

GABON—REPORTED STATEMENT ON REASON
FOR CANADIAN ACTION

On the orders of the day:

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether he has been informed of a statement reported to have been made by the government of Gabon, that the real reason the Canadian government has declined to establish diplomatic relations is that Canada is in default in our foreign aid commitments to that country. Has such a statement been made, and is Canada in fact in default with respect to foreign aid commitments?

Hon. Paul Martin (Secretary of State for External Affairs): No, Mr. Speaker, Canada is not in default in respect of any aid. Aid certainly is not an arrangement between countries. Aid extended by a donor country is something that is undertaken by the donor country on its own initiative, at the suggestion of other governments or the government particularly concerned. There is no contractual relationship involved in this situation. That is not the reason. By the way, we have not broken off relations; we have suspended relations with Gabon.

Mr. Fulton: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Was there any understanding with respect to the extension of aid on the basis of which Gabon might have concluded that it would receive aid which in fact has not been forthcoming?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): No, sir.

Hon. George Hees (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. Was the Minister of Justice expressing the view of the government last night in Quebec when he said that the Republic of France was behind the move by Gabon, and if France adopted a similar policy toward this country we should cut off our relationship with France?

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have nothing to add to what I said yesterday except this, that we do not make distinctions between large countries and small countries in these matters.

[Translation]

[Later:]

Mr. Gilles Grégoire (Lapointe): Mr. Speaker, further to the question put earlier by the hon. member for Kamloops (Mr. Fulton), I

Inquiries of the Ministry

should like to direct a question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin), in order to clear up a point.

Since, in its press release, the government of Gabon does not refer to any contract or contractual commitment, but rather to promises of economic, financial and technical assistance made to Gabon by the Canadian government, can the minister tell us whether such promises have been made and actually kept?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, the government has kept all its promises to Gabon and is ready to carry out its obligations to any country whatsoever.

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Speaker, may I ask a supplementary question?

Could the hon. minister inquire of the government of Gabon about the meaning of the sentence which accuses Canada of not having fulfilled its promises, and could he inform the house later on?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I think I have already answered that question.

Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the hon. minister to indicate to the house the objectives of the trip taken by Hon. Lionel Chevrier to African countries?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will recognize that the question has already been asked and answered.

Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct another question to the hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs.

In view of the fact that the Gabon incident has started a dispute between the Quebec government and the Ottawa government, can the minister tell us if he will meet the Quebec authorities in order to set forth a clear and precise policy on the foreign representation of the provinces and the central government?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I think that the answer is very clear, Mr. Speaker.

[Later:]

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the right hon. Prime Minister.

Does he intend to put before the committee on constitutional affairs instituted at the last federal-provincial conference, the dispute now existing between Ottawa and Quebec, and the Quebec representations on education and international affairs?