

Statement on Commonwealth Conference

And, speaking of the great cause of peace in the world, he added:

Your country, Mr. Prime Minister, is basically a pacifist country, and we like to think that it will continue, under your leadership, to bring with authority its precious contribution to so vital a cause to the future of humanity.

After this most cordial interview, I also had the pleasure of conversing with the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, Mr. Mariano Rumor, and several of his ministers.

Together, we reviewed the international situation. We also talked about the relations between Canada and Italy. In this regard, we noted the real progress that has been accomplished in the last few years, and we expressed the hope that this progress will continue.

That, in brief, sums up that day in Rome.

[English]

• (2:20 p.m.)

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I wish to begin by saying we all welcome the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) back. We missed him—except I do not think he was ever really very far from sight. I could report to him on the pace of legislative achievement in the house during his absence, but I am sure this would be unnecessary. Undoubtedly he has spent the past week end in his usual blameless way, curled up in front of the fire with a copy of *Votes and Proceedings* before him, and by now he is well informed as to what has transpired here. By now he is up to date, at least in this sense of the phrase. Possibly, even trendy. In any case, I venture to speak on behalf of parliament and the country in saying how pleased we are that the Prime Minister is back safe and well.

I am pleased, too, that he found the conference useful. However, I do feel it necessary to speak quite frankly here on occasions such as this, because I think we must be frank. Parliament and the country have to consider in a very serious way what has transpired in the course of this conference, and I think the country has the impression, as I have the impression, that never in the history of the Commonwealth has Canada made a contribution less important and less useful than has been made by the Government of Canada in connection with this conference. I do not think any leader of the opposition has ever had occasion in the past to reproach the government of this country in any way in this connection, and, if I may say so, I hope it will not be necessary again. None of us in my party—and I think this applies to every

[Mr. Trudeau.]

informed person in the country—is under any illusion as to the difficulty of arriving at a consensus among members of the Commonwealth at this conference; but there are things which should be said.

The Prime Minister has spoken about the usefulness of this organism, the British Commonwealth of Nations. The Commonwealth exists as a unique world organization—I refer to it as an organization. It is multi-racial, worldwide, embracing, as the Prime Minister said, about a quarter of the population of the world, bringing together both established and emerging nations of varying views and colours. The Commonwealth has helped maintain international order and understanding and has helped to reduce international tension in the past. Any international organism or institution, whatever one might choose to call it, which serves as a bridge between the races on a worldwide basis is surely of great value today. It has a potential for good both in the present and in the future—I am speaking here in terms only of its minimal potential and not in terms of tradition—and to that extent it is well worth using, well worth preserving, well worth strengthening.

Canada, in the past, has played a leading role in that community. I think it is quite clear that other members of the Commonwealth are disappointed in the lack of Canadian leadership last week. It would not be surprising if there had grown among other members of the world community a concern that Canada might similarly abstain from other international responsibilities that she has heretofore assumed.

While we welcome some of the structural improvements in relations between Commonwealth members to which the Prime Minister has referred, we must recognize with regret that these were due to the initiatives of others. There seems little doubt that the negative attitude of Canada in abstaining from the responsibility of leadership has contributed, I fear, to a weakening of the Commonwealth, and I fear a weakening of its importance as an institution or organism in the modern world.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge the truism that Canada cannot be all things to all people. That is one of those truisms to which the Prime Minister subscribes. Let us then choose the policy areas and objectives and methods that we can pursue with the realistic prospect of making a significant contribution. That truism has the corollary that there are some areas in which we are unusually qualified to contribute. The Commonwealth is one area