want to touch, also briefly because of the shortage of time, on the whole question of population and whether there is anything we, and I say "we" in the global sense, can do in terms of population. I also want to touch on the question of agriculture in the context of being able to feed the world as it will be between now and the year 2000, a world in which there will be over six billion people, as well as in the context of our relations with the Caribbean nations and Latin America.

The first matter I should like to speak to is the whole question of the recent committee that has been set up to take the first in-depth look at Canada's relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean. The committee has been empowered to look at all aspects of our relationship from immigration to trade, which is certainly the main thrust of our committee's work, and also the question of humanitarianism, and whether Canada as a country can, should, or has the wherewithal—the knowledge and expertise—to mediate, as has been suggested