

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, surely my hon. friend will recall the events that led up to the Commonwealth meeting in Vancouver, and the leadership that the Government of Canada and the people of Canada provided, notwithstanding some ferocious attacks from other quarters. We stood firm in the view that I enunciated on behalf of the Government many years ago, that apartheid was an evil and would be resisted and fought by the Government of Canada at every opportunity and in every circumstance.

This was followed up by a tangible accomplishment. It was not a perfect one, but a tangible one, when the Secretary of State for External Affairs went to southern Africa and met with the leaders of the Front Line States. He is now the Chairman of the Front Line States Foreign Ministers Conference in regard to dealing with apartheid and the tangible measures that can emerge in order that we may be helpful to those suffering under apartheid.

We have retained clearly as an option the severance of all relationships with the Government of South Africa. The Secretary of State for External Affairs, I, and my colleagues continue to believe that, at the moment, we can be of more and greater help to those being oppressed in South Africa, namely, the black majority, by retaining the types of initiatives that we are implementing. Once we sever relations, we cease to be a player.

For example, I point out to my hon. friend that the Secretary of State for External Affairs was capable of indicating Canada's unique and helpful role by, within 24 hours, meeting in southern Africa with the leaders of the Front Line States and in Pretoria with the Foreign Minister of the Government of South Africa.

While dialogue remains possible, we believe it can be helpful to the black majority. We will continue to fight for black majority rights in South Africa.

REQUEST FOR IMPOSITION OF TOTAL SANCTIONS

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister describes reactions that were appropriate to a different time and a different set of circumstances, a set of actions premised on the notion that it was possible to bring the South African Government to the table to talk to the representatives of the black population.

Does the Prime Minister not recognize that those days are ended, that the South African Government has pronounced to the entire world that it will not speak to the legitimate representatives of the black population there, and that no further progress can be made unless a clear message is given by this Government that this type of refusal to deal with the appropriate representatives of the majority will not be tolerated by the imposition of those economic sanctions that the Prime Minister stood before the UN and said that he would impose if there was no progress? It is about time.

● (1430)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend says: "It is about time". He may be

right. He is making a value judgment on a very complicated, explosive situation.

If he cares to go back even further than the Vancouver conference in regard to Canada's role, Canada was instrumental at the Nassau First Ministers' Conference in constituting the Eminent Persons Group and causing that group to initiate dialogue, very hopeful dialogue in the view of most world leaders, in southern Africa.

I agree that the actions taken at that time, arbitrary and pernicious actions by the Government of South Africa, undermined this, I think quite noble, attempt at dialogue to bring about peaceful change in South Africa.

We have encountered, it is true, more obstacles than I would care to count, and we have had more disappointments than most people should be asked to bear, particularly the majority in South Africa. However, I think the signal which is coming from many of them to Canada is to continue this initiative to see if we cannot engage in that dialogue. If we cannot be helpful in a definitive way, then of course we will not hesitate to take what we believe to be the solution at that time, namely, the severance of relations.

We are receiving counsel and advice from people friendly to this proposition in South Africa to attempt to maintain dialogue at this time. We always reserve the right for the Parliament and the Government of Canada to sever relationships if required.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

FRENCH IN THE WEST—OPPORTUNITY FOR A REFERRAL TO SUPREME COURT

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. In fact, he was expecting it. I waited for him Thursday and Friday, so today's the day. My question is about the Supreme Court decision concerning the Province of Saskatchewan which, as we all know, will have to translate all the province's statutes passed since 1905. The Minister is also aware that I asked a question Friday about an alternative, namely, the province could proclaim itself bilingual by adopting a statute that would make it unilingual.

My question to the Minister is this: To avoid any misunderstanding or situations that might be very difficult indeed, and considering the Supreme Court's decision affecting Saskatchewan, is the Minister prepared to make a reference, asking the court to make a similar decision with respect to Alberta, which, as we know, was carved out of the same Northwest Territories and is the subject of an identical or almost identical Act?