

Income Tax

would have gone to Canada's defence spending, that is about 9.3 cents of every dollar for the 1984-1985 fiscal year. This is obviously neither responsible nor reasonable.

This year personal income taxes amounted to about \$30 billion of the Government's total revenues. To put things in perspective, this motion would make Parliament surrender control of about \$3 billion each year, or close to 3 per cent of this year's total expenditures.

My first reaction to this motion was that it implies there is a disagreement between the wishes of Parliament and those of the Canadian people. This contradicts the basic belief we all hold that says Parliament provides a forum where the different views and interests of Canadians can be engaged and debated. It is hoped that the result of this process will be policy and legislation that pursues the national interest in the most effective way possible.

If we accept the principle behind this motion we will have to admit that Parliament is not succeeding in its most basic goal. In the case of defence policy I think that our Government has taken particular care to see that its defence spending priorities reflect the appropriate balance between the need for an effective military capability and, yes, an earnest desire to enhance national and international security.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I think that this policy supports in a very deliberate way the traditional role that Canada has played in international affairs and that we have earned respect for, that is a role highlighting leadership in bringing about the peaceful resolution of conflicts around the world and voicing the importance of moderation and understanding in that relation between all nations.

Even more significantly, I think our Government's defence policy is an expression of the views and priorities of the Canadian public. The public has by and large supported the approach we have taken on questions relating to national defence and international security. Of course, there will always be debate over precisely the best way to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves of a nation, as part of North America and as members of the NATO Alliance. A difference of opinion is always healthy in the sense that it ensures that alternatives will be considered most carefully. This is particularly evident in the activities of the Canadian Institute for Arms Control and Disarmament. The establishment of this organization was a clear expression of the fact that the Government sees as important precisely the same objectives as the Hon. Member has brought forward in his Bill tonight.

• (1820)

The Government's recent decision with respect to the Strategic Defence Initiative was indicative of our appreciation for the democratic process. When concerns were raised over the merits of this proposal through the direct representation of Canadians, the media and the speeches of Members of this House, the Government took care to appeal to public participation in this decision. I believe that the final choice not to participate in SDI directly as a Government was very strongly influenced by a number of widely held reservations about this new strategy on the part of Canadians.

Defence policy is of such a crucial nature that the principles embraced by the Government, more so than in any other area of policy, must be sensitive to the prevailing attitudes among the electorate. At the same time, however, I think that this area of Government policy is most effectively dealt with by the parliamentary and Cabinet decision-making process.

I believe the views and opinions of Canadians must be considered in forming Canada's defence policy. This process, however, depends on the institution of Parliament. Parliamentarians have access to resources and information, they have opportunities for debate and discussion and they have a legislative process, all of which ensure that conclusions are reached responsibly and legitimately. Matters as sensitive and complex as defence policy rely very heavily on the testimony of experts and on healthy debate between those with widely differing views.

I am afraid that the motion being debated today would not satisfy the principles of parliamentary democracy that are the traditions of this House. To illustrate this point, I suggest that we imagine what it would be like if we could earmark our tax returns for any purpose that we might personally feel important. I am sure that this would result in a very colourful range of Government-sponsored activities. Although this would be a very clear expression of public preference, it would not be an improvement over our present arrangement. More importantly, this kind of tax provision would introduce total disorder into the duties of the House of Commons. Members of Parliament would cease to exercise their responsibilities and policy would not be the product of a deliberate and thoughtful process.

The final point I would like to make is the simplest of all. I disagree with this motion because I believe the restraints imposed by our huge deficit have made defence spending, not to mention spending on environmental protection, very inadequate. As a nation-state, Canada has to fulfil certain responsibilities, primarily to our own defence and secondly to the safety and security of our allies. In the context of other obligations and commitments, the Government has allocated certain funds for national defence. Still our forces rely on obsolete technology and deteriorating equipment. It is very questionable as to whether or not we could offer any defence whatsoever to our sovereign territory, no matter how much we cherish it. Unfortunately, we inherited this terrible state of defence from the previous administration.

As a member country in good standing in NATO which certainly enjoys benefits commensurate with our contributions, we must be careful to honour our obligations. Support for this motion would certainly bring into question our commitment to the goals of our alliance and indeed to the values of peace and security that we are trying to uphold so well.

Finally, significant reductions in nuclear armaments can only be achieved if they are verifiable. Negotiations have to be conducted from a position of credibility. I believe that support for this motion would seriously jeopardize this goal.

It is important for all Canadians to know that to protect the interests of our country, we must speak from a position of