

STATEMENTS  
AND  
SPEECHES



DÉCLARATIONS  
ET  
DISCOURS

91/4

Notes for a statement  
in the House of Commons by  
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
during an emergency debate  
on the Baltic States

Ottawa, Ontario  
January 21, 1991

Mr. Speaker, there is not very often unanimity in this House, even on questions of international policy, but I think that this is one of those occasions in which the House of Commons of Canada speaks, if not with one voice, then certainly with one purpose and one conviction and that is to send the clearest possible signal to the leadership of the Soviet Union and to the Baltic peoples that Canada, each and every one of us, each and every Canadian, opposes absolutely the crackdown that has begun to develop in the Soviet Union against aspirations and governments which have a legitimacy in the Baltic States.

The hard question for us, and one that I think we cannot answer tonight, is what exactly and practically the people and Government of Canada can do to reverse these developments. We are all determined to seek the reversal and to find ways that are available to us within the limits we face, as a government with obligations and restrictions in the family of nations.

Everyone, every Canadian, I believe is shocked by the brutal and unwarranted use of military force against the people and democratically elected governments of the Baltic States, last week in Lithuania and yesterday in Riga, Latvia. We condemn such appalling and reprehensible behaviour and we call upon Soviet President Gorbachev to do the same.

No one can remain unmoved by the vigilant and peaceful struggle of the peoples of the Baltic States to regain their independence. Their future is bound up in that of the new international order we are trying to create, whether that is in Europe or in the Gulf. For that reason this debate is important. It is important also to make it clear to the leaders of the Soviet Union that whatever our preoccupations with a war in which Canadian lives are at stake in the Gulf, those preoccupations will not allow anyone to get away with a crackdown of the kind that is beginning, that is all too evident now in the Baltic States.

I want to commend the excellent work of the Member for Scarborough Centre who presides over an ad hoc committee of members of Parliament on the Baltic States. They have been concerned, committed and tireless in their efforts on behalf of the Canadian Baltic communities and the people who come from there.

Canada's support for the Baltic States has been unwavering. We recognize their de jure independence. We have never accepted their forcible annexation. We support the right of their peoples to determine their own future. The question for us is what practical help can we offer now.

I have just had the great privilege of meeting, in my capacity as a parliamentarian, with Vice-President Ivans of Latvia who came up particularly to see me tonight and is on now

for meetings later this evening or early tomorrow morning with the Secretary of State of the United States. We talked about three areas in which the help of Canada can be offered: one is material, one is moral and political and the third is diplomatic.

Regarding material help, there may well be in Latvia, as there sadly is in Lithuania, a need for some medical supplies. I asked Vice-President Ivans on behalf of the Government and people of Canada to prepare a list of the things that might be needed by the Latvian people, things that we might be in a position to provide and we would then look at ways -- and they could be difficult -- by which those might be delivered to people in need.

I would encourage groups in Canada who might have materials, medical supplies, perhaps other things that would be necessary to consider ways by which those might be gathered and made available for transmission to people in the Baltic States.

In terms of moral and political support, two or three matters were raised by the Vice-President of Latvia. One of them I think must be considered carefully by this House. It holds some risks, including personal risks and including a risk of being counter-productive and that is the possibility of a delegation of parliamentarians of this House going from here to Latvia.

As Secretary of State for External Affairs I would not at the moment make a recommendation on that matter. I think that is simply because this debate comes so quickly after the proposal was made.

There are some positive things that could be gained from a gesture of that kind. But there are dangers, some of them personal in the circumstances, and also the danger that that kind of action by parliamentarians from this House would invite exactly the opposite response from what we seek from the Soviet Union.

The Baltic countries have established a Baltic centre in Stockholm. That is something the Government of Sweden has determined to be acceptable by its interpretation of international law and practice. Certainly, I think it is important and useful for us to consider whether a similar arrangement might be applied here.

