

Routine Proceedings

While we respect time honoured traditions and cultures our position has always been that the best guarantee for stability and prosperity is a government that is responsive to its people.

As a matter of policy this government will continue to work with other countries to ensure that China respects its obligations under the United Nations declaration of human rights. This was affirmed in the resolution voted on three weeks ago in my party's policy convention.

On a bilateral basis we have also expressed our concerns on human rights to the Chinese leadership. Indeed, during the visit of Vice Premier Zou Jiahua to Canada I personally voiced my concern about human rights in China and I raised specific cases with the vice premier. This was also done by the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the meetings with Mr. Zou.

At the same time we intend to engage in constructive projects and dialogues with the Chinese government on this question. It is for this reason that our government will be funding joint research projects like the one between the University of Ottawa's human rights centre and Beijing University.

I believe this kind of dialogue and co-operation will help to bring about greater understanding and will be of assistance to the Chinese government in its efforts to reform its legal and judicial structures.

CIDA's China program has contributed to China's economic reforms and gradual opening mainly by creating links between people and institutions, transferring skills, knowledge and technology, and exposing thousands of Chinese to Canada, its values and government.

• (1010)

Canadians expect their elected representatives to abide by the democratic principles on which our society is built. The Liberal Party has always taken an innovative and effective approach to its dealings with China.

It was a Liberal government in 1970 that took the bold and imaginative step of recognizing the People's Republic of China. I believe this helped to create the conditions for China to embark on a process of economic reform and opening to the outside world, a development which has had a tremendous positive impact on millions of ordinary Chinese citizens.

As one who has been actively involved in the democratic movement, I want to assure this House and all Canadians concerned about human rights that dialogue and engagement will best serve Canada's interests and those of the Chinese people. This is the policy of this government and I believe it is the right one.

[Translation]

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this morning and to mark on behalf of the Bloc Québécois the sad anniversary of the massacres in Tiananmen Square.

Thousands were killed there when the repressive Chinese regime crushed the student democracy movement.

In spite of the hopes that had been raised by this vast movement, democracy is still no closer to being a reality five years later. In Shanghai, the 5th anniversary was marked by the arrest of dissident Bao Ge after he had filed papers with the city to register a human rights organization.

Mr. Bao Ge, who had been under permanent police surveillance, was one of the few human rights activists who had not been detained or forced to leave the big cities.

In Beijing where particularly repressive security measures have been put in place, the police, terrified by the idea of public demonstrations, ringed the square where the tragedy occurred.

Memories of the crushing defeat of the democracy movement during the night of June 3 and 4, 1989, are still vivid. According to dissidents and foreign observers, thousands were massacred.

The first image that automatically springs to mind is that of the student facing down the tanks which literally crushed the uprising. One would think that here in Canada, the federal government would have decided to mark this event by making radical changes to its human rights policy, a policy which the secretary of state is defending this morning with great conviction.

Indeed, a great deal of courage and conviction is required to defend this government's 180 degree turn. From now on, human rights will apparently take a back seat to this government's commercial interests.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated in a question to the Prime Minister: "Canada is relinquishing its historic responsibility, since the Prime Minister knows perfectly well that polite comments behind closed doors will have no impact on foreign leaders who systematically violate human rights". Would you care to hear the Prime Minister's answer, Mr. Speaker? He answered to the effect that China would laugh in his face if he adopted a hard-line position.

I think we are the ones who are being laughed at now. If we want respect, we must have a conscience and that conscience is what has earned Canada the worldwide admiration it currently enjoys.

• (1015)

We have heard the ministers of this government take turns telling us that human rights are no longer tied to trade and market logic.

As my hon. colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve stated before this House on March 22 last, and I quote: "The Liberals had promised a more 'we'll go it alone' Canadian foreign policy, one more in line with Lester B. Pearson's vision. Let the naive think again! The Liberal government is trashing a long-standing tradition of defending human rights, reducing