

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, July 17, 1964

The house met at 10.30 a.m.

COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE

REPORT BY PRIME MINISTER ON RETURN

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to make a report to the house on the commonwealth conference which has recently concluded its work in London. I should like to thank my colleagues in the house for their warm welcome on my return. From what I have read, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should stay away, since the house seemed to do very well in my absence. Nevertheless, believe it or not, I am glad to be back.

I was assisted in representing the government at this conference by the high commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, an old colleague of ours in this house, and by a small group of officials. I believe ours was the smallest of all the delegations. However, so far as the officials are concerned it made up in quality what it lacked in quantity. I should like to pay a very warm tribute to their hard work, and it was hard work.

When I was on the point of leaving for London the right hon. Leader of the Opposition, who has had much experience with meetings of prime ministers of the commonwealth, remarked that I would find it a great experience. Well, he was certainly right, Mr. Speaker. I found it, as I am sure he found it in the past, to be a fascinating and stimulating experience to meet with the leaders of this world wide association or club, as it was continually referred to in the discussions, which has now reached membership proportions not dreamed of in early days.

There were 18 representatives of commonwealth governments who sat around the table this time, a considerable increase since the last commonwealth conference, and they included many new countries which have emerged to independence since that last conference was held in London. I doubt, Mr. Speaker, if anything can do more to bring home to one the problems with which the new countries in Africa and Asia are contending than to participate in the kind of meetings

that were held in London during the last 10 days. I doubt also, Mr. Speaker, if anything can do more to remove doubts about the value the commonwealth can have—and I hope and believe will have in the years ahead—as a link between races and cultures and continents, and as an agency to promote co-operation and understanding among men and nations.

With the permission of the house, Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to have the final communiqué of the conference appear as an appendix to *Hansard* today.

Mr. Speaker: Does the house agree?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[Editor's note: For text of communiqué above referred to see appendix]

Mr. Pearson: The final communiqué which was made public on the last day of the conference, very late on Wednesday evening after a communiqué session which began in the morning and went through until nine o'clock in the evening, gives an indication of the nature and scope of the discussions and of the most important points on which agreement was reached and on which views were recorded. No previous meeting, I believe, Mr. Speaker, has led to so expansive a statement in a communiqué on so many subjects. I am now talking about commonwealth prime ministers' meetings; and no previous meeting, I suspect, went through quite so much debate in trying to agree on just what should be said in the communiqué.

There is nothing surprising about either fact. The communiqué is long because the discussions were far ranging, because the interests of the commonwealth countries are world wide and the problems for attention are varied. The long debate over the production of the communiqué was, I think, to be expected when there were participating 18 countries of extremely different views and often contending views on a great many subjects.

The commonwealth today is a far cry from the compact association of a few years ago. However, Mr. Speaker, I think it is a more representative reflection of the world in which we live today and of mankind as a whole