

Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Act

Mr. Hawkes: I urge Hon. Members to do that, if in fact they face a vote on that matter.

Mr. Althouse: There is no special committee.

Mr. Hawkes: I have been here since five o'clock. Before the weekend I became aware that this subject matter would be brought up for debate today.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am following the debate and I am very interested in listening to the remarks of the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes). To what special committee is he referring? To the best of my knowledge, no such special committee has been set up.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): That is not a point of order. This is Private Members' Hour. The time is slowly approaching six o'clock. There are other Members who would like to speak on this Bill. The Hon. Member for Calgary West has the floor.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of Members one of the differences that happen when you are elected to serve in this Chamber. Prior to election, one serves one's nation generally in the capacity of a private citizen. One of the obligations of citizenship in a democracy is to propose sets of ideas which should be discussed in public and should be advanced by different types of groups with different interests. The minute you join this Chamber, you assume a responsibility for decision-making. You not only propose, but you must dispose. You must make decisions.

I do not think there is a Member of this House of Commons who does not want and does not yearn for the day when nuclear weapons become a thing of the past, for the day when they no longer constitute a threat. It is the responsibility of those in this Chamber which is something different from that of private citizens, to make decisions which, to the best of our knowledge, are likely to lead us a step closer to that day. It is not just a forum for discussion. The responsibility of Members of Parliament is to reach decisions about the steps which might take us one step closer to the eradication of nuclear weapons on the face of the earth and the removal of that threat.

That is a special obligation. Our debate today would be wise to focus on whether or not the proposal which appears before us in the form of Bill C-218 is a wise step. Would it serve Canadians well? Would it serve the people of the world well if we were to take that step? It is our responsibility to make decisions.

The Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) stood and the basic argument that he advanced in trying to encourage Members of this Chamber to support his Bill was the argument that if Canada were to take this unilateral action, other nations would follow. There is a germ of truth to that because Canada does enjoy a reputation for leadership in world affairs. I think it is correct to say that some nations would follow Canada's lead in this regard, but as responsible

decision-makers, we have to ask ourselves which nations would follow. Would the U.S.S.R. or any member of the Eastern bloc follow our lead?

I recently had, what is a very unique opportunity for Members of this Chamber, that of being a member of Canada's delegation to the United Nations for 11 weeks this past fall. It was a unique opportunity to interact five days a week with representatives from the 159 member nations, the observer nations and the observer groups. Canada has taken the lead. Canada has been one of the leading nations in putting forward many initiatives. Who followed and who did not? Canada is a leading national when it comes to democracy. We believe in democracy. We espouse it. We say it is the best form of Government. It is the most humane, most sensitive and leads to the best standard of living for the most.

I stand here in the month of March 1985, knowing there are 159 member nations in the United Nations, less than 30 are democracies. We take the lead. We declare ourselves. We act in that fashion, and there are less than 30 others who join us in that activity, and none from the East bloc.

At the United Nations this fall, we worked very hard on getting passage through third committee and through plenary of two very important initiatives. One was the development of an international instrument that would enable us as a world community to do a better job of narcotics control. Another was the passage of an international covenant that would outlaw torture. I saw nations of this world and their delegations try to trade off. They said that if we would back off on our concerns about torture, they would support our concerns in terms of international narcotics control. All of that was taking place in a context where after 17 years the basic human rights covenant at the United Nations was signed by nearly half the nations. A large number that have signed it refused to sign the protocol which would allow for verifiability.

The reality is that we live in a world where the overwhelming majority of member states, led by the East bloc countries, will not allow an international organization like the United Nations to come into their country and verify whether or not torture is taking place and whether or not they are producing and transshipping drugs. That is the reality of the international community today. To stand in this Chamber and to think that a unilateral action, no matter how desirable the goal or the direction might be, is a way of leading the world defies the reality of experience.

The member nations do not follow just because you do. They do not follow in the direction that you go. They certainly do not follow by signing documents and allowing a kind of open door that would enable you to verify whether or not they keep those international covenants. That is how those member states behaved in the General Assembly context of the United Nations and in the private perspective.

This Bill says there shall be no nuclear arms in Canadian coastal waters. If we were to take that action as a nation state, the odds are reasonable that member states within the NATO alliance would respect our desire in that regard because they are democracies and they respect the sovereignty of states.