

*North-South Relations*

In the course of doing what it is doing, this government is embittering the relations between this country and Britain, and for no good Canadian purpose I can see. Perhaps it is to meet the whim of an overzealous government which claims to be the great deliverer of Canada out of the bonds of colonialism. However, in the course of its action this government is turning on one of its principal friends and allies and destroying relations which have been built up over centuries with a country in whose traditions we live.

My motion under Standing Order 43 today, for example, referred to one of those traditions. Today is the 766th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta. We are among the beneficiaries of the provisions of that charter, and here we are having this debate today in order to mark time until the ruling of the Supreme Court and the ensuing debate here so that we can pass the resolution to Britain and thereby foul up the good relations which exist.

I feel I ought to make another not very pleasant reflection on the manner in which this resolution has been presented today. The proposal to have this debate came out during the exchange between House leaders on Thursday in the usual question. The proposal was that there would be a debate today. No mention was made at the time of a report on the government's reaction to the North-South report, yet today after having given the appropriate notice on the Order Paper—it must have been entered on Friday—that we would have this debate, there was no mention of the government's commentary on the North-South report. At two o'clock that commentary was tabled by the Secretary of State for External Affairs in a most cavalier fashion, as if it were of no importance. Just out of courtesy the minister might have passed that commentary around to spokesmen in the other parties so that they might have prepared their comments in the light of the comments of the government. The hon. member for Edmonton South (Mr. Roche) was able, by missing part of the earlier session, to look at the report and make some comments on it, but I can only describe this behaviour as sleazy. It has been a sleazy and devious method of dealing with a matter of such importance.

The prospects for Canada's relations with Britain do not appear to be good. The motion before us refers to the future prospects of Canada's international relations. One aspect of those relations is our relations with Britain. I do not think our relations with Britain will be anything of which we will be proud. Our ties with Britain date far back. Those ties relate to the family, to social organizations, to constitutional matters and even to our ethical values. Many of our ethical values are derived from our British connection, and now we are prepared to throw that connection aside.

However, there is another country—a close neighbour—with which we have ties which are somewhat different. They are simplified, and yet complicated, by the nearness of that neighbour. They are also vital to the well-being of Canada. I speak, of course, about the United States.

● (2140)

There are two areas at least in which this government has been neglectful, negligent and deserving of a round of adverse criticism. One affects the conclusion of bilateral treaties, and the other deals with the failure of this government to co-ordinate its economic relations with the United States. I would like to comment briefly on these two matters in connection with the Canada-U.S. relationship. We have a very good organization in the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group. I think it is one of the most valuable interparliamentary groups in existence. I am very pleased that as secretary to that group I was present at the inaugural meeting and some of the succeeding meetings, and I now have the honour to be a member from time to time. I missed the Halifax meeting but I was at the meeting in San Diego about a year ago. I do believe that meetings of this sort deserve more time in the House and time ought to be found, if only at six o'clock, to make the reports of those meetings—I am talking about our relations with other countries and one way of pursuing those relations, and it was not because of a government with a Liberal stripe that that institution came into being. It was the result of the action of one John G. Diefenbaker whose name may be recalled by some members of this House.

One of the matters to which they have not done justice is to deal on bilateral issues on the basis of equality in the economic field. Everything is ad hoc. If a problem arises, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gray) or the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) will rush down to Washington. That is not dealing on the basis of equality, because the shoe is pinching us. If we were to do something, would there be a minister from the Reagan administration, or its predecessor the Carter administration, rushing up to Canada?

There are courtesy visits, certainly, but on the basis of equality I think these matters should be dealt with in a much more organized way. For example, there ought to be regular annual meetings of ministers, or first ministers depending on the gravity of the situation, to resolve disputes that were not resolvable in the course of regular meetings. I would suggest that those meetings at the ambassadorial level with the assistance of officials ought to be held at quarterly intervals. Acid rain is certainly one of those matters, but there are a number of others. There are the fishing agreements on the east and west coasts and boundary agreements and the Law of the Sea. The Law of the Sea issue has recently been raised in a very critical way, and we have the advantage of an outstanding negotiator in Geneva, New York and Caracas in the person of Mr. Alan Beasley. He led our delegation and had brought matters almost to the point of fruition when the U.S. administration backed away from some of the clauses, thereby threatening the future of that operation.

These are matters, Mr. Speaker, that ought to have been dealt with on a regular basis by a Canada-U.S. economic commission. As I suggested, they should be held possibly at quarterly intervals, at the ambassadorial level with officials. When matters cannot be resolved there, then they should be taken to a first ministers' meeting.