

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak in the debate this afternoon in order to resolve a number of procedural problems that were raised earlier. I intend to make a speech, and I have no questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Very well. Debate.

Mr. Chrétien: Thank you Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to say that it bothers me somewhat that, at least as far as I know, we are not going to have more than one debate during this session on a subject as important as this one. We were advised Wednesday of today's debate, and I think it is incredible that, considering the fact that this will be our sole opportunity to discuss a problem that millions of Canadians see as the most important issue facing our generation, neither the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) nor the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) could find the time to be in the House. I remember when they were both in the Opposition and were asking us every day for a debate on the subject, and now that we do have a debate here in the House, they have found other, more pressing business to attend to. I also remember that the Prime Minister, in his first speech as Prime Minister which he made when he visited his alma mater in Nova Scotia, a few weeks after he was sworn in, I remember that he said that for him, nuclear armament would be his number one concern during his mandate. Today, we have a debate on this issue, and normally we will not have another before the end of this session which may last until June or even later, and I therefore consider it entirely unacceptable that neither the Prime Minister nor the Secretary of State for External Affairs are present in the House today.

[English]

I think the speeches made so far today have given an indication of how serious the problem is. I could go on about all the disasters the world could face if ever some error were committed by the two superpowers using the arsenals in their possession. The U.S.S.R. has 1,398 intercontinental ballistic missiles in land-based silos hundreds of thousands of times more powerful than the atomic blast at Hiroshima. The same is true of the United States. The Americans have 1,037 intercontinental ballistic missiles, which represent the potential for thousands of Hiroshimas.

We know that on June 3, 1981, a computer malfunctioned in the United States. We came within minutes of having a decision made by a very responsible general, General James Hartinger, that would have affected life. He was informed one moment that a technological problem and occurred and he was faced with making a decision based on a technical error.

I am sure everyone will recall a film shown on television not long ago and, as a result of it, how emotional the youth in universities around the world became. People were frightened and preoccupied by this film. Many felt they had no future because of the continuing escalation in nuclear armaments by the two superpowers. Today we are confronted with the prob-

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lem of expressing the views of Canadians on the matter. I am surprised that there are so few Members in the House and no government leaders to express their views today.

● (1630)

Of course, we all want peace and disarmament. However, I am quarreling with the proposition of the NDP today. I am glad the House Leader of that Party, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans), recognized that there was a political element in the motion before the House. He asked to delete, if it were possible, some of the words of the motion because he felt that they offended. That is why my Party cannot vote for the main motion. It is basically because it introduces politics into the matter. It calls upon the Government to adopt the motion as policy and thereby reject the position of the previous administration. That injects an element of politics of an unacceptable nature into the motion.

We in the House unanimously supported the peace mission of Mr. Trudeau when he was Prime Minister. We felt that it was extremely important for the voice of Canada to be recognized around the world as that of a country that tries to find new solutions to the fundamental problem confronting humanity. To introduce a motion today which will deny the validity of the peace mission of former Prime Minister Trudeau, which was supported by all three Parties in the House, introduces politics into this debate. I am glad the House Leader of the NDP had the courage to recognize that these words were too many. Despite the fact that we could debate the main motion, some elements of it made it impossible for members of my Party to subscribe to the motion, at least on that point.

There is another flaw in the resolution of the NDP. It has been overtaken today by what has happened in the world. When the resolution was proposed at the United Nations, the intent of it was basically to induce the superpowers to start negotiations, to agree on a freeze of nuclear armaments and when the freeze was agreed upon to reduce the arsenal.

We all want peace. The problem is the process. However, now there is a new element in the process. The Leader of my Party rose in the House this morning and indicated that on January 7 and January 8, 1985 the two superpowers have decided to meet without preconditions to review the situation on nuclear disarmament. We should welcome this opportunity. I am sure the people who proposed the resolution at the United Nations had that in mind. They wanted to ensure that the superpowers came together and made a move which would give some relief to the anxiety of the people of the world.

When my Leader rose this morning, he made a proposition indicating that we should give to the superpowers an agenda which will lead to peace and disarmament. It was a very good move to which we are happy to subscribe. I am sure all Members of the House are able to subscribe to it.

There is massive new development. It was not easy for us in government to agree to the policies of the past. With the build-up in the U.S.S.R. and the deployment of SS-20s in Europe, the western world was suffering from a lack of