

Inquiries of the Ministry

would find there a suggestion that in the second stage there should be a wider conference called to which all nations with significant military power would be invited.

DISARMAMENT—CANADIAN ATTITUDE TO FRENCH PROPOSALS AT CONFERENCE

On the orders of the day:

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs if the six principles proposed yesterday by the representative of France in the ten power disarmament committee as a necessary foundation for a disarmament treaty, and which have been accepted by the Soviet union, have been accepted by Canada?

Hon. Howard C. Green (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I have not had a report from General Burns as yet. I understand that Mr. Moch was in fact speaking for all of the five western countries when he made that proposal, and the reaction to it seems to me a very hopeful sign.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Will the minister say whether or not those six principles which were outlined in today's press were put forward by France with the knowledge of the government of Canada?

Mr. Green: I cannot give a definite answer to that, but I presume they were.

COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS

SOUTH AFRICA—STATEMENT ON APARTHEID POLICY

On the orders of the day:

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): May I ask the Prime Minister if he is now in a position to report on the situation in South Africa.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): I have received a report from the high commissioner in Capetown. While, of course, the hon. gentleman would be the first to aver that I cannot refer to the contents of the report, I can say that it indicates that there are, and will be, widely differing interpretations of why and in exactly what circumstances the incidents took place.

The house will be aware that the South African government has taken steps to institute judicial inquiries into the tragic happenings, and I understand that the formation of a larger commission to investigate the background of the various contributing factors is under consideration by the Union government.

[Mr. Green.]

This government is fully aware from questions asked in the house, from press comments, and from correspondence which has been received, that there exists in Canada a profound current of anxiety at the measures which the South African authorities considered it necessary to take. I have already made it clear on numerous occasions that the government has no sympathy for policies of racial discrimination and that we deplore the development of a situation which has given rise to such tragic violence and loss of life.

There have been requests that some positive action should be taken by the government. We understand the sincere feelings and motives which have prompted these suggestions.

However, as to the suggestions themselves, the government must have one over-riding criterion in mind. The important consideration is not whether any action or statement by Canada would relieve Canadian feelings, but what practical effect such action or such a statement might have in South Africa itself. In other words, we have a responsibility, and a solemn one, to reconcile the natural desire in the circumstances to demonstrate by positive action Canadian feelings of distress and, on the other hand, the necessity of ensuring that any such statement or action would help, and not hinder, those people who so strongly merit sympathy and concern.

The weighing of these considerations is a responsibility which rests on the government alone, and in no sense do we seek to evade it. The conclusion of the government is that at this time no beneficial purpose would be served by diplomatic protests or by even more extreme measures to intervene in this tragic situation.

I might add that in the last two days an announcement was made in the parliament of South Africa by the prime minister that he intends to attend the prime ministers' conference in London in May. In 1957 the then prime minister found himself unable to attend. The fact that the present prime minister will attend is a circumstance which, I am sure the house will understand, will ensure that the feelings of the various component parts of the commonwealth can be properly made known.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Prime Minister in the light of what he has just said whether he is in a position to comment on a press report to the effect that he informed a delegation of the national federation of Canadian university students, when he received them on Wednesday last, that he was opposed to taking too strong a stand on