

Perhaps most important, the experience gained will be invaluable in assisting the government to determine what new avenues may now be opening up for closer relations with Latin American countries, both bilaterally and with respect to our common interest in the world at large.

The work of the mission is part of a review of Canadian policy toward Latin America which is already under way. I am confident that this review will demonstrate that there is real scope for strengthening Canada's relations with Latin America to the mutual advantage of both. The ministerial mission which is about to depart will help the government to determine what the real possibilities are and how best to proceed.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I do not want the Prime Minister to think I am being facetious, but I should commence by saying that we will hardly notice the absence of the ministers from the house.

With regard to the import of the Prime Minister's statement, I think we all approve of the establishment of closer associations with the countries of Latin America. I hope the ministers will have in mind the possibilities of establishing closer trading relationships. I believe that in the course of time, if not immediately, our country will be confronted by the need for exploring the possibility of becoming part of a larger trading union than is presently the case. I hope the ministers will have in mind the possibility of closer and more permanent trading associations with the Latin American countries.

I do not know whether the Prime Minister has in mind the possibility of Canada entering the O.A.S. or anything of this sort, but whatever reservations we might have in this connection I am sure we all approve of improvement in understanding between the Latin American countries and our own, and the importance that we must all attach to the fact that we share this hemisphere and that we have an important role to play together.

We will wish the ministers the best of luck in connection with this mission, and hope we will eventually see them again in the House of Commons.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I do not think one needs more than a sentence or two to say that we entirely approve of and are delighted with the initiative taken by the government. It is obvious that this mission can do a great deal of work, and I

Ministerial Mission to Latin America

have no doubt the ministers will find ways of improving our relations with Latin American countries and opportunities for later exchanges, both cultural and economic.

As my second point, Mr. Speaker, I may suggest it would be worth while for the government to consider sending a similar mission to the Caribbean countries which are members of the Commonwealth as well as being countries in this hemisphere, and with which our commercial and cultural relations can be improved a great deal.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues I hope this is not the first step toward membership in the Organization of American States, something which should not occur at this time. But it should be the first step in strengthening relations with all countries in the hemisphere that are smaller and less powerful than our powerful neighbour to the south.

● (2:50 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I should like to comment briefly on the statement the right hon. Prime Minister just made on the special ministerial mission to Latin America and two countries in Central America.

We are very pleased to hear this because, personally, I feel that compared to the assistance Canada has given other regions of the world, we have sadly neglected South America.

According to the information we have and the news we get, the ministers will be visiting countries where there is quite a subversive ferment. If it so desires, the ministerial mission can bring some hope of better days to those peoples, through the support and direct assistance Canada can give them.

As mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), I suppose that the mission will take this opportunity to study the possibility of Canada entering the O.A.S. in order to establish closer relations between our country and the countries of America which, in fact, are located in our continent.

[*English*]

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I know it is the fault of my bilingualistic inadequacies, but I did not really suggest that the minister should explore the possibilities of entering O.A.S. I did not really express any views in that regard.