

remind honourable senators that we are talking about an organization of 46 nations. Does anybody really think that, over that period of time when literally hundreds of wars, large and small, were fought, the existence of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had no peacekeeping effect? Had there been no Commonwealth organization, how many of those 46-member nations would have resorted to violence, to military antagonism and hostilities, against one another?

To return for a moment to Canada's role in this organization, the fact is that, rightly or wrongly, Canada is expected to provide leadership. The views and feelings of the Canadian people, as expressed by the Canadian delegates to conferences such as the one I have been talking about, carry enormous weight and influence around the world. For Canada to opt out of its moral responsibility—and that is what it is—would be an act of cowardice, and, indeed, would be a supreme act of irresponsibility.

Honourable senators, I have often paid, and continue to pay, tribute to the dedication of many members of the media. I cannot help thinking that very often commentators and editorial writers on these subjects work from a basis which essentially is either malice or profound ignorance, or, I suspect, a combination of both. At this time of economic and political turbulence, Canada cannot afford to ignore its overseas friends. Let us not panic because we are passing through difficult times. We have had recessions before, and we shall have them again. The world did not end on previous occasions, and it will not end this time.

● (1540)

We have to remind ourselves that we are still one of the most fortunate countries—perhaps, in many ways, the most fortunate country—in the world, and what that really means is that our responsibility to the less fortunate areas of the world is proportionately great.

Hon. Martha P. Bielish: Honourable senators, Senator Rowe capably presented an overview of the Twenty-eighth Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference held at Nassau in the Bahamas in October of this year. He also mentioned that eventually a verbatim report will be available. However, perhaps I may be permitted to make a few comments and observations, since I was honoured to be part of the Canadian delegation and to have the opportunity of hearing the views of parliamentarians from other member countries of the Commonwealth, and to participate in the discussions, both formally and informally.

Senator Rowe's contribution in a plenary session on the topic "The Freedom of the Individual, Human Rights and Responsibilities, and the Authority of Government in a Parliamentary Democracy" was well received by an interested audience. In his remarks Senator Rowe referred to the patriation of the Constitution and spoke about the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In this chamber I represent the opposition party, and I will present a few of the highlights from the point of view of a member of the opposition. Some countries within the Commonwealth have a one-party system and expressed the view that an opposition was not necessary; that their system of government was operating satisfactorily.

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Olson agrees.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Stand up and take a bow.

Senator Bielish: I thought that would make someone happy. The session dealing with the subject "The Role of the Opposition in a Parliamentary System" was addressed by the Honourable Ron Huntington representing Canada. There were several references to his speech being an excellent one and he received enthusiastic applause. In his usual modest manner, he commented that his remarks were the result of a number of years of first-hand experience.

What I have said may suggest to honourable senators both the serious nature and friendly atmosphere that was evident throughout the conference. The agenda included seven half-day plenary sessions and two half-day panel discussions. I will list the topics, and honourable senators will see that they ranged over topics not only of concern to the Commonwealth but also to Canada, bearing in mind Canada's place in the world. The first plenary session dealt with World Peace and Development, and then followed: The Security and Future of Small Countries of the Commonwealth; Approaches to Unemployment; The Freedom of the Individual, Human Rights and Responsibilities, and the Authority of Government in a Parliamentary Democracy; and Development of Alternative Energy Resources. The latter subject took the form of a panel. There were two panels held at the same time and the subject of the second was Parliamentary Privilege with Special Reference to Confidentiality.

Further panels dealt with Population Control and Preservation of the Environment with Special Reference to Wildlife. Other plenary sessions dealt with Parliament and the Scrutiny of Public Finance; The Role of the Opposition in a Parliamentary System; and Parliament and the Executive.

At the time of the conference the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the Association took place, and also the election of officers.

The topics discussed by parliamentarians of member nations of the Commonwealth, and the exchanging of ideas and experiences; learning of their successes and setbacks; seeking solutions to problems that beset countries both large and small, be they developed or developing, is what the CPA is all about. There are those who would heap criticism. Honourable senators may judge for themselves.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, as no other senator wishes to participate, this inquiry is considered debated.

The Senate adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.