POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

Will Canadian interests in the future best be served through continued Canadian membership in NATO? One of the major concerns in our review of defence policy and related foreign policy considerations has been to establish whether there are in fact any better alternatives to NATO for Canada. We are examining this problem ourselves, we are seeking the views of other informed observers and taking account of the opinions we have received from the public at large. At the same time, a Parliamentary committee is conducting its own review of many of the issues.

If we should decide that it is in our interest to remain in NATO, it will be necessary to take account of the responsibilities as well as the benefits that go with such a policy. I mention this because there have been suggestions recently that, by withdrawing from the alliance or maintaining only nominal membership, Canada could have most of the benefits the system provides without paying for them. I doubt that this approach would appeal to many Canadians or that the benefits would in fact flow so readily. This is not to say that a decision to stay in NATO would mean that we stay for another 20 years, or that our military contribution will remain the same.

Governments are often accused of losing touch with the wishes and aspirations of the people, and the Government of Canada has heard such accusations often enough. But there is one issue on which the Government and the people of Canada stand four-square together – the paramount determination to do our part to prevent war. If Canada decides to stay in NATO, it will be because we are convinced that in NATO we can effectively help to prevent war. If some other course is taken, it will be because we think such a course will better enable us to help to prevent war. No other consideration, however seductive it may appear, will be permitted to deflect Canada from its supreme objective, the prevention of war.
