

Supply

For example, if it becomes feasible through negotiations to do a step-by-step withdrawal, Canada may withdraw from NATO as Poland withdraws from the Warsaw Pact. If there is a step-by-step de-escalation, we would do that, we would play our card as though we are having a game of bridge. We would play our trump card at the appropriate time. We would not start the game by immediately laying down our card. It is done at the appropriate time.

That is the change to our policy. It has changed from one of immediately withdrawing from NATO to one of withdrawing at the appropriate time. However, our goal remains the same, to withdraw from NATO at the most opportune moment possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Desjardins: Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the Hon. Member's speech and to the remarks of the Hon. Member for Lotbinière (Mr. Tremblay). I should think that all my colleagues here are very pleased that an NDP spokesman has finally explained his Party's clear position with respect to NATO. We had been waiting for that for quite some time. The Hon. Member might be interested to know that two years ago some of my colleagues and I met with Lord Carrington in Brussels. At the time I asked Lord Carrington how Europe would fare should Canada ever decide to pull out of NATO. Lord Carrington's answer: It would be a catastrophe for both Europe and your own country.

So I have to ask the Hon. Member whether he agrees that Canada's withdrawal from the NATO contingent would be an unacceptable retreat, that Canadians would find themselves in an untenable position, altogether vulnerable from an economic standpoint and, in time, completely isolated, in short a withdrawal for which they would end up paying very dearly?

My second question concerns his Party's national defence policy. His own leader once said that a future hypothetical NDP administration—hopefully Canadians will never see that—would maintain the national defence budget as is but earmark the funds in a different way. I wish the Hon. Member would state his position concerning the kind of funding which should be allocated to national defence and, second, concerning the precari-

ous situation Canada might be in should we as a country ever decide to part company with NATO.

[English]

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his question. First, let me go back to the question of NATO. Let us not forget that it was a Conservative Minister of Defence, the Hon. Eric Nielsen, who went to Washington and then Europe floating the idea that perhaps Canadian troops should be brought out of Europe. It was a Conservative proposal. The American representative at that time, Mr. Weinberger, said, "Well, that is an interesting proposal. I think we would like to back you guys on that. Why don't you go and see what the Europeans have to say about that?"

Of course, Mr. Nielsen went to Europe and the Europeans said, "Horror of horrors, you can't do this to us".

We spend around \$1 billion maintaining our troops in Europe, but strategically they are of no importance whatsoever. Let us get this clear. Canadian troops in Europe are of no strategic importance and of no consequence. When Mr. Nielsen was Minister of Defence, he recognized this. Everyone recognizes this. It is a political consideration. Why did the Europeans want Canadian troops in Europe? They wanted them because if Canadian troops were not in Europe, the Americans might decide to leave. The Europeans want the Americans in Europe because if there was an outbreak of hostilities, they know that the United States could immediately become involved in those hostilities. If American boys were not in Europe, then Americans conceivably might decide not to become involved. That is really the political rationale as to why Canadian troops should remain in Europe. It is a political consideration.

• (1050)

What we have found with this Government is that it is withdrawing from Canada by closing all of these bases in Canada that conduct air and sea operations and rescue operations and so forth. It is withdrawing from Canada, but it is leaving our troops in Europe. I suggest that if the Government is going to leave our troops in Europe, they at least should begin to charge a billion dollars or so to the Europeans. The Europeans can well afford their defence situation. If if we are going to become merce-