

Oral Questions

Mr. Broadbent: It is interesting that the minister says he did not say it. The only correction which appeared subsequently in the press was that he did not use the word "acquiescence" but rather used the word "quiescence". The minister is nodding his head. If that is the only difference, what the minister said was that he was acquiescing. There is no difference at all in principle between the two assertions, and the minister should know that. In light of what he has just said, I should like to ask him, considering that over the weekend the U.S. increased its military assistance to the junta by providing additional military personnel, and considering that in the U.S. Congress itself more than 50 elected representatives of the American people are organizing an attempt to block all military assistance to the junta in El Salvador, would the minister state unequivocally now Canadian support for the principle of Congressman Studd's bill, namely, that all military assistance provided by the United States should terminate immediately?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, our policy has been, and continues to be, one of opposition to the shipment of offensive arms by Canada or any other country to El Salvador or any other country which is torn by internal strife. We look forward to a political solution, not to a military one, and it is for that reason that we oppose the shipment of arms from any country, and that includes eastern block countries as well, to such countries as El Salvador.

● (1430)

SUPPORT FOR NEW INITIATIVE BY FORMER WEST GERMAN
CHANCELLOR

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the minister knows full well in a country where six leaders of opposition parties were assassinated by the government during the last year that regrettably the only resort of the people of that country to deal with a vicious military regime is to take counter military action. If the minister has another proposal which will work and achieve some justice for the people of that country, I am sure everyone in the world would like to hear it.

Will the minister follow up on what he has just said by having the Government of Canada, for example, request that Willy Brandt, former chancellor of West Germany, head of the North-South Commission and head of Socialist International, intervene directly to try to bring peace to that troubled part of the world? Will the government lend its support to such an initiative which might have some concrete results?

Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, it seems to me if the hon. member's comment suggests anything, it suggests that he welcomes or tolerates arm shipments from the eastern bloc to El Salvador, but not by the United States.

Some hon. Members: Oh, come on.

Mr. MacGuigan: That is exactly the implication of the words he was using.

Mr. Stevens: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacGuigan: It seems to me he ought to make that clear. Our position is one of opposition to the importation of offensive arms from all sectors into El Salvador. If Mr. Brandt's initiative is being sponsored by his own government and is a matter in which they are seeking the support of other countries, we will certainly give it full consideration. In the meantime, I expressed our position to Secretary Haig when I met him before, and we will be expressing that position again to the United States next week when we have an opportunity of meeting here.

STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO MINISTER

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I should like to follow up on the questions asked by the hon. member for Oshawa and the reply of the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I noted very carefully the quotation attributed to him wherein he said, "I would certainly not condemn any decision the United States takes to send offensive arms . . . to El Salvador . . . The United States can at least count on our quiet quiescence." He stated specifically that he had not made that statement last week. The report indicated that he made the statement on February 4. Is the Secretary of State for External Affairs prepared to stand in his place and make a firm denial that he ever made that statement?

Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, I am prepared to say that there is a great difference between quiescence and acquiescence.

Mr. Broadbent: Explain it.

Mr. MacGuigan: We do not believe that we have either the responsibility or the opportunity of judging first-hand the events in El Salvador. The Canadian churches tell us one thing; the Vatican specifically repudiates what the Canadian Catholic church tells us. When I met the diplomatic commission from El Salvador, they told me that they received no arms from the communist bloc; apparently the United States has conclusive evidence that they have. We do not have a resident ambassador in El Salvador. We have no means of judging the internal situation in El Salvador, and we do not propose to do so.

Miss MacDonald: Madam Speaker, therefore I take it the statement of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, that "I would certainly not condemn any decision that United States takes to send offensive arms . . . to El Salvador", stands as he put it initially; he did not deny that. He replied that it is not in Canada's interest to put forward any proposals, that he is caught in the dilemma of one group saying one thing and another group saying another, and since we do not have any representation there he just does not know what is going on and therefore cannot put forward any positive proposals. In light of the fact that Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and even West Germany, have put forward proposals, what is Canada prepared to do in an area close to home, within this hemisphere, where we have very serious obligations to help maintain peace?