

With time, of course, the incident has been slowly disappearing from the public limelight. But the misconceptions and repercussions created over the incident have been profound. As one intelligent minister in the area put it to me, as a lawyer he was bound to admit that the proper processes of the law had to be and had been followed, but as an individual he was also forced to recognize that because of human nature the incident would have in his judgment far-reaching influences in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

It is interesting to note that, in one of the islands I visited in the Caribbean, a black-power demonstration was organized against me and a sheet distributed containing charges of racial discrimination in Canada. This was, however, the only specific evidence of anti-Canadian sentiment I found during my nearly four weeks in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Another factor which led to our earlier difficulties was, of course, the Canadian handling of the sugar-rebate question. While I, of course, defended and explained the reasons for the Canadian decision, I admitted frankly both to the governments and to the public, as my colleague the Secretary of State for External Affairs himself has done, that we should have handled the issue perhaps in a more tactful way. The offer of the Canadian Government to extend the rebate payments during the current year was accepted by all of the sugar-producing countries and was regarded, I think, as evidence of our desire to respond constructively to their concerns.

Obviously, a number of points of view were put to me by leaders in the Commonwealth Caribbean, ranging from those who had originally understood that the rebate payments would be ended when a new international sugar agreement came into being to those who believed that the original Canadian offer made by the Government of Mr. Pearson in 1966 was open-ended and not subject to termination. By extending the rebates for the current year and by going through the process of consultation in which I have been involved, I am confident that a much better setting has been achieved for resolving this issue in a spirit of understanding on both sides.

A further contributing element to some of the misunderstandings earlier this year was a feeling of questioning in the Commonwealth Caribbean about the degree of interest Canada still had in the area. They were conscious that in Canada we have been re-examining the basic tenets of our foreign policy, and attempting to reappraise our relations with other areas such as Latin America or the Pacific Rim. I think I was able to explain that there was no diminution of Canadian interest in the region and, on the contrary, a heightened interest caused by a large number of factors such as our traditional and historical ties, geographic proximity, growing Canadian investment, our trading relations, increasing Canadian tourism, the growing numbers of first-rate West Indian immigrants coming to Canada, our expanding Canadian aid programs in the Commonwealth Caribbean, our new participation in the Caribbean Development Bank and many other factors. I think as well that the mere fact of the visit, and its demonstration that the Canadian Government was seriously interested in listening to any points of view which local leaders wanted to raise, did much to dispel some of the unfounded suspicions I have described.

In this context, I should like to underline the usefulness of the report on Canada-Commonwealth Caribbean relations prepared by the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs under the very able chairmanship of Senator