

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 10, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMONWEALTH DAY

OBSERVANCE OF ANNIVERSARY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, today is Commonwealth Day and it gives me great pleasure to salute this remarkable institution. We are all familiar with the spirit of friendship and tolerance which so distinguishes this association of 49 states comprising fully one-quarter of the world's population. Its specific achievements are many, and we quite naturally think of the Commonwealth as an association where peoples from around the world reach across the great divides of religion, race, and economic and political philosophies to establish a commonality of purpose which draws on our diversity and is nourished by it.

Canada needs the Commonwealth and Canadians, by temperament, are well suited to playing a leadership role there. A nation's foreign policy is grounded in the needs, interests, aspirations, and talents of its people. We in Canada are fortunate to have two official languages and many different cultural and ethnic traditions. We have, against great odds, built a country which is second to none in its respect for the rights of others and, most especially, for the right to a life of dignity regardless of race, religion, or creed.

[Translation]

It is no accident that the Commonwealth so accurately reflects these fundamental values of our country. We were present when the organization was established, and from the very outset, Canadians have been active and energetic participants. More than any other multilateral institution, the Commonwealth has been shaped by Canadian values and reflects the driving forces behind our foreign policy.

Mr. Speaker, this country abhors the system of apartheid. It was John Diefenbaker who spearheaded the movement to expel South Africa from the Commonwealth, a spectacular act that sharply focussed the attention of the world, more than ever before, on this shameful situation. Last year in Nassau, it was again the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mulroney) who decisively influenced the Commonwealth Agreement on South Africa.

[English]

Going into Nassau there were many who feared that the South Africa question could damage the meeting, could perhaps damage the Commonwealth itself, beyond all repair. We did not share this pessimism. We have confidence in our traditional foreign policy skills and the ways in which those skills have served Canada and the Commonwealth so well over the years.

In Nassau we set a timetable for the dismantling of apartheid and the initiation of reforms. We established a group of eminent persons to facilitate dialogue and work for power-sharing arrangements that might avert a catastrophe in South Africa. That group is now in South Africa and Canada is ably represented by Archbishop Edward Scott in its deliberations.

The Commonwealth has been important to the pursuit of other Canadian foreign policy objectives: The transformation of Rhodesia to the new Zimbabwe, the growing acceptance of women as equal partners in economic and political life, and the efforts to move forward on north-south economic issues. In these and similar areas the Commonwealth has made significant contributions. Indeed, the success of the Commonwealth inspired much of the thinking which went into the hosting of the first ever Summit of Francophone Nations last month in Paris. We have great hopes that this francophone forum, too, will become an instrument for international understanding and human progress.

[Translation]

Canada's foreign policy is conducted through a complex series of bilateral and multilateral associations and institutions. To better understand this country and its position in the world, we should identify the means by which we pursue our national objectives in agreement with our allies and friends the world over. Our foreign policy is distinct because we have a unique network of international relations. Outside the Commonwealth, no other institution reflects so profoundly the way we feel about ourselves.

[English]

Canada has invited Commonwealth leaders to convene in Vancouver in 1987 for their next meeting. The invitation demonstrates our commitment to the Commonwealth, and the Vancouver meeting will demonstrate to Canadians the Commonwealth's attachment to and respect for Canada and the principles which guide this country in our activities around the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my own caucus I would like to share with the