

Oral Questions

[English]

LITHUANIA

Mr. Garth Turner (Halton—Peel): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Secretary of State for External Affairs met this morning with our distinguished guest, the Prime Minister of Lithuania.

Does that meeting indicate that Canada will be playing a role in helping to ease the tensions in the struggling country of Lithuania?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I did have the opportunity this morning, as a parliamentarian meeting another parliamentarian, to have some discussions with the Prime Minister of Lithuania.

We identified a number of areas in which Canadian help to the elected leaders of Lithuania can proceed, ranging all the way from advice on establishing banking systems and government departments, through to the provision of training in Canadian business schools and the discussion of trade with members of the trade delegation accompanying the Prime Minister.

Of particular interest to me was the response by the Prime Minister of Lithuania to the proposal made on the weekend by President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl. The response was a constructive and positive one, indicating that they would, of course, require some international guarantees. I indicated to the Prime Minister that Canada would look for ways in which we could contribute to international guarantees that might allow the independence of Lithuania to be achieved by negotiation and peacefully.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister for External Affairs and it also concerns Lithuania.

Did the minister have an opportunity in his discussions this morning with the Prime Minister to indicate Canada's recognition of this as being an international problem and not just a national problem for Moscow, and our willingness to indicate to Moscow our support for a peaceful settlement and the eventual independence of Lithuania?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, that position was communicated some time ago, not least by a unanimous resolution of this House of Commons.

I think that the practical problem being faced now is how one achieves that result in a way that encourages and maintains in control in the Soviet Union the forces of reform which all of us applaud.

There was a very important initiative taken by President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl. There has been a constructive response by the Lithuanians to that initiative. There is a requirement from the point of view of the Lithuanians of some kind of international guarantees. There are a couple of ways in which Canada can work on that. One is to consult with some of our allies, which we will do, beginning in the next few days. Another would be to respond positively to the request of the Prime Minister of Lithuania this morning that there might be some Canadian expertise in international law that could be made available to Lithuanians. We are prepared to look at that.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is to the same minister.

I am sure all Canadians appreciate the initiatives being taken here, but I would like to pursue one specific one. Given Canada's commitment to international organizations, does the minister see a role for the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, and the presence of international organizations during these very, very insecure times for Lithuanians?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, that matter was discussed with the Prime Minister of Lithuania this morning. I conveyed to her my view that it would be premature to involve the United Nations or the Security Council at this stage because that might have the effect of hardening attitudes on all sides. I thought the informal but highly effective approach that had been initiated by President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl should be followed up with a similarly informal but effective attempt by nations in the west to provide the kind of international guarantees, quite reasonable guarantees in my view, that were sought by the Prime Minister of Lithuania.