

HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Saturday, July 28, 1956

The house met at eleven o'clock.

**EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**EGYPT—CANADIAN POSITION RESPECTING SEIZURE  
OF SUEZ CANAL**

On the orders of the day:

**Mr. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert):** I should like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs if he is prepared to make a statement on the situation in relation to the Suez canal. Would he also advise whether, in view of the unprecedented and shocking conduct of the Nasser government, Canada ought not to join with Britain in condemnation of what has taken place there in a perversion of international contracts, and also indicate to Britain and the other nations Canada's agreement with the stand which they are taking to meet this situation?

**Hon. L. B. Pearson (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, the violation by the government of Egypt of an international convention governing the use of an international waterway so important as the Suez canal is, of course, to be condemned. Possibly it should be recalled at this time that the convention in question attempted to safeguard the free use of the waterway in war and in peace. In that sense, the convention was already violated by the Egyptian government when Israeli vessels were prevented from using the canal.

We are exchanging views with governments probably more directly concerned with this matter than the Canadian government because of their association with the Suez Canal Company. I think it would be premature for me to make any statement beyond that at this time, except possibly to repeat what I said yesterday in answer to queries from the press as to whether Canada had any interest in this matter. In reply to those queries I said that while Canada had no share in the ownership of the Suez Canal Company, nevertheless as a trading nation, and for other reasons I might add, we have a very real interest in the efficient and non-discriminatory operation of this waterway which is of such great and historic importance, both in peace and in war. I added that we would regret, and be concerned about, any action which interfered with such operation.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Might I just add a supplementary question? Does not the minister consider that Canada, as a member of the British commonwealth, should have something to say on a matter that particularly affects the members of the commonwealth, Britain, Australia and New Zealand particularly, to indicate a degree of unity in regard to this matter?

**Mr. Pearson:** Mr. Speaker, we have already had something to say on the matter, as I have indicated. And I should add that our High Commissioner in London, since the announcement of Egyptian action, had discussions in London with the secretary of state for commonwealth relations, with the foreign secretary and with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom with a view, not only to ascertaining what United Kingdom policy is in this matter—and they are more directly concerned than we are because of their share in the ownership of the Suez Canal Company—but also to doing what we can to concert our attitude and policy with other commonwealth countries on this matter.

**Mr. Howard C. Green (Vancouver-Quadra):** May I ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs a supplementary question? A report in the *Ottawa Journal* last night indicated he had made a statement to that paper that Canada would be making no representations on the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez canal. I would like to know from the minister whether that statement is correct, and if so whether he does not think that, because this question is of such vital importance to the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and probably India and Pakistan as well, and France, and because of the position being taken by the United States beside those countries, Canada, too, should stand beside them and let the whole world know that she does?

**Mr. Pearson:** Mr. Speaker, I think what I said yesterday to the press, certainly what I intended to say, was that we had not made any formal representations at that time to the Egyptian government. What we may or may not do in the future remains to be determined; but I believe also that the only governments that have made such formal representations at this time are the governments of the United Kingdom and of France, which have a very special interest through