

Supply

indicated it was 25 per cent of their gross national product which, of course, we also do not know.

As I mentioned previously, we in the committee heard from many witnesses and while their concern was obviously genuine, I felt that in some instances they were seeking a dangerous path to peace, that of unqualified, unilateral disarmament.

Canadians have already witnessed this government's attitude toward disarmament. I am pleased to see that the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne) is here because I suggest to him that our Canadian armed forces, which is our vehicle for national security, our contribution to the maintenance of world peace, has been disarmed to the brink of dissolution under this government. Under this government, our military has been decimated and neglected for over a decade.

As a member of two international military alliances, NORAD and NATO, Canada is supposed to be assisting our allies in the defence of the free world. It is common knowledge and a matter of shame to many Canadians—particularly those men and women who serve in uniform—that our contribution is merely token.

Although our people are of the highest professional calibre, and what service they do provide is of value, this nation's minuscule contribution to the alliances in manpower, equipment and spending percentages is far less than it should rightfully be. Of the 15 NATO nations, only the small country of Luxembourg pays less per capita for defence than does Canada. Furthermore, what we have for the little we spend is nothing to brag about. Although we may have the best people, the equipment and the funds they have to work with certainly are not the best.

Let us look at our navy. We may call it a navy but that would be stretching the imagination. Our navy presently consists of 20 ships which, to say the least, are not of 1982 vintage. Although we have a new program to build six new patrol frigates, they are still in the design phase. Even this program is in difficulty and is incurring rising costs, as usual. When I first came on the committee for national defence, I heard stories about the great frigate program. I believe the cost of building those six frigates some years back was \$1,000,400,000, but the latest figure is now \$4 billion, and the Lord knows what the figure will be by the time the first frigate is on the water and delivered to the hon. minister, whoever he may be at the time. By then it will be even higher.

● (1750)

Miss Jewett: Yes, he or she.

Mr. Darling: Sure, he or she. I am well aware that the day may come when we could have a woman minister of national defence, and she may be a woman of the calibre of the present prime minister of Great Britain.

Miss Jewett: Oh, perish the thought.

Mr. Darling: She would certainly carry her weight.

Some hon. Members: Ursula.

Mr. Darling: If the government had understood the necessity of our military and had provided sufficient funds for a sensible, smooth-flowing program of equipment replacement, we would be spending far less than we now do to try to catch up to where we were before.

This nation has one of the longest coastlines in the world. I believe it is 37,000 miles long. It stands to reason that a viable, up to date and strong navy is of great importance to us. Following the Second World War, Canada had the third largest navy in the world. People watching the serious situation in the Falkland Islands with concern were probably laughing and discussing the fact that Argentina only had one aircraft carrier. However, that is one more than we have.

Our air force and our army are in equal disarray. We are slowly re-equipping these two elements of our military as well. It has also become a case of too little too late, and now at too high a cost. Yet, despite the state of our military today, there are people who feel we should reduce its size even more. There are those who would like to see Canada sit back and let the United States assume full responsibility for our security. What they perhaps do not know is that our great neighbour to the south now spends a significant portion of his defence budget to what could be considered to be in our defence as well. I believe that our defence budget, which has increased this year, is in the \$7 billion bracket, up considerably from a while ago. However, when compared with the budget of \$200 billion of the United States, we find that its budget is ten times higher. If the United States spends \$200 billion on arms, our equivalent would be \$20 billion. Is that not right, Mr. Minister? The Minister of National Defence is shaking his head. I am not suggesting that we are in any financial position to spend that amount, but it is worth while to compare the budgets.

The U.S. assumes most of the cost of NORAD, which is our continental defence and is the major spending partner in our NATO alliance. Can we take pride as a nation? Indeed, do we have any right to call ourselves a nation if we turn to another to defend our very existence as a nation? If we do not have the national will and the gumption to assume more of our own defence requirements, can we shame ourselves even more by refusing to assist our defender with our joint requirements?

The United States seeks permission to conduct testing of a number of items of military equipment on and over Canadian soil. One of these is the Cruise missile. The motion before this House in support of this press release demands, among other things, that no Cruise missile testing be allowed in Canada. The U.S. has stated that it would like to test a missile from our facilities at the Canadian Forces Base at Cold Lake in northern Alberta because the terrain and climate is similar to that on the Russian front where it might be used. As soon as the request was revealed in the media, a hue and cry went up exhorting the government not to grant permission. Critics berated the government for its potential involvement in a nuclear weapons system, many of them not realizing that testing would in no way involve the use of the nuclear warheads themselves.