

Government Orders

Now is the time for all Canadians to put aside their differences and rally to their support. I am sure that all hon. members join me and all Canadians in praying that this war will end quickly and that all Canadians will welcome home our brave fellow citizens who defend freedom and the cause of peace.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, as I rise in the House of Commons tonight, my heart is filled with a deep sense of foreboding. Like every Canadian, like the mothers and fathers of those men and women representing us in the Persian Gulf, I am worried. I had hoped that it would not come to this.

[*Translation*]

This evening, Canada is at war. Operation Desert Storm has begun. This evening, Canada is anxiously following the course of events in the Middle East. Canadian men and women are watching their TV sets, hoping the missiles will spare their families and friends.

[*English*]

While I am Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party, I am also a father and a grandfather and, like the millions of Canadians now sitting clustered around their televisions and radios, I am trying to come to terms with all of this. Tonight, diplomacy and negotiations have given way to bullets and bombs and I am sad about that. But, as the Prime Minister said, I hope that this will be reversed very quickly. As all Canadians who have followed this crisis know, the Liberal Party has urged the government not to go to war. We urged the government to allow more time for the sanctions to work before putting the lives of thousands of Canadian troops at risk.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, diplomacy and negotiations have given way to armed intervention, and I regret this deeply. The Liberal Party has always been opposed to war. No one likes war and no one likes to go to war. All we can hope now is that Iraq will withdraw its troops from Kuwait and that there will be as few victims as possible. The war must not be allowed to go on forever.

On behalf of the families and relatives of our Canadian soldiers, those men and women who perform their duties so bravely and valiantly, we can only hope that this war will be a short one. The price of war is always far too high.

[*English*]

We regret that our request that a search be made for a peaceful solution has fallen on deaf ears but, at the same time, we will support the efforts of our men and women in the Persian Gulf. We are at war, but all of us have to make sure that we are not losing the Canadian ambition, our historic quest for peace. We hope that this war will be short. We hope that all efforts will be made to find avenues to have a cease-fire quickly, in order to make sure that not many men and women lose their lives in that process. We hope that this operation will be successful; we do not think it was necessary. Let us all hope and pray together that it will be short and that those valiant Canadians who are there will be able to come back to their families, as the Prime Minister has said, in good health.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: I want to ask the Prime Minister and his cabinet to do everything in their power to restore peace in the Middle East as soon as possible. As we have said before, it is sometimes much more difficult to end a war than to start it. We hope that we will have peace again very soon, because we sincerely believed a few months ago that a new international order had been established.

• (2230)

The cold war being over, we felt that it would be possible to find peaceful solutions to world problems and now we find to our dismay that a real war can start so quickly.

We are all Canadians and we must support our brothers and sisters fighting for peace. I rise tonight to say that all Canadians have the obligation to stand united under such circumstances.

[*English*]

As Canadians, we have differences. I said that it was not the right way, but we are at war and we have to be united because Canadians are fighting right now. I hope that none go down in fighting. We have to back them up.