

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, July 16, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

BROADCASTING, FILMS AND ASSISTANCE TO THE ARTS

Second report of the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts in English and French concerning television advertising directed to children—Mr. Stewart (Cochrane).

[Editor's Note: For text of above report see today's Votes and Proceedings.]

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

KILLING OF TWO CANADIAN GIRLS WHILE VISITING VICTORIA FALLS—TABLING OF STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, in order to inform the House and the Canadian public of developments to this date concerning the death of two Canadian girls on the Zambian-Rhodesia border, I wish to table in both official languages, a statement on this tragic matter.

This statement sets out the facts of this tragedy as we know them. I wish to quote from, and thereby draw the attention of hon. members to, the conclusion of the statement I have just tabled:

The situation now is that our strong and persistent representations to the Zambian government have resulted in expressions of regret and apologies, which I have no doubt are sincere, and an offer of *ex gratia* payments to the families of the slain girls. We appreciate these indications of their concern. The Zambian government has not denied that the shots came from their guards but it has maintained that the sentry or sentries acted in accordance with their duty in the circumstances as they saw them. We do not consider that there is evidence of a threat to Zambian installations which would justify the prolonged shooting which resulted in the deaths of two innocent Canadian girls. As long as this major difference remains between our view of what happened and the view of the Zambian government, we cannot consider the matter closed. Our stand all along has been that it is the responsibility of the Zambian government to carry out investigations and produce explanations that will satisfy reasonable Canadian opinion.

That is the conclusion of the quotation from the statement I have just tabled. I have instructed our High Commissioner in Lusaka, Mr. Broadbridge, to present the text of the statement I am tabling to the Zambian authorities.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank the minister for giving me a copy of the state-

ment that he has just tabled. It is primarily a summary of events. I think my first words to the minister and his department would be that they have taken altogether too long in making this statement and, secondly, that the whole matter seems to have been handled with a lack of promptness from the very day it happened. There seemed to be great delay in finding out the cause of this tragic situation. However, we are glad that the minister has seen fit to tell parliament and the Canadian people the facts as they are known at this time.

The department cannot escape criticism for its failure in extending courtesy and assistance to the Drijber family who wanted to go to South Africa, Rhodesia and Zambia to do everything possible in the hope that their daughter might still be living and also in the hope, if she was not, that they might be able to find her body. In this connection, the department suggested, or in plain language told them, that they should not go. When they did go, the representative of the Department of External Affairs did not meet them at the plane in South Africa. These poor, stricken people arrived in South Africa, but were not met by anybody from the department, although I am told that our closest representative is within 30 miles of the airport. It seems to me that the officials should be severely reprimanded for not having been there to have met Mr. and Mrs. Drijber at the plane.

The matter of the envoy was mentioned in this House without naming the envoy. This immediately created an area of suspicion. Why was the envoy's name not given? It turned out to be Dr. Phillips, Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Windsor, a man who had been for seven years an adviser to the President of Zambia, Dr. Kaunda. Naturally, he would go there with a rather prejudiced opinion. However, he was sent with only one mission and that was to express Canada's concern about this whole tragedy. He was not given terms of reference which would allow him to explore the circumstances and get the true facts. He returned here without the facts. For the life of me, I do not know why an envoy was sent with such narrow terms of reference.

I would think that the fact the matter, which is so important to me and I am sure to the families of these two girls, is not closed would cause the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) to take the opportunity to discuss it further with President Kaunda when he is in Canada attending the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference and at that time get a first hand report. But, Mr. Speaker, it seems a very, very strange way to handle a situation in which a country kills two nationals of Canada in cold blood, innocent girls. On the one hand they say they are sorry and, on the other hand, they take a million bucks from us. It seems a very strange way indeed to handle this whole situation.