

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on Bosnia this morning on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

I would like to point out, however, that, as the minister indicated, we received a copy of the ministerial statement only half an hour ago. I think this is unreasonably short notice.

• (1010)

This rather high handed approach speaks volumes about the government's lack of respect for even the most fundamental parliamentary procedures. It is customary in Parliament for the minister to send out a copy of his statement at least one day ahead. This is typical of the foreign affairs minister.

In 1990, this very minister had the gall to claim that federalism acts as a shield to protect individual freedoms. There is cause for concern when we hear this kind of falsehood. It was the Liberal government that did not hesitate to implement the War Measures Act in 1970, using an alleged danger of insurrection in Quebec to trample the rights and freedoms of several hundred Quebecers.

One can rightly be outraged to hear such the remarks from this minister, who told the Bélanger-Campeau commission that abuse of fundamental rights by the government is more likely in countries with a single level of government. This is the same man who made outrageous remarks during a recent trip to New York, drawing a parallel between the former Yugoslavia and the highly democratic process under way in Quebec to achieve sovereignty.

What did the minister mean when he said: "We have not started killing another yet, and I hope that what is going on in the former Yugoslavia will never happen in Canada"? The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Government of Canada should be ashamed of making such insinuations. This kind of irresponsible behaviour on the part of the minister says a lot about the No side: intolerance, abuse, insults.

At any rate, it is with a feeling of having done our duty that we learned this morning that the Canadian battalion deployed in Bosnia will not be replaced when its mandate ends in November. If the work done by our peacekeepers is starting to pay off, it is precisely because we steadfastly assumed our responsibilities as the official opposition the whole time.

When there was strong pressure to withdraw our troops, abandoning the civilian population over there in a state of destitution and insecurity, as the Reform Party suggested for instance, we, Bloc members, felt that it was our humanitarian duty to stay on location.

As the Leader of the Opposition said as early as January 1994, we had to bear in mind that we had to take on, to the best of our

abilities, our fair share of the tasks that arise out of our belief in the democratic values of peace and justice. Today, we can see the concrete result of this. There is every indication that the conflict in Bosnia can be resolved through negotiations instead of violence and massacres. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to pay tribute to the courage and sacrifice of all our military personnel, some of whom gave their lives so that peace could prevail.

[English]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I make my comments from the national opposition standpoint.

After three and a half years of excellent service our peacekeepers are finally coming home from Bosnia. That is just great. They deserve hearty congratulations for a job well done. During these years our peacekeepers have had to operate under the most difficult of circumstances but they always fulfilled their duties with distinction.

All our troops who have served in the former Yugoslavia have the thanks of the Canadian people and Parliament. To the families of those who were killed in the service of peace, we also pay our deepest respects.

For over a year now the Reform Party has been asking for this day to happen. I refer directly to the statement. I believe there is a coded message in that statement. I draw to the attention of the minister that the last debate in the House occurred on March 29, which was a six-month mandate. That mandate expired at the end of September of this year. Somehow it has been extended to November without consulting the House.

• (1015)

The minister commented that we will be part of a new force. There is no detail of what this new force might be. There is no suggestion of what the criteria might be under which we would participate. There are a lot of questions Canadians are asking. They want the questions answered and the criteria established in the House.

The questions include cost, length of the commitment and whether there is peace to keep. Is there a mandate for our troops when they go? Most important, they want to know if we will be part of the decision making, not like with the former Yugoslavia where the contact group was one thing and we more or less put up our hands and said we would go along with what was decided.

We have to look at the UN and the reforms. I know the minister is interested in that. We have to look at the mismanagement that has occurred and the serious doubts we have about UN missions, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and now Haiti where there appear to be serious problems in terms of conducting the mandate. We have to establish those criteria.