

*Supply—External Affairs*

air base itself is the situation of Iceland in so far as radar communication and installations are concerned. Therefore we must hope and do everything we can in NATO to resolve this difficulty, and I have some expectation that this will be possible before long.

The hon. member for Prince Albert also mentioned, and it is a very important matter indeed, the question of the reappraisal—I think that was the word he used—of our defence policies which is now under way and about which there has been so much discussion recently in various NATO capitals. What actually is happening is that the governments that are concerned, understandably, with adapting their defence and indeed their foreign policies to new circumstances—but I am talking about defence policies now—have begun to exchange views as to what, if anything, should be done. Those views are to be discussed in the NATO council, which quite properly is becoming increasingly effective as an agency for consultations of this kind. As I tried to say this morning, it is of vital importance that these things be done collectively through NATO and not unilaterally by national decision without consultation with other NATO members.

This question of political consultation in NATO, which the hon. member referred to, is one of very great importance and one to which our committee is giving special attention. I think if the record could be given for the last six months or the last year it would be shown that NATO has been more effective in respect to political consultations during that time than in previous years. That is as it should be.

The hon. member for Eglinton had something to say about the recent commonwealth prime ministers' conference in London. Apparently he has the impression that this government was not particularly interested in the conference and even implied—I hope I am not doing him an injustice—that we were not interested in commonwealth conferences generally. He suggested that the Canadian Prime Minister and the Canadian delegation had not done much to prepare for this conference and had made a pretty small contribution to it. I cannot accept that particular criticism.

We are interested in commonwealth conferences. We are very concerned with maintaining and strengthening commonwealth connections, which are of as great value in the world in which we live today as they have been at any time; and largely because of the three Asian countries. I think I am correct when I say that we have participated in more commonwealth meetings, including prime ministers' meetings, during the last 10

[Mr. Pearson.]

years than in any similar period since the commonwealth was established.

I can assure the hon. member that a great deal of preparation went into the work of this conference on behalf of the Canadian and other governments. It may well be that this work and the interest we have shown has not been reflected in the commonwealth conference communique, which has been described as a collection of clichés. The hon. member was impatient, and I can understand his impatience, because we had not come to more decisions at this meeting. I would ask him, decisions on what? There are specific problems within the commonwealth between commonwealth governments, and I admit that some of the most acute of them were not discussed at the prime ministers' conference. With my own knowledge, and I am sure this is shared by others, of the background of some of these problems I can say it was a very good thing that they were not discussed. If discussion had been insisted upon it might very well have broken up the meeting.

There was one specific problem settled, and that was the admission of Ceylon, when it changes to republic status, into the commonwealth as a republic. That was a matter of no small importance to the commonwealth, to continue in its membership Ceylon as a republic.

However, in so far as the main subjects on the agenda were concerned, it was not a question of reaching decisions, it was a question of exchanging views so that each member of the commonwealth would have the benefit of the views of the others. If you looked at the composition of the commonwealth today you would realize that there would be very divergent views on most of the international matters which concern us. When you have a membership which includes—I am mentioning these countries because they do have different and sometimes opposing views on certain international matters—South Africa on the one hand and India on the other, or New Zealand on the one hand and Ceylon on the other, it is not going to be easy to come to decisions on all international matters. But from this kind of composition comes a particular value in the discussion of these problems.

I believe that was very well exemplified in the meeting at London. I think every commonwealth representative left with the feeling that he had learned something new about these international problems by listening to other viewpoints, and especially the viewpoint of the Asian members of the commonwealth. I think that was of particular advantage to the other commonwealth prime ministers.