

*Special Debate*

yet? Does this mean that tomorrow night, the government could move to replace 1,600 troops, two 800 member contingents, and deal with aircraft, logistics, transportation, options? Are they trying to tell us that no decision has been made yet?

The very wording of the motion shows that I am right. They are laughing at Parliament today. They are laughing at us.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Bouchard:** A debate on what? What kind of debate is this? How can we seriously debate this issue, when the government has not even taken stock of the situation over there, when there is no assessment, no information? All that we know, we have learned from reading the papers. The government never provided us with any significant, specific and clear information on anything that went on over there. It never told us how the operations were evaluated, or what it was prognosticating. We were never told whether our troops were there for the duration or only a certain length of time, and in which case, how long that would be. We know nothing. We are kept in the dark.

We are expected to drink in the words of the Minister of National Defence and take leaps of faith, sign blank cheques and continue to send troops who operate in total frustration over there, not knowing what their mandate is, not being authorized by military authorities to conduct the operations that need to be conducted. They are helpless witnesses to revolting situations: children being tortured and killed, people being blown to pieces, civilians becoming live targets for blind fire from the hills. We are despatching our troops under very poor conditions. Are they there for the duration and under what conditions?

• (1850)

I think that the position the government finds itself today is such that it does not have much of a choice. The only argument it has left is to say: "We do not have any choice; we have to maintain our presence over there". The worst of it is that they are right: we do not have a choice.

We do not have a choice because, by its failure to act, its negligence and its superficial commitments, the government has put itself in such a position that we do not have any choice any more. A government or state that bases its policies on arguments like: "We do not have a choice" is in big trouble.

I think that this is the kind of action that has to be decided as a matter of choice, deliberately, for humanitarian reasons, on compassionate grounds, as a show of solidarity. In this case, the decision is based on an absence of policy. This government does not have a policy.

I dare anyone to get a serious response from government to the questions: what is Canada's policy regarding peacekeeping missions, what are the guiding principles, on what basis are decisions made regarding these operations? These questions will remain unanswered because they do not know.

We know for a fact that the government, through its members on the foreign affairs committee which reviewed Canada's foreign policy, agreed with the opposition that some criteria and standards were now required, and that we could no longer make individual commitments on a case-by-case basis in operations such as this one, where people die and where incredible amounts of money are spent in vain, without making a difference. The fact is that we did not make any progress whatsoever since last year. On the contrary, the issue is becoming more and more insoluble and it is increasingly obvious that we have reached a deadlock.

We wanted to get information from the government. We wanted the government to table these documents and set up a House committee, but all we got was an advance notice of a few hours yesterday. Indeed, yesterday afternoon we suddenly received notice of a debate on Bosnia and Croatia. Earlier today, we managed to get a one-hour briefing from defence officials who were very co-operative in answering our questions. However, we did not get the necessary files, the basic information required.

If the government is serious about this issue, it should allow a House committee to review the situation and hear witnesses, and it should also make these documents available. If we have to respect parliamentary secrecy, if the members of such a committee have to work in secrecy, they will do it. We are all responsible people, whether we belong to the Reform Party, the Bloc Québécois or the Liberal Party. We could conduct an in-depth review of the situation in Bosnia and Croatia, because right now we do not know what is going on.

Because the government let the events dictate its policy, we do have to remain there, since nothing was solved and the situation is still the same. From a humanitarian point of view, we are well aware that if, under the current conditions, UN troops were to withdraw, including the Canadian peacekeepers, the whole Sarajevo population could die of hunger.

All the food that enters the city is airlifted by UN forces, along with water, gas, medication and so on. People barely survive in extremely harsh conditions and almost unacceptable sanitary conditions, but they do survive thanks to the humanitarian assistance provided by peacekeeping forces in Bosnia.

We are well aware that the UN mission in Bosnia is essentially humanitarian in nature. It is a military one in Croatia, since there is a buffer zone that keeps the factions apart with, in the