

Oral Questions

In this case, the Solicitor General indicated that Mr. Laberge's wife was unfortunately among those who had to be laid off as part of the cuts imposed by the government.

I find the opposition's allegations incredible, having seen for example the firing of Mrs. Thibault, who was the president of an association for persons with disabilities, because she was a known Liberal supporter. If I were in their shoes, with the hundred or so shameful cases of patronage in Quebec over the past nine months, I would shut my mouth.

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[English]

BOSNIA

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister has been widely quoted as saying that Canada supports the NATO air strikes. On Saturday, however, Canadian UN ambassador Robert Fowler stated that the Canadian government opposed punitive air strikes against Bosnian Serbs. "Air strikes as NATO carried out last week", he said, "were not useful".

Is Bob Fowler still running Canadian defence policy? If not, can the minister correct this discrepancy by explaining Canada's actual position?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been no change with respect to Canada's policy on the use of NATO air power.

We had a number of discussions a year ago. The Prime Minister was in those discussions. As a result, we agreed to the use of NATO air power when requested by the UN forces on the ground for close air support, for protection of UN personnel and in certain situations relating to the safety of people in the various enclaves in Croatia and Bosnia. However, we did agree in certain circumstances that they could be used for other less defensive needs.

• (1455)

In the last couple of days we have said that if such air attacks as were deployed last week were to be used again, we would prefer some modification to the approval process so that Canada would certainly be part of that decision in a more formal sense.

With respect to the general application of the policy with close air support, as I have earlier described, we are quite happy with the way that process has been working in the past.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, that Bob Fowler would feel so free to express his own personal opinion I think speaks volumes about the mess at the Department of National Defence. There is a huge vacuum of leadership. I think Mr. Fowler thought he would step in and fill it.

What is the minister doing to improve the communications and clear up the confusion in his own department at a time when the safety of our own troops depends on it?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing a pattern of questions in the House today that is very unfortunate.

The lives of Canadian men and women are in danger. Despite our partisan differences on other matters, all of our questions and all of our thoughts should be on how to improve the situation, not to make petty criticisms on the floor of the House of Commons.

The hon. member speaks of a vacuum, but when we hear the comments of his defence critic, who a few moments ago said "retreat is not withdrawal and withdrawal doesn't mean you leave", one wonders where the vacuum is and who is actually setting policy on that side of the House.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. As he knows, last April 27 the Canadian Wheat Board issued an embargo on pasta from the European Union.

This action has spawned an artificial distribution system, weakened the financial stability of hundreds of family retail enterprises dependent on the sales of pasta for survival and put thousands of Canadian jobs at risk. Moreover, for consumers it has caused a price increase for a reduced variety of product. Will the minister either rescind the order or modify it so these effects can be corrected?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the source of the problem described by the hon. member in his question is obviously European subsidization on European pasta exports which recommenced as of April 1.

We have asked the Europeans to withdraw their subsidies, but to date they have declined. The Canadian Wheat Board has had no choice but to respond, which the board did on April 27 by reimposing Canadian import restrictions on certain pasta products.

These restrictions limited imports to retail sized packages imported by retailers. Since the time that measure was imposed we have been made aware by the hon. member and by others of certain unintended effects to small retailers who normally use wholesalers to import pasta on the small retailers' behalf.

Accordingly the Canadian Wheat Board is making certain administrative adjustments to address this issue to allow import permits for pasta imported by wholesalers if that pasta has been imported on behalf of a small retailer and will be sold only to the