

WEST INDIES

SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, a special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons be appointed to consider the advisability of taking an initiative in seeking to promote closer relations with the former British possessions in the West Indies, such as the Turks and Caicos Islands, which have not yet attained independence, and further that if the residents of any of these islands so desire it, economic and political union of these islands with the Dominion of Canada be negotiated at an early date at the proper constitutional levels.

● (1600)

He said: Mr. Speaker, as this motion was called I heard my hon. friend from Fraser Valley East indicate that I had spoken already today in this House. I just have to tell him it is unfortunate that we do not have the American Constitution governing us and are not provided the protection against double jeopardy.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to discuss this matter. I have no ulterior thoughts concerning why my motion received such good priority, and I shall not dwell upon the fact that this is a sunny Friday before a long weekend and that I am now doing better than I did on the draw for motions. This is a subject which I know most members are aware has been close to my heart for a long time. I think this is perhaps the tenth time I have spoken on this subject matter, either on a motion in my name or in the name of some other member. The first time the motion became familiar to us was when it was moved by a distinguished parliamentarian who is now a distinguished member of the other House, Senator McLraith.

Through the years my views on the general question have remained the same and my convictions have been strengthened, but from time to time there have been developments which have prompted me to give some additional focus to the general matter. Over the years since I have been proposing this measure, from one part of this geographic region has come a clear expression of interest in closer political ties between this country and that part of the Caribbean. Because that came to our attention I thought it would be well for the parliamentarians of Canada to demonstrate sufficient interest to be willing to set up some forum whereby the matter might be discussed. The motion of course does not make any claim in respect of recommendations concerning what should be done constitutionally but rather that the matter should be examined.

I have always believed that our Commonwealth Caribbean neighbours in many ways are the touchstone of the success of our external policy in terms of economics, in terms of aid, and indeed in terms of immigration because in many ways that is an aspect of our foreign policy. I believe if we cannot be successful in dealing with these our hemispheric neighbours, these our sister states of the Commonwealth, then we are failing and are likely to fail in the broader and more ambitious programs on worldwide basis.

I also have, as do most maritimers, a sentimental attachment to and sustained interest in this part of our hemisphere. The maritimers have known the people of the West

West Indies

Indies, of the Caribbean generally and, in what we used to refer to as the golden age of iron men and wooden ships, the exchanges of goods and people. From these ties have emerged a good feeling. I want to salute the Premier of Nova Scotia who I believe is making a special arrangement to invite a number of Caribbean parliamentarians to come to Nova Scotia in July this year. That is an excellent idea. They will see something of the second best part of the maritime provinces, and perhaps they will be able to come to the epitome of beauty and excellence, the province of Prince Edward Island, when they get to the Atlantic region. This is a part of the tradition. These are the ties. But more important than the romantic connection and the fondness we have for rum, and that is fairly important, is the realistic situation that the islands to which I refer in this motion are most interesting communities whose economic and political viability is most precarious.

I do not know if Canadians realize how many small but functioning and successful parliaments exist in these very small communities in the Caribbean area. We hear about the exciting things involving violence and occasional trouble with the banks and so on. But much more important is that down there there are miniature legislatures, emanations of the parliamentary system of which we are a member. They are carrying on and doing very very well. While the communities are tiny, their problems are vast.

I am always happy to find that the Caribbean people and their political leaders refer to Canada as their best friend. I do not know of any designation we should cherish more than to be well regarded by these people who look upon us as something of a big power. I remember when I was in the Turks and Caicos Islands with my colleague who is now the Chairman of CPA, one of the men there asked me what I thought of the whole West Indian area. I told him I had always been interested. I told him about the historic ties and I said also that because I come from by far the smallest province in Canada I probably have an emotional affinity for small communities, especially when they are islands.

He asked me how large Prince Edward Island is and I told him that it is 2,184 square miles, whereupon he said, "Gee, man, do you call that small?" So, in some areas even Prince Edward Island is something of an empire. However, I should like to see us concentrate our attention a little more on these areas.

I am not at all critical about the Caribbean CIDA program. I have no political axe to grind by pointing out that the aid program was started under the government of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). I think we are doing very well, but I also think we can do more. I hear disturbing rumours that we are likely to wind down or get out of our CIDA program with Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Jamaica. I am not sure I am pleased with that, because while I am concentrating on the smaller islands which have not reached sovereign status these sister communities which are sovereign states are very important to us also, and their success in their political and economic experiment is extremely important. I hope that if CIDA is planning to cut out on these large islands that there has been the fullest consultation and co-operation with the leaders of those islands, and that we will not be regarded as having pulled the plug prematurely, if I