

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 1, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

STATUS OF WOMEN

TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR CO-ORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT ACTION FROM MINISTER OF STATE FOR URBAN AFFAIRS TO MINISTER OF LABOUR

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to announce the transfer of ministerial responsibility for the co-ordination of government action on the status of women from the Minister of State for Urban Affairs to the Minister of Labour.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I am happy to report that the interdepartmental committee which was set up last spring has now completed its examination of the commission's report and is drafting its recommendations for cabinet consideration.

[Translation]

The study of the interdepartmental committee indicates that the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour covers a good part of the legislative action to undertake. For this reason, I asked the Minister of Labour to assume this additional responsibility.

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[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT ON BRITISH PROPOSALS FOR SETTLEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION OF RHODESIA

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, on November 24 the British government announced proposals for settlement of the constitutional position of Rhodesia. By now, hon. members will be familiar with the main features of these proposals which include provisions concerning the franchise and the composition of the legislature designed to give an increasing political voice to Africans, provisions intended to reduce racial discrimination, including a justifiable Declaration of Rights, a large development program, and a test of acceptability to be conducted by a commission appointed by the British government.

For the convenience of members I am prepared to table the British white paper containing these proposals which are complex and cover a number of interrelated procedures that must be completed before a settlement can be said to be secured.

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The reason I say I am prepared to table this document is that I am not sure whether it is proper to table in the Canadian House of Commons a white paper put out in Britain. If there is any question about it, I have copies which hon. members can obtain.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement that the Secretary of State for External Affairs may table the white paper to which he has referred?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Sharp: From the beginning, Canada has held that the solution in Rhodesia should be a constitution providing for the rapid election of a government broadly representative of the Rhodesian people, of whom the overwhelming majority are black. The constitutional arrangements which have been announced fall short of this objective. The period for the transition to majority rule is not specified and the means for achieving it are highly complicated. Given the past experience with complicated constitutional provisions in Rhodesia and in various other parts of the world, there is inevitably concern as to how these arrangements will be implemented. Much will depend on the good will and co-operation of all concerned—qualities not always evident in recent years in the conduct of the Rhodesian regime.

When I visited Africa last March I was struck by the fact that two great contemporary dramas were being played out on that continent. Southern Africa is the scene of one of the most crucial chapters in the world-wide search for racial equality and human dignity, and the scene of the final stages in the liquidation of the European colonial empires.

Both of these themes are found in Rhodesia. In seeking to provide equitable arrangements for Rhodesian independence, Britain has had to face the fact that the white minority is at the present time unwilling to yield power to the black majority and that British capacity to influence the situation is very limited. Even mandatory United Nations sanctions have not been sufficient to produce this transfer of power. The only alternative means of bringing about a radical change would have been the use of force, a course of action which has been judged unacceptable by successive British governments.

Mr. Godber, the British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whom I saw on November 27, gave me to understand that in the stalemate which has resulted such factors as the political stagnation for the Rhodesian Africans, the drift toward apartheid, the isolation of all Rhodesians from the outside world, and the distortion of Rhodesia's economic and social development, had led the British authorities to believe there were serious disadvantages to the perpetuation of the status quo. These were among the considerations behind the decision of the British government to make these propos-