There are things that we have to consider doing on the diplomatic front as was discussed in this House in answer to questions from my friend for Winnipeg-Transcona. There has to be consideration here as to what we can do in the context of the United Nations, probably most likely in its committees dealing with human rights. We are already trying to define some ways in

which we can make progress through the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). I want to return to that theme a little bit later tonight.

As the two speakers preceding me have indicated, what is happening in Latvia and Lithuania is inseparable from the broader situation in the Soviet Union, a situation which becomes more troubling every day, particularly for those of us who were so encouraged by the movement towards glasnost and perestroika and so determined to do what we can to help those reforms succeed.

None of us wants the Soviet Union to crumble. All of us want reform in that society to succeed. We were encouraged, among other things, by the attitudes that had been shown generally earlier with respect to the status of the Baltic States. We are discouraged now, deeply discouraged, by actions that have become more violent and more dramatic in recent days.

There are things that we can do that we must consider to support the Baltic people, but we must try to do them in the context of encouraging the reform and the cohesion of the Soviet Union. That is a particularly difficult challenge for all of us, but it is, I think, Mr. Speaker, in everybody's interest, including the interest of the people in the Baltic States and the people of Baltic origin in Canada, that we seek a way that accomplishes or encourages together the reform that was started by Mr. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and some movement towards the independence of the Baltic States.

There is no clear way, at least not clear to me, in which we can accomplish that goal tonight. But the Soviet Union, as it considers what it is doing now, and as it considers the importance to it of the support of a people and a government like ours, must understand that Canadians not only have commitments to human rights that are so much a part of our society, but also have a population that was formed in such large part by people who came from Eastern and Central Europe and from communities in what is now the Soviet Union.

Canadians cannot help but be profoundly affected by what is occurring in the Soviet Union now, and that if those actions do not stop, they are bound to have an effect for the worst upon the relations between Canada and the Soviet Union in a formal sense, but also, and perhaps in a much more important way, they are bound to dim and then to reverse the enthusiasm for reform that had been building among our own people, most particularly among people who had roots behind what used to be the Iron Curtain.

Canada's support for the Baltic States has been unwavering. We recognize their independence by right. We never

accepted their annexation by force. We argue in favour of the right of these peoples to determine their future.

Last spring, the three republics held fair and free elections. Federal representatives, including the Honourable Member for Parkdale-High Park, the Honourable Member for Winnipeg-Transcona and the Honourable Member for Scarborough Centre, and a representative from Ontario, Premier Rae, went to Lithuania during the election as observers.

At the initiative of Lithuania, on March 11, these democratically elected governments declared their independence from the U.S.S.R. They tried to negotiate with Moscow, as provided under the existing constitution. Instead, they were subjected to political and economic pressure.

After five years of a steadily deteriorating standard of living, perestroika has now reached a critical phase. The Soviet economy is crumbling. Pressure from independence movements is rising and public opinion is becoming increasingly negative. Mr. Gorbachev must choose: advance or retreat.

Gorbachev's supporters claim that law and order are the only weapons against anarchy. His opponents say that a policy of oppression will make him the hostage of reactionary forces. Polarization quickly leads to instability.

This winter, the U.S.S.R. asked Canada and other Western countries for assistance. We decided to support reforms by reducing the cost of transition. After my conversations with the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Shevardnadze, the Prime Minister of Canada offered specific types of assistance at the last CSCE Summit in Paris. All of this is now at risk.

That things were getting worse in the Soviet Union was evident when Mr. Shevardnadze resigned in mid-December, warning that dictatorship could be on the way. The tragic events in Vilnius, the night of January 12-13, with 14 dead, 163 wounded and 57 missing, made Mr. Shevardnadze, unhappily, a prophet. Mr. Gorbachev has taken the position that the events in Vilnius were regrettable but inevitable. He has not condemned the violence; he has not expressed sympathy for the victims or repudiated those who ordered it. His ultimatum to the Baltic States gave the military a green light, though he is disclaiming any personal knowledge of the consequences.

