

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Inquiries of the Ministry

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

POSSIBILITY OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN NATO AND WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES—MEETING WITH MAINLAND CHINA REPRESENTATIVE

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to see the Secretary of State for External Affairs back in the House of Commons. May I ask him whether Canada as a member of NATO is pressing NATO countries to enter into discussions with the Warsaw pact countries in an attempt to bring about meetings which will be fruitful and result possibly in a détente?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as I said in my report on my Scandinavian tour, we have been supporting in particular the Finnish initiative which embodies the conditions and qualifications we think necessary for a successful conference. We believe that the Budapest Declaration, or the language of that declaration, is not of a nature best calculated to make friends and influence people. The Finnish initiative seems to have that character and has, therefore, more hope of success.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I asked, Mr. Speaker, whether Canada is pressing her NATO allies or associates to proceed along those lines?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is our policy. It is the position we are pursuing within NATO.

Mr. Stanfield: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Has Canada actually made representations to this effect to the NATO council or to any appropriate NATO organization? Has it done so beyond speaking to individual Scandinavian countries, for example? Has Canada made specific recommendations to the appropriate NATO organization which would take the step that has been alluded to? Also, what does the minister consider is the appropriate first step for anyone to take having regard to his indication that we ought to proceed step by step?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, Canada has been foremost among NATO countries over a long period of months in advocating a détente between east and west. This has perhaps been our most important contribution to the NATO discussions in recent months. Our view about the course of the discussions, as I indicated,

is that we should proceed to discuss those questions upon which greatest progress is likely to be made immediately. We should begin with disarmament.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs, whether in his discussions with the Finnish government he indicated that Canada would be prepared to attend such a conference? Also, did he find that other countries had indicated to the Finnish government that they would be willing to attend such a conference?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, we not only indicated our willingness to attend but also our wish to be invited. This is the first hurdle in these discussions which must be surmounted. The plans which have been put forward do not indicate with sufficient certainty as yet that Canada and the United States will be invited. But it is our wish to be invited and we are certainly willing to go if we are invited.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister speaks of certain steps which ought to be taken preliminary to such a conference. Has the minister outlined these proposed steps in any document and has this document been circulated among our NATO allies? If so, what has been the response?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, it is not necessary for us in the NATO council to distribute documents of this kind. We have been discussing in the NATO council for some months the prospects for détente. Indeed, this discussion, as the hon. gentlemen will recall, was quite well advanced before the Czechoslovakian invasion. We now hope to get the discussions under way again, and that is why we have been giving such strong support to the initiative of the Finnish government which is an entirely neutral government. That initiative seems to offer the best hope. It would enable the two sides to come together and discuss the issues upon which Europe is divided. As I understand it, the discussions that are going on are very informal because in many cases certain countries have not replied yet to the proposals put forward by the Finnish government. Perhaps the conference might consider a series of questions, beginning with those upon which greatest progress is likely to be made and ending with those that are most difficult.