

Comment on Statement by General de Gaulle

statements must be accepted even if they are conflicting. However, the member for Mégantic cannot be allowed to pursue the matter by way of a question of privilege.

Mr. Langlois (Mégantic): I accept your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and I will consider that as a correction to the official report.

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRSCOMMENT ON STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT
DE GAULLE

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement commenting on one made yesterday in Paris by General de Gaulle, a statement made as I was leaving London to return to Canada and which I did not see until I arrived back in Canada. Perhaps it is just as well that I did not have the opportunity of reading it before I spoke in London yesterday.

Before I make that statement, Mr. Speaker, perhaps you will permit me as Prime Minister to express my appreciation for the kindness I received from the British government during our visit to London last week and for the privilege, during a very difficult time for that government, of discussing with them some matters of commonwealth and international concern. We discussed in particular the situation in Cyprus, which has remained so dangerously explosive during recent days and which, if it were permitted to explode into armed conflict between two members of NATO and on the territory of a member of the commonwealth, could have an almost fatal effect on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I said in my statement of July 25, 1967, Mr. Speaker, commenting on some earlier remarks of the president of the French republic, that Canada has always had a special relationship with France, which is the motherland of so many of her citizens. I said we attached the greatest importance to our friendship with the French people; that it had been and remained the strong purpose of the government of Canada to foster that friendship. I should like to confirm those words today, Mr. Speaker.

I do not propose to deal in any detail with General de Gaulle's statement of yesterday, a statement very carefully prepared and made to the press. General de Gaulle's statement will obviously arouse discord in Canada. I am sure the people of this country will be

[Mr. Speaker.]

restrained in their response to it, as I am in mine today, so as not to serve the purposes of those who would disunite and divide our country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I believe the statement distorted some Canadian history, misrepresented certain contemporary developments and wrongly predicted the future. This statement was not merely a commentary on Canadian domestic or foreign policies, which could have been ignored; it was an intervention in those policies by the head of a foreign state. As such it remains unacceptable. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, in this case it is intolerable that a head of a foreign state or government should recommend a course of political or constitutional action which would destroy Canadian confederation and the unity of the Canadian state.

The future of Canada, Mr. Speaker, will be decided in Canada, by Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I have confidence, and I know all members of this house have confidence, in the ability and good sense of all Canadians, French speaking or English speaking, to make the right decision. They will do it in their own way and through their own democratic process. I believe this decision will require further constitutional changes to bring our federalism up to date and to ensure, among other things, that French speaking Canadians who form one of our two founding cultural and linguistic groups, or societies if you like, will have their rights accepted and respected in Canada.

I agree also that the federal government, any federal government, should encourage and promote special and close cultural relations between French speaking Canadians and France and other French speaking countries. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are doing that. There should be no argument on this score except with those who wish to use these relations to destroy the federal government's responsibility for foreign affairs, and that we do not accept.

Canada is a free country and its people govern themselves. Canadians in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada have the right to exercise fully their political rights in federal and provincial elections. Self determination is no new discovery for us.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.