All three Baltic States believe that military-enforced, direct presidential rule is imminent. They are directing urgent appeals to Canada and to other Western states, making an explicit linkage to the Gulf crisis. The three have sent out representatives empowered to establish governments in exile if

required. And, as the House knows and as I have said, I met earlier this evening with the Vice-President of Latvia.

Making any assessment difficult is the lack of coherence in Moscow among the various constituencies vying for power. Russian Republic President Yeltsin has joined the Baltic States in opposing the centre. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Moscow, yesterday, calling for Mr. Gorbachev's resignation and the restoration of democracy. Meanwhile, the situation in other republics is increasingly tense, in Georgia, in Armenia, in Moldavia and in Ukraine. Mr. Gorbachev and the military have threatened them with similar treatment if they do not knuckle under. Many believe that the Baltic States are the dress rehearsal.

Last spring, Canada welcomed the free elections in the Baltic States, stressing our support for the right of their peoples to determine their own future. We protested the Soviet resort to intimidation. In my parliamentary capacity, I met with the then Prime Minister of Lithuania, Madame Prunskiene. Canada moved quickly to express its concern about the dangerous situation currently developing in the Baltic States. In December, the Prime Minister and I, in our parliamentary capacities, met with Lithuanian President Landsbergis, Latvian Prime Minister Godmanis and Foreign Minister Jurkans. I wrote to former Foreign Minister Shevardnadze on December 13 seeking confirmation of explicit assurances that were given to me and to the Prime Minister, a year ago, that there would be no crackdown in the Baltic States. On January 8 and January 11, the Soviet Ambassador was called in.

I, on behalf of the Government of Canada, issued tough statements. Canada's reaction to the tragic events in Vilnius was among the strongest to come from any democracy in the Western world.

The Prime Minister wrote immediately to President Gorbachev. He issued a strong condemnation calling on the Soviet President to show restraint and to negotiate settlements based on the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. He reminded him that, at this time of heightened international tension, Canadians were watching events in the U.S.S.R. just as we were watching events in the Gulf.

At the same time, the Prime Minister announced that Canada was reviewing its offer of technical assistance and the new \$150 million line of credit. That is not food aid, but a commercial sale. We have drawn a direct linkage between Canadian assistance and the continuation of Soviet reform. I announced earlier that we were reviewing actions under those programs. I want to advise the House that we have now suspended any action

under those programs that had not taken place before the actions in Lithuania.

On January 15, this House passed a unanimous resolution condemning the brutal violence used against the people and democratically elected Government of Lithuania.

Saturday, I received a communication from the Soviet Ambassador giving the official explanation for the tragic events in Lithuania. The note rejected Moscow's responsibility for what happened blaming instead the Lithuanian leaders who were claimed to have held extremist positions. That, however, was before the equally tragic events in Riga yesterday.

No one knows if Mr. Gorbachev is still in charge or, more worrying, whether he remains committed to the reforms that began in his name. In his letter of January 13, the Prime Minister warned the Soviet President against the consequences of his present course. That letter remains unanswered, and tonight I would like to quote it and lay it on the table of Parliament.

The Prime Minister wrote:

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to express the shock and abhorrence felt by all Canadians at the unwarranted violence used against the people and democratically elected Government of Lithuania.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs raised Canada's concerns with the Soviet Ambassador, January 11. Since then, Soviet military forces have been used against the institutions and citizens of Lithuania with resulting serious injuries and loss of life.

I deeply regret that these actions have taken place. They are contrary to the assurances Mr. Clark had received from Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and which you had explicitly repeated to me that there would be no crackdown in the Baltic States. I cannot stress to you strongly enough the importance of quickly and unequivocally condemning such behaviour.

You have accomplished a great deal in bringing new hope to your nation and the world. I appeal to you not to undermine this achievement but to show restraint in this increasingly dangerous situation so that further bloodshed can be averted. I urge you to seek negotiated solutions consistent with the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the legitimate aspirations of Lithuania and the other Baltic

States. Democracy cannot exist without respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

As of now, Canada is reviewing its offers of technical assistance and new lines of credit for the purchase of foodstuffs. Developments in the Baltic States will also have an impact on the agreements reached during Mr. Clark's visit to Moscow and in our discussions at the CSCE Paris Summit.

