

Statements by Ministers

ing the critical objectives of the Geneva negotiations. That is our goal, our duty and our Canadian tradition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I rise on this occasion because I think it is a very important subject which is not often debated in the House. I thank the Minister for making a statement at this time. It is a policy area where we have to try not to be partisan and to try to find a proper solution in our contributions as a nation to peace.

[*Translation*]

In 1982, at the second Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmement, then Prime Minister Trudeau stated: "You would have to be deaf to remain untouched by the clamour which is now rising all over the world against the arms race. Millions of men and women around the world are addressing a most pressing appeal to their leaders."

Today, four years later, the clamour is the same because, while the climate has improved between the major powers these last two years, no new disarmement agreement has been signed and the arms race unfortunately continues.

What we are discussing today is the implementation of this political will or impulsion on which Mr. Trudeau focused his peace and security initiatives a few years ago.

With its plan to eliminate arsenals, to reduce conventional forces and to develop measures related to chemical weapons, the proposal made last week by Mr. Gorbachev could be a very important step leading to a breakthrough between the two super powers. This gesture seems to express a renewed political will. For this reason and because of the novelty of some of its elements, the Soviet proposal deserves serious consideration. The offer made by Moscow certainly justifies some optimism, but it should also be viewed with caution.

We know that, as concerns arms control and disarmement, like the Minister said earlier, the road to success is always very rocky. The Gorbachev proposal must be carefully examined and it will call for a very reasonable reply. However, preliminary analysis already shows that the plan submitted by the Soviet leader contains new and encouraging elements.

[*English*]

It is a good opportunity for us that this proposition has many elements which are extremely important. As the Minister mentioned a few minutes ago, the willingness of the Russians or the Soviets at this time to permit site inspection—and they have affirmed that they will accept that—is very important. In that field we cannot rely only on satellite verification. It will always be there, but it is a great confidence builder when both sides agree that there might be and will be some site verification.

● (1530)

There is a new sign of flexibility that I welcome. It is something we should all applaud. There has been somewhat of

a move away from the insistence that the disarmement negotiations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. be different from the negotiations that should occur with France and Great Britain. I do believe there was a very difficult political problem there and I see the new disposition of the Soviets to put in the second phase or have later on discussions with the British and French Governments as a positive sign that there will be more flexibility and early progress in the negotiations. I do think that is very positive.

There is a problem to which the Minister did not refer and that disturbed me a bit. I think he should have referred to it. Everyone recognizes that the main obstacle to progress at this time is SDI. I do not know, but some say that SDI was developed and put forward because it would put pressure on the Russians to return to the negotiating table after they had quit. On tactical grounds, I felt that that was a valid argument. Now that the Soviets have returned to the negotiating table and are willing to put forward some new propositions, I think that the NATO nations should talk to the Americans and try to do something positive regarding SDI. It should not necessarily be put aside forever, but perhaps the point should be made that it slow down or be frozen for a period of time in order to give a chance for talks to make progress. I believe that that is the main obstacle to progress.

The Minister did well to point out at this time the issue of conventional arms control. That is a very important point. Everyone recognizes that it might be possible to debate nuclear armaments and have some kind of equilibrium depending on the way one looks at it. However, the Eastern bloc has a great advantage in conventional arms and it should be pointed out very clearly to the U.S.S.R. that this should be reduced as quickly as possible while not necessarily linking the two. In my mind I tend to make a big distinction between the grave danger of nuclear armaments and the conventional arms, which are of a different nature.

What can we do here to help? Of course, there is not much, but I think we have to make Canada's point of view known. The point of view of my Party, at least, is that we should press the Americans on SDI as I think it is a crucial point that must be put forward by Canadians. I would urge the Minister to reconsider his position on that.

In 1982 when Mr. Gorbachev came here, it was in a different context. He came to lead a parliamentary delegation and he created a big impression on Canada. I think we used that occasion to create an impression on him. I remember that when he came before the committee, which was then chaired by the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme), he was the first senior officer of the Soviet Union to speak to Parliamentarians. That helped us to understand some of their positions. When Gorbachev made his great tour of Canada with the then Minister of Agriculture, I think it was the first opening up that there was for this leader who became a leader of a great power. It allowed him to know what the western world was all about. When Mr. Gorbachev went to Great Britain last year as the head of his Government, we saw that he was already acquainted more closely than anyone else who