

From what I have said, it is clear that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference dealt with a number of matters of world importance. If one were to listen to some media spokesmen, or read what some columnists and editors had to say about both that conference and other international parliamentary conferences, one would be left with the very strong impression that Canada's financial involvement in Commonwealth affairs should, at this time, be either reduced to a minimum or eliminated altogether. The impression would be given that, in a time of recession and restraint, it is gross extravagance for Canada to be sending delegations to parliamentary conferences such as the one I am reporting on today.

Honourable senators, in the light of the world's problems and the interdependence of all countries of the world, this attitude is well nigh incomprehensible. Not one of the 46 countries who comprise the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is held in higher regard by the others than is Canada. Over the long haul, this feeling is bound to translate itself into benefits for Canada in one way or another. However, that is not the major justification for Canada's involvement. If that were the only consideration, Canada could, justifiably, be accused of being selfish.

Many of the 46 countries are Third World or developing countries who need Canada's sympathy and assistance. I speak personally when I say that, above all, they need our understanding. By the same token, especially at this particular time in Canadian and world history—at a time when we are confronted by so much economic and political turbulence—Canada must not lose respect. Canada cannot afford to disregard the influence she wields in international affairs. Let us make no mistake about it, honourable senators, Canada does wield influence, and is held in the highest regard by other countries. That is not a piece of wishful thinking on my part.

● (1530)

It may come as a surprise, even to some honourable senators, to hear that, of the 46 countries which comprise the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the richest in terms of the per capita gross national product is Canada. I have before me the actual figures for 1979. In that year, Canada's per capita GNP was \$9,650. I ask honourable senators to register that figure in their minds. The country nearest to Canada was Australia, with \$9,100 per capita. The third country was the United Kingdom, with \$6,340 per capita. At the other end of the spectrum was Kenya, with \$380 per capita. I remind honourable senators that Canada has a per capita GNP of over \$9,000. India, an influential and vigorous member of the Commonwealth, and the second largest country in the world in terms of population, has a per capita gross national product of \$190. Bangladesh, the poorest country, has a per capita gross national product of \$100.

Honourable senators, if, because of current economic conditions, we were to take the advice of some of the editors, columnists and commentators Canada would cease participating in this organization. If that were so for Canada, how much more appropriate should it be for the poorer nations of the world? If we were to give up our membership in this associa-

[Senator Rowe.]

tion because we are experiencing some financial troubles at the moment, how much more so is that true for countries like Kenya, Bangladesh or perhaps 30 other developing Third World countries? How much more necessary would it be for those countries to get out and save that bit of money?

In other words, probably without realizing it, some members of the media are actually advocating the abolition of this organization. If Canada, the wealthiest of all of the countries belonging to the organization, gets out, why should any of the other poorer nations remain part of it? I believe, perhaps without realizing what they are doing, members of the media are advocating the abolition of the Commonwealth.

Honourable senators, we could stretch that idea a little further to say that we may as well not take part in the conferences of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is a still bigger organization than the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The idea could be carried yet further to its logical absurdity, which is that Canada ought to back out of the United Nations. If that were to happen, all the other nations should back out, too, and that organization would go the way of all flesh.

It is rather interesting to note, honourable senators, that the United Kingdom, which so often sets the pattern in these matters, and which I think we would all agree is going through a period of severe economic troubles, sent 10 senior members of the Thatcher administration and the Parliament at Westminster to the meeting. Five of those representatives bore the title "Right Honourable." What does that mean, honourable senators? Five of those representatives were cabinet ministers, yet they were present at that meeting. Should anyone want to confirm that information, I have with me the official list of delegates.

Incidentally, the English delegation was led by one of the senior members of the Thatcher administration, the Right Honourable Harry Neil Martin. I may be naive on this point, but, having met Mrs. Thatcher and having followed her career in recent years, I cannot see her approving such an expenditure of time and money—such an absence of senior political figures from the United Kingdom—if she did not regard this association very highly. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Thatcher was, for many years, an active member of this association. Five cabinet ministers did not travel to the Bahamas without Mrs. Thatcher's okay; I do not think anybody would kid himself on that.

I can say the same thing with respect to Australia. It is not all sunshine in Australia, in these difficult times, yet fourteen members of the Australian Senate and House of Representatives travelled four or five times the distance that Canadians had to travel to attend this meeting. I cannot see their doing so if they did not feel it was of great benefit to their country.

Honourable senators, the formation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has brought together a number of traditional enemies. Over the period of time that has elapsed since its formation following World War II—now some 30 years—there have been two wars, to the best of my recollection, involving members of the association as antagonists. I