

THE SENATE

Tuesday, March 22, 1994

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

CHINA-CANADA RELATIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Consiglio Di Nino: Honourable senators, I have missed several days of this sitting and feel it only proper to account for my absence. For the fifth time, on a personal trip, I was on the other side of the world participating in the search for hope and freedom among the people of a proud and ancient culture.

Only hours after having participated in the World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet, attended by some 40 parliamentarians from 25 countries and dealing with Tibetan issues and the brutally repressive treatment of Tibetans by the occupying Chinese forces, I read on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* of Saturday, March 19, the comments of Canada's Prime Minister on the cowardly and hypocritical stance of his government on human rights issues in China.

The conference heard a litany of examples of human rights abuses and denials of freedoms in China, and particularly in Tibet; abuses well documented by the U.N., international human rights organizations, and official parliamentary fact-finding delegations from several countries.

When I first read Mr. Chrétien's comments, I felt a strong sense of shame, quickly followed by an even stronger sense of outrage. These comments from the head of government of a nation that is one of the world's most respected defenders of human rights and freedoms disgraces Canada's long and proud tradition in the defence of the self-respect and dignity of every human being in every corner of the globe. This is not the tradition of his predecessors, who left him a legacy of courage and determination as staunch defenders of the rights of those who cannot defend themselves.

Honourable senators, what kind of message is Mr. Chrétien sending the millions of oppressed and downtrodden peoples of the world in their quest for minimal and most basic rights? What kind of message is Mr. Chrétien sending to Amnesty International, Asia Watch, and others, about Canada's support for their struggles? What kind of message is Mr. Chrétien sending the Chinese dissidents inside and outside China who are putting their lives at stake on behalf of millions of their brothers and sisters who are even today being persecuted? Has Mr. Chrétien ever heard of David and Goliath? Has Mr. Chrétien ever heard of

Tiananmen Square? Or is he suffering from convenient memory loss? Has he ever heard of leadership?

Honourable senators, there are ways to do business with a nation while at the same time taking tough and courageous positions on certain issues with that nation's government. But history has shown that Mr. Chrétien will dodge tough issues. Sadly, this is but another example, only a most tragic one.

Mr. Chrétien does not speak for me, and I fervently believe he does not speak for the majority of his party or the majority of Canadians. Canada has been universally recognized as one of the strongest beacons, sending the world a powerful message of hope for all those who have been denied. Canada has always been praised for its exemplary leadership on difficult issues of freedom and dignity, and prior Canadian governments have not been afraid to act unilaterally on issues of ethics and morality.

Honourable senators, I hope the Chrétien government has not extinguished that beacon of hope.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE BUDGET

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE AT ST-JEAN

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella: Honourable senators, the media continues to publish varying accounts of the annual savings to be realized through the government's planned closure of the Royal Military College at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Much doubt has been generated as a result, and clarification should be given to demonstrate the government's claim that the closure of this college will result in an annual saving of \$23 million. Honourable senators, even if this figure is correct — and I believe it is not — the threat to national unity which this measure entails does not justify what I believe to be an ill-advised decision.

Long before the various studies on bilingualism, including the royal commission, the reasons for establishing a military college for francophone and anglophone officers in a predominantly francophone cultural milieu were well understood. Those reasons are as valid today as they were in 1952 when the Collège militaire royal de St-Jean was opened.

Many colleagues in this chamber are aware that this decision is part of the newly elected government's first budget. Mindful of that, we are prepared to work on a collaborative basis to find creative and imaginative solutions to this question. I wish to build upon the declaration of our colleague Senator Gigantès, and responses to questions by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, that imaginative and creative solutions be found. However, those solutions must be such as to enhance and enrich our federalist vision of Canada as a great, bilingual country.