

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Webb in the first place. This man gave dedicated service in the two years he was in India. During that time he contracted a tropical disease and was very ill, but he stayed in India, met his obligations and complied with the regulations with one very minor exception, namely that he was asked to surrender his passport and declined to do so. I do not blame him at all for this; in my opinion he was quite right.

Our high commission in New Delhi say that they do not believe there is anything more they can do. I could quote a very long paragraph in a letter from the head of the consular division in which they suggest reasons why they cannot do anything more. I am not personally prepared to accept those reasons and I know that Mr. Webb is not prepared to do so. I feel we have to see that the shabby treatment of this Canadian citizen is rectified, and what I am asking now is that the Secretary of State for External Affairs deal with this matter personally and at the highest level to see that justice is done.

Mr. D. S. Macdonald (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, my first words, after the account given by the hon. member, would be to confirm what he has said. I could tell by listening to the facts recounted by the hon. member that they are the facts as I understand them, and I think I can confirm them. The second observation is a personal reaction of sympathy with this case and the loss that this man has suffered. Mixed with that personal feeling of sympathy is one of disappointment, that after the hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance made available to the government of India by Canada since the Colombo plan started, that country should have failed to make amends to a Canadian ensnared in a maze of petty officialdom. That seems to have been an act of folly on their part. Actions of this kind toward Canadians make the role of the friends of India in this country, and I consider myself to be one, all the more difficult, particularly when a grievance is brought forward by an hon. member like the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. MacRae), who in my experience has been noteworthy in this house for his balance and fairness in debate.

● (10:20 p.m.)

All that being said in a personal vein, perhaps the only further answer I can make at this point in an official capacity is that the government of India has now made its decision. On behalf of the officials of the Department of External Affairs I think I can say with some justification that they have exercised all possible efforts on behalf of this man. At an advanced stage in the transactions referred to by the hon. member the high commission in New Delhi was consulted by Mr. Webb and the high commission immediately contacted the State Bank of India, the entity involved in this transaction, on Mr. Webb's behalf. As a result of the request by the high commission and, we can presume, representations made by them, the State Bank did treat this as a special case, waived the normal requirements of Indian law and authorized payment to Mr. Webb. Unfortunately, by the time this took place the axe of devaluation had fallen or was on the point of falling. The high commission then intervened further on Mr. Webb's behalf, specifically pointing out that the cheque should be paid at the pre-devaluation rate and that the delay was not Mr. Webb's fault. A negative decision by the State Bank was then appealed to the Indian ministry of finance, which ultimately refused the relief on the ground that it was force of circumstances rather than bureaucratic neglect which was the reason for loss.

In summary, from April to October in the year just completed the high commission intervened on Mr. Webb's behalf at different levels on every occasion when the opportunity presented itself, but received a final negative decision.

Perhaps I might point out that in dealing with foreign sovereign states the government of Canada can ask but it cannot demand. In the circumstances it must be the decision of the government of India whether or not it will make an *ex gratia* payment. However perhaps the representations made by the hon. member this evening may ultimately reach the attention of the government of India, which may possibly have a change of heart. I can assure the hon. member that his particular words will be drawn by me to the attention of the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Motion agreed to and the house adjourned at 10.25 p.m.