

Oral Questions

[English]

BOSNIA

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Washington the foreign affairs minister announced we will be sending troops to Bosnia as part of the new NATO combat force. Prior to the announcement there was no consultation with Parliament or with Canadians.

It is outrageous. It is just like the Mulroney Tories, whom the Liberals often condemn.

In opposition the now Minister of Human Resources Development said about the deployment of troops to the Persian Gulf: "To deny the opportunity of this Parliament to be heard or to represent the Canadian people is a dereliction of duty by the government".

I ask the Prime Minister, why has the government abandoned its principles and adopted the same style of government as the hated Mulroney?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that as of this moment we have had three debates. The minister said "if necessary".

The Americans, our partners in the Bosnian situation, are trying to achieve peace. If peace is achieved they would like it to be maintained. The Americans, who have not yet put one soldier there, are apparently willing to send in up to 25,000 soldiers. They have asked us if we would participate. The minister said we would look into it and if it is absolutely necessary troops would be sent. However, before we make a decision we will come to cabinet and the House of Commons.

The member should congratulate the ministers and all those involved for the peace we are about to have in Bosnia. One of the reasons we will have peace in Bosnia is because of our Canadian soldiers and others who have been there for the last three years developing a situation that is leading to that peace today.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if we are going to have peace in the former Yugoslavia, which we all hope for, we certainly would not be sending troops that are the biggest and baddest junkyard dogs to take care of themselves over there; we would be sending peacekeepers. That is what was promised in this House.

This is a totally new role. The Canadian people demand to know how many troops we are sending. What is the duration of their stay there? What will be the cost? What will be the exact mandate of these troops?

Will the Prime Minister agree that Parliament must be allowed to establish the criteria for a dangerous mission like this?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): I do not know if you remember, Mr. Speaker, but I remember that they voted twice in the House for having troops there. They got up from their seats and approved the actions of the government.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Fine, no. I am sorry, they just made speeches in favour of that but they did not vote. When I say something, I also vote that way.

• (1430)

It is a very useful situation at the moment. We said that everybody wants to be involved and there will be even more troops if a peace treaty is ratified to make sure the situation evolves peacefully in Bosnia. We all want that to happen.

If Canadian soldiers are needed, Mr. Christopher was informed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs that we will look into the possibility. However, before we make a decision we will consult the cabinet and the House of Commons where you can express your views. Again I can expect that what you say is not necessarily what you will vote for.

The Speaker: I ask my colleagues to please address the Chair.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we should remember we are not voting during these discussions and that the decision has been made before the discussions.

The defence minister said yesterday the force we are sending to Bosnia will not have a peacekeeping role. That means the government is sending Canadian troops into a combat role without consulting Parliament, which is outrageous.

With the lives of young Canadians at stake will the Prime Minister at the very minimum allow Parliament to have a free vote on whether our men and women should be sent into a combat role in Bosnia?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member took this quotation from but I assure him what we are expecting is peace at last in the former Yugoslavia.

We are not getting ready to send combat troops. We feel it is the profound sentiment of Canadians all across the country to support UN peacekeeping missions. We have in the past and we will in the future because that is where Canadians have been singled out as among the best, a duty Canadian troops expect to continue in the future.

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[Translation]

REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.