

Supply—External Affairs

It may well be that a Canadian student in, let us say, an Asian country of the commonwealth will not learn as much about high level bridges as he might in some other commonwealth country, but he will perhaps learn a good deal about building bridges of understanding, and I am sure that is one of the purposes which the government had in mind when they encouraged this development.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for what he has said about this vote. A great deal of thought was given to this enterprise before it was launched at the commonwealth trade and economic conference at Montreal.

I do not think it would be amiss, in referring gratefully to his memory, to recall that the Canadian position at this conference with regard to the enterprise we are now considering was put forward by the late Hon. Sidney E. Smith. It was a project which was very dear to his heart. I do not need to remind the committee that he had taken a very active part in higher education in Canada and in developing the concept of the value of exchanges in the educational field between the different countries of the commonwealth.

The United Kingdom took a leading part in sponsoring this proposal. Lord Home, the secretary of state for commonwealth relations, spoke for the United Kingdom on this subject and it was, I think, as those of us who were privileged to be present will recall, one of the high points of the conference. Some of the expressions which came from the representatives of the colonial territories in relation to this plan would have warmed the hearts of all hon. members had they been present to hear them spoken. High hopes are held concerning this commonwealth scholarship scheme, and it may be that over the years students will enjoy benefits as a result of this plan which will enable them to devote to the service of their countries in the commonwealth talents and training which will be of very great value to the people of all parts of this family of nations.

Mr. Argue: I wonder if the minister could say whether any thought is being given to an extension of this plan or to a new plan of a similar nature for an exchange of students with the French community as an appropriate way to recognize the bilingual nature of our country as well as the desirability of such a plan and the further advantage of improving our relations with that community.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): This is, of course, a commonwealth plan. No suggestion has ever

been made that there should be an extension of this plan to include countries outside the commonwealth. As far as a separate plan is concerned as between Canada on the one hand and the French nations on the other, I have not heard of any suggestion of that nature as yet.

Mr. Argue: Although the minister has not heard of it, I have made this suggestion on a number of occasions. The minister will be pleased to know it was given an excellent response in the French language newspapers of this country and a number of impressive articles have subsequently appeared supporting the idea. I commend it to the minister and to the government for consideration.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Thank you.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I think the committee would like to be reminded that this is not exactly a new idea. There were a great many blocked funds after the war and under the aegis of my hon. friend, the Leader of the Opposition, they were used for precisely this purpose not only in France but in many other countries of Europe.

(Translation):

Mr. Dorion: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a few remarks on this item.

I believe that student exchanges within the commonwealth are an excellent thing and that, because of them, we may reach better understanding and closer relationship between commonwealth countries.

Equally excellent, at least in part, are the suggestions of the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue). There is such a thing as "l'Union culturelle française," which is not a government agency but which has a similar purpose among French communities or French groups scattered throughout the world.

Besides, I believe the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) has already received with great cordiality a delegation from that organization.

I do not know in what form something similar might be provided for the people of French language and culture, who represent no less than a third of Canada's population. However, knowing the extremely friendly feelings of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fleming) towards our ethnic group, I should be extremely happy if he could find a way to give equal opportunities to Canada's French-Canadian group. Perhaps, for instance, something similar might be attempted within