I must stress that further escalation will have serious consequences for our relations. As Mr. Clark advised the Soviet Ambassador, at this time of heightened international tension, we are watching events not only in the Gulf, but in the U.S.S.R. as well. In circumstances such as these, you should not underestimate the force of Canadian and world opinion.

That was the Prime Minister's letter to Mr. Gorbachev, and I am prepared to lay it on the table of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Honourable Member understands, as others in the House do, the constraints that are upon us as a country. I have made it very clear that the circumstances under which I could meet elected leaders, other parliamentarians who hold government office from the Baltic States, was in my capacity as a parliamentarian. That has been understood by all of them and I think clearly understood by members of the Baltic community in Canada. It was certainly in that capacity that I met the parliamentarian who is Vice-President of Latvia today.

Mr. Speaker, officials of the departments of External Affairs and International Trade are in continuous contact with representatives of the Baltic communities and concerned individuals.

For example, we are continuing to facilitate the shipment of medical supplies to Lithuania and to other Baltic States.

In Moscow our embassy has been repeating Canada's message, the message of the House of Commons and our government to the Soviets through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there, including a conversation today between Ambassador Michael Bell of Canada and the new Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh of the Soviet Union.

An embassy officer is on the ground in Vilnius providing consular services to Canadians in the region and acting as a channel of communication. He is in direct contact with President Landsbergis.



Another embassy officer is leaving for Riga shortly.

We are looking at ways of including the Baltic States in the CSCE process. Canada is making strong statements at the CSCE conference in Valetta, the meeting on the peaceful resolution of disputes and will do the same at ongoing meetings in Vienna.

Canada and others will be invoking the human dimension mechanism of the CSCE which we think may provide us more influence than we had heretofore seeking explanations formally from Soviet authorities about what is happening in the Baltic States.

As the House knows, the Member for Markham raised a proposal in the House today of which I have taken note regarding the conference under the CSCE process on human rights.

We are discussing the situation with our allies in NATO and are considering the means by which it might be raised effectively in the United Nations, especially in the Commission on Human Rights meeting in Geneva later this month. Members of Parliament have made the point to me that, while they understand the effect of the veto on matters that might be raised in the Security Council, the presence of that veto should not in and of itself preclude us from raising the matter either there or in the General Assembly. We are looking at ways effect can be given to that view.

Bilaterally we are looking at concrete ways that Canada can support the Baltic States through increased contacts and direct assistance. We are also exploring with the Baltic communities in Canada the possibilities of opening a Baltic information office here in Canada.

I am prepared to look at any other ways that are practical. There are limits upon what we can do given our obligations in the family of nations and given the importance of our continuing relations with the Soviet Union, given the importance indeed of our capacity to influence that country and that government, not simply in matters it considers internal but also in other international matters.

I can say, that while I am aware of those limits, it is my intention and the personal commitment of the Prime Minister to push those limits as far as is humanly possible. I will need not simply the support of the House in that, but also the advice of the House as to means that might be followed that can accomplish that purpose. Any proposals that are put forward in this debate or later will be seriously considered.

The purpose of this debate, I believe, is to make one message clear to the Baltic peoples and most particularly to the

leadership in the Soviet Union, and that is that the violence and repression that we have seen in recent days is completely unacceptable to Canada, unacceptable to this Parliament and poses a grave risk to relations that we want to pursue and to reforms that we want to encourage in the Soviet Union.

There is a crisis in the Gulf that preoccupies us all. If leaders of the Soviet Union thought that would deflect the attention of Canadians, this Parliament or this government away from the situation of the Baltic peoples, then they were wrong. We are committed to support principles that have been important to Canadians for years and to support peoples whose bravery and determination has won the admiration of all of us.