

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[Translation]***SITUATION IN BOSNIA**

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in retaliation for NATO air raids on their positions, the Serb forces have taken peacekeepers hostage, including 55 Canadians, in Visoko, all the while pursuing their offensive on the Muslim enclave of Bihac. In addition, some 1,200 peacekeepers under Canadian command are presently in a very vulnerable position as they find themselves besieged by Serb troops.

Can the Prime Minister bring us up to date on the situation of these Canadian peacekeepers being held hostage and the progress the UN is making in its negotiations with Serb authorities to have them released?

Hon. David Michael Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition gave a very accurate account of the situation. Fifty-five members of the Canadian Armed Forces are presently detained near Visoko, in an area under Bosnian Serb control.

I have been informed that they are well, thank goodness, and that negotiations are under way between the Serbs and the Canadian commanding officer. I hope that the situation will soon be resolved.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm the statement made by Brigadier-General Ashton, to the effect that Canadian peacekeepers may not be released for another four or five days?

Are we to conclude that this is the way the Serb forces have found to finish off their offensive on Bihac without further disruption from NATO raids?

Hon. David Michael Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition is quite correct in his analysis. I cannot say whether our troops will be released earlier than in four or five days. It is too early to tell.

[English]

It is somewhat premature to speculate on how long our soldiers will be detained. There is no question that it is tied in with the NATO air strikes. There is no question that there is an escalation of rhetoric and threat against UNPROFOR members in general but our personnel in particular. As I said a moment ago they are in good shape. There are negotiations going on between the Bosnian Serb authorities and the Canadian officers on the ground.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the minister indicate the position that Canada defended today at the NATO meeting, held in Brussels, regard-

ing the advisability of new air strikes in order to discourage the Serbian forces from carrying out further attacks in Bihac? What are the risks that new raids would pose for the security of United Nations soldiers either held hostage or under siege?

● (1420)

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a difficult situation like this one I do not think we should speculate about the effects of further air strikes.

NAC was in session today in Brussels. We were engaged in those discussions. We are now being debriefed on the outcome, as to whether or not there is any change in the position of NATO in consultation with the United Nations. As soon as we have further information we will inform the leaders of the other parties.

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*[Translation]***POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Quebec federation of university professors sounded an alarm about social program reform, which it called an unprecedented threat to Quebec's education system. The federation estimates that the reform will result in a \$721-million shortfall of cash transfers and also tax points, through the abolition of Quebec's special abatement.

In order to alleviate the legitimate concerns of Quebec's entire academic community, does the Prime Minister promise not to unilaterally review the agreement with Quebec that was negotiated under the Lesage government, which provides for a transfer of tax points to finance post-secondary education in Quebec?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want every interested group to express its views on reform. All the elements raised by the hon. member will be considered by the committee reviewing the matter. Committee members will, I hope, have a chance to study the comments made by academics so that the recommendations to the government, in their report, will take everybody's interests into account.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we note that the Prime Minister did not take the opportunity to reassure the academic community.

How can he justify his government's attack on post-secondary education when Canada's major challenge is to compete internationally with other industrialized countries by relying on increasingly well-educated people? How can he justify his position?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should analyze the paper tabled by the Minister of Human Resources Development. He will realize that the government's intention is to find a way to make more money