

*Supply—External Affairs*

During the discussion several questions were asked about our policy in regard to the Middle East. I touched on that matter this morning, and I went into it at very considerable length when I spoke in the house earlier in the session. The hon. member for Prince Albert felt that we should have taken, or should still take no doubt, a stronger stand in support of the three governments which are now meeting in London in connection with the Suez canal crisis.

The hon. member for Eglinton complained that we were adopting—I think I am quoting him correctly—a lofty attitude of distant spectators, and he wondered whether we were taking this crisis seriously enough. Indeed we are, because it is a serious matter. Yet I think we were well advised in this government not to intervene, and indeed no other government has intervened in the way of blanket support. So far as I know the discussions in London have not as yet resulted in a decision even among the three governments concerned. This government, however, has already expressed its concern over this matter and has indicated our support for the principle of international control of the Suez canal, a principle which they are trying to work out in London at the present time.

But I doubt, even from the commonwealth point of view, whether it would be wise for us to go much further at this particular moment. Indeed, while the hon. member was speaking this afternoon I received a telegram from our representative in one of the Asian countries of the commonwealth which indicated that the feeling in that country on this matter was quite different indeed from that which exists in Canada or in certain other parts of the commonwealth. So while I think we must condemn and express real concern over what I have called already the arbitrary action of the Egyptian government; while we must do what we can to support the principle of international control of these waters, and the time may come when we will be given an opportunity to express our support of that principle by some kind of action, I do not think at this time we would be helping anyone by expressing more detailed views.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Would the minister give the house and the country a statement of the situation generally in regard to the Suez canal? Press reports certainly give a very dark and sombre picture of the situation. Would the minister care to comment within the limitations of the restrictions which we all realize have to be imposed?

**Mr. Pearson:** All I can say is that the information we received earlier this evening

from London does not confirm some of the alarmist headlines which have been appearing in the press today about troop movements and all that sort of thing. We have reason to believe, although the information has not reached us officially as yet, that agreement has been reached in London this afternoon by which an international meeting will be called, at which it is hoped a settlement of this problem can be reached which would protect the use of the canal, and that no action other than this will be necessary for that purpose. That is all I can say, partly because the meetings in London are not completed and partly because I do not think I should go beyond that.

So far as the problem of arms shipments to Israel is concerned, I think our position has been made clear on that. Discussions have been going on among certain governments, three or four governments, with a view not to concerting a plan or a collective arrangement governing shipments of arms to Israel but with a view to seeing whether the responsibilities in this matter can be shared and whether our plans and our policies are in agreement; those discussions had come to a conclusion a few days ago when the Suez crisis developed. As I think I said yesterday in the house, any decision on our part arising out of those discussions has been postponed for a short time pending our effort to establish the relationship, if any, of the Suez crisis to the general situation in Palestine.

By that I do not want to give the impression that we are going to delay indefinitely because of this Suez situation, but it was felt advisable, and not only by this government, to delay the decision for a few days. I know that the government has taken a long time to come to a decision in this matter. It is a very difficult and a very complicated matter. Of course if a certain resolution had been passed in this house last February the decision would have been made for us, and our decision would have been very simple indeed. We would not have been permitted to send anything. However, conditions change, and men change with changing conditions, but we want to be pretty certain before we fill an order of this kind—a squadron of F-86's—that this will be conducive to security and stability in the area concerned. All I can say in addition is that I hope in a few days this matter will be disposed of in a satisfactory way.

**Mr. Fleming:** Would the minister permit a question? He has not dealt with the question I asked him this afternoon, as to whether the events of this week involving the Suez canal will be regarded by the government