

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Robinson (Simcoe East) in the chair.

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

A—Department and missions abroad—

92. Departmental administration, \$4,379,430.

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): This is an occasion of which I shall take advantage to make a statement, which I hope will not be too long, on some aspects of our foreign policy.

At the beginning I should point out to the house that the committee on external affairs had a number of useful meetings, during which not only was careful consideration given to every detail of our estimates but there was also an exchange of views, in which I participated at four or five meetings, on policy matters generally. Therefore I have had an opportunity recently to discuss some of our policies.

Also in the house, in January last I made a fairly comprehensive statement on some of the major aspects of our policy. At that time I dealt more particularly with an analysis, in so far as we were able to make it, of the recent changes in Soviet leadership. I discussed the situation in the Middle East and also, at that time in January, the situation in the Far East.

So far as the latter subject is concerned, there has been no substantial change in the situation in the Far East since I spoke in January; nor has there been any change in Canadian policy with respect to it. That situation, particularly in and about the Formosan straits, remains potentially dangerous as long as two Chinese armies face each other only four or five miles apart, but it has not in recent weeks or even in recent months deteriorated.

So far as the situation in the Middle East is concerned, the long and bitter dispute between the state of Israel and its Arab neighbours continues. That situation, while still tense, has not—and this is as far, I think, as anyone would dare go,—has not grown worse since I talked about it last. Incidents, which continue on the frontiers and which are likely to continue in the present atmosphere, have not, at least, exploded into war. The United Nations secretary-general in two visits to the area has made a useful and constructive effort to lessen tension in that area, and by his intervention he has, I think, succeeded in strengthening the truce. I know that on the cease fire and the truce which he has helped to strengthen he hopes to build an arrangement which will be more permanent.

Supply—External Affairs

I think we can also pay tribute at this time to the activities of the United Nations truce commission in Palestine, in which several Canadian officers are now serving. That commission is playing a courageous and selfless part in difficult and indeed—as we know from the tragic incident of last week—often in dangerous circumstances. It is operating under the objective, patient and very efficient leadership of a Canadian, General Burns, whose work, I think, deserves the highest commendation on the part of all those who are genuinely interested in establishing security and a just peace in that part of the world. Certainly there is not peace there yet, for there has been no political settlement made between the contending parties. That must come if there is to be peace, because in the long run such a political settlement under the United Nations, rather than arms, will be the foundation of security for Israel and the Arab states.

In recent days a new situation—I was going to say “a new crisis”—has developed there in connection with the Suez canal. A sudden arbitrary move on the part of the Egyptian government has aroused fears that the right to use this international waterway in peace and war without discrimination may be prejudiced, a right which, as hon. members know, is guaranteed by an international treaty. Far more than the nationalization, or, if you like, the expropriation, of the Suez Canal Company is at stake in this matter; it is the future use for all nations without arbitrary or unnecessary interference of an essential international artery of trade and of communications, a waterway which was constructed by international agreement and with international co-operation and is now maintained and operated internationally.

As hon. members know, steps are being taken at the moment in London, by three powers very directly and importantly affected by the Egyptian decision, to bring about a satisfactory solution to this problem, the problem created by this action of the Egyptian government, by establishing some form of permanent international control for this international waterway, by which the legitimate rights of all countries can be protected. Until the results of this London meeting are available—and the meeting has not concluded yet—I think I should say nothing more about this matter, except possibly to express the support of our government for the principle of such international control, with the countries having the greatest interest in the operation of the canal sharing in that control, preferably, if this turns out to be practicable, under the aegis of the United Nations.