

Statements by Ministers

Has the Alliance met the test that Lester Person set for it 40 years ago? Has it led to positive social, economic and political achievements? Is it more than just a military alliance? Clearly the answer is yes to all questions.

It was through NATO in 1972 that we and our Allies set down our objectives for the conference on security and co-operation in Europe. Through that process, we have secured from the Soviet Union, and its East European Allies, real commitments in human rights, economic co-operation and military security. Today, in the East, there is greater respect for the rights of individuals, greater freedom to travel to visit friends or relatives and greater freedom to worship. That progress would not have been made without the tenacity with which the Allies pressed the East to extend to their publics the privileges and rights which we take for granted.

We are at an historic juncture now. The two superpowers have agreed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. Significant progress has been made on a treaty to reduce by approximately 50 per cent the size of their strategic nuclear arsenals. A new sense of purpose has been injected into their efforts to control and ultimately ban chemical weapons. And perhaps most important of all, new negotiations to reduce conventional forces in Europe are under way in Vienna. With imagination and good will on both sides we have every reason for optimism. President Gorbachev is claiming credit for much of this success and certainly he deserves a good deal of credit. After all, he is redefining the Soviet Union. However, it is important to remember that President Gorbachev has been responding to ideas and proposals originally made by the West. He has been responding to the unity and to the fidelity to western values which are at the heart of the success of the North Atlantic Alliance.

• (1110)

Every Canadian of good will celebrates the changes that are appearing in the Soviet Union and in parts of eastern Europe. They represent the kind of genuine progress toward the social, economic and political achievement that Mr. Pearson described. The challenge is for NATO to continue to bring down the tensions between East and West and to continue to build up confidence and co-operation. That will require the same unity and determination which have allowed the NATO alliance to contribute so strongly to the progress so far.

Some have suggested that Canada should step aside from the responsibilities of membership in this western alliance. Had we stepped aside before, NATO would not have been able to contribute as constructively to the progress the world sees now. Canada has many means to influence peace in the world. One of those, which has worked for 40 years, and is essential to continued progress in East-West relations, is the NATO alliance whose anniversary we mark today. NATO has been good for Europe, good for North America and good for Canada. This Government is committed to ensuring that Canada continues to play a full and leading role in NATO in helping to shape a new era in East-West relations.

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I stand in this House this morning on this very special occasion, the fortieth anniversary of NATO, with a deep sense of humility and pride; humility in the wake of the great architects of NATO, the men who had the vision to put it all together, and Canada had a great part in that; and a sense of pride in the reflection that this forum of legislative debate can take the time out to mark an organization that represents human liberty in the purest form yet devised.

I do not stand here as an advocate for any partisan cause for the issues to which reference has just been made by the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark). These issues, Mr. Speaker, are fundamental and reach quite beyond the realm of partisan considerations. I hear in this House this morning on the fortieth anniversary of NATO the hopes, the aspirations and the faiths of over 600 million people in 16 nations on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Unhappily, Mr. Speaker, I possess neither the eloquence of diction nor the brilliance of the metaphor to suitably convey all that NATO stands for, what it means now and what it has meant over the last 40 years. In the past, military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be the crucible of war. The utter destruction of war now blocks out this alternative. To preserve the peace, we must now synchronize our matchless advances in science, technology and all the other material developments of our time and combine them with a firm resolve of our human character. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.

As a country, Canada is the second largest in the world, but we are not, Mr. Speaker, as we are all aware, second largest in resources, in particular military resources. Canada can neither independently guarantee