



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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A MAJOR TEST FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

A statement in the House of Commons on March 17, 1961, by Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker.

.... My primary purpose in rising today is to bring before the House something of the events of the last two weeks. The meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers began in London on March 8 and, as the House knows, I was accompanied there by the Minister of Justice and the Secretary of State, and was assisted during the Conference by the High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Hon. George Drew.

The Prime Ministers' Conference is a most unusual convocation. We sit around a small table with practically all the races of man and five of the leading religions, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Mohammedan, represented there. While during the discussions there are always disagreements in detail, there is that feeling that came to me as I visited the Commonwealth countries in Asia and Australia and New Zealand some years ago, a feeling that defies explanation or understanding. It is just impossible to believe that any of the members of the Commonwealth could ever be at war with one another.

Disturbing Elements

We met in an international setting not as dark as in May 1960, when the last meeting was held, but there are disturbing elements. While the Soviet campaign of vilification against Washington has subsided, and this is encouraging, there has been no sign of restraint in other ways by the Soviet leaders. They have relentlessly pursued Communist aims in countries as far apart as Congo and Laos. I am not going to deal today with the Congo, except to say that there the United Nations is on trial, and if it does not succeed in restoring law and order in that country the hopes and aspirations of mankind with respect to that institution may very well be diminished.

While all of us know the situation in Laos, those who live in Asia regard it as fraught with terrible danger.