

*Special Debate*

We of course supported the renewal of the mandate of Canadian peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia, but with some reservations. We have to make sure that our presence is still required, and we must also ensure that our peacekeepers are safe in the theatres of operations.

We also want to raise the issue of suicides. There is some extremely disturbing information to the effect that a number of soldiers committed suicide either after participating in peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia, or because they did not want to take part in these operations. This is most disturbing. Some facts will have to be thoroughly reviewed.

Given these considerations, I am somewhat surprised to find myself debating the presence of our troops in the former Yugoslavia, less than two days before the expiry of the UN forces mandate in that region, and particularly in Croatia.

In any case, the previous debates on this issue provided us with an opportunity to express our views and to hear the views of others.

I do not think that we should go back, today, and repeat everything that was already said on the issue. Instead, we should try to see why Canadian troops should withdraw from that region, or remain there.

A primary concern, to which I briefly referred earlier, is the danger faced by our troops stationed in the former Yugoslavia. This issue, which was also raised in previous debates, must once again be considered now.

Indeed, given the numerous violations of the cease-fire, our troops, on any day, could be dealing with a bloody war, as opposed to a conventional peacekeeping mission. Let us not forget that ten peacekeepers lost their lives and many others have been injured since the first Canadian peacekeepers arrived in the former Yugoslavia.

Similarly, a truce signed by the Bosnian government with the various warring factions in Bosnia was violated repeatedly during the past few weeks. Furthermore, the Bosnian Serbs recently threatened the international community with retaliatory action against the peacekeepers if the Bosnian Serb forces were hit by NATO air strikes.

In a way, and we see this in the media, since the beginning of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the situation has hardly improved, on the contrary. Today, battles are raging throughout the territories coveted by the various belligerents. Today, people are suffering from a lack of food and fuel, lack of medical drugs and health care, lack of adequate housing, peace and safety.

On the other hand, we should also consider the excellent job being done by our troops within the UN theatres of operations. Our troops continue to provide the peoples of the former Yugoslavia with shelter, food, clothing, protection and moral support. Since the fall of 1991, nearly \$60 million has been

spent on the purchase and delivery of food, medicine and clothing, on shelter for the homeless and on assistance to refugees, displaced persons and victims of violence.

• (1940)

I feel that as long as the presence of Canadian troops is required and useful, there is no doubt that its presence must be maintained. By sending troops to the former Yugoslavia, Canada has made an important choice. It cannot afford to ignore a situation where human beings are experiencing an unspeakable tragedy. Granted, the help provided by our soldiers is not a panacea but at least it can alleviate the suffering.

To bring back our peacekeepers in these circumstances would not only mean abdicating our responsibilities and moral obligations as human beings, it would also extinguish that flicker of hope these people still have, people who for the most part are innocent victims of man's inhumanity to man. It would also mean leaving them to face a tragic escalation in the current conflict. No, we cannot go backward today, we have no choice, in the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

However, we need some answers about the safety of our troops should the embargo be lifted and in the event of air strikes. We need to know about the willingness of local authorities to have our troops remain there. We need answers about the cases of suicide in current peacekeeping operations. We need to look deeper into this troubling situation. Of course, we are in favour of keeping Canadian troops in the former Yugoslavia, but, unlike last year, I do not think the government can assume each year that it has the opposition's support.

The government must provide an assessment of the situation and explain to us how it has changed. We have had no assessment and no explanation of changes in the situation. We have no idea, apart from the bits of information we gleaned this afternoon. We have not had an opportunity to find out details of what is happening in the field, and I think that, if we are to have a serious debate in this House, the government must give us this information.

[English]

**Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter the debate this evening. I want to put into perspective what Canadian troops are doing.

Right now we have in the former Yugoslavia, and I refer mostly to Croatia and Bosnia, roughly 40,000 United Nations troops from 35 countries participating in a variety of operations. We in Canada have the fifth largest operation and we have deployed roughly 2,100 troops. They are engaged in four main operations. There is the operation in Bosnia in which we have approximately 820 troops. They are mostly engaged in relief convoys and the protection of human beings, humanitarian protection.