

International Peace and Security

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): Are there any questions or comments? Debate.

Mr. Lee Clark (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to address this subject today. It may well prove to be one of the most important topics brought before the House in recent times, provided the House deals with the issue in an appropriate manner and that the proposal ends up winning the confidence and support of the people of Canada.

Certainly there is genuine concern among the people of Canada today with respect to the prospects of a general war. It seems to me as an historian that the concern which exists today has been equalled only by the situation which existed in the thirties. At that time there was a widespread pacifist movement similar but not identical to the concerns of today. That movement proved to be very significant in terms of the history of the world, particularly the history of Great Britain. The subject was of special interest to me. The British pacifist movement was the subject of my MA thesis many years ago.

The end result of that movement was that it divided to a substantial degree the people of Great Britain. It is my opinion that the British pacifist movement virtually paralyzed the Government of Great Britain, and I would argue that the end result was not a positive one in terms of future developments in Great Britain and in the western world.

We in this Parliament must harness the concern which already exists in Canada in such a manner that the whole country is a beneficiary. The pursuit of peace has never been a partisan issue in the House. All of us are reassured by that. It is extremely important that the unanimity displayed to this point in time be continued. The most effective way to ensure that unanimity be maintained is to provide the general public with the greatest possible opportunity to make a contribution to this issue which is of vital concern to them.

As I said in the House some months ago, I received a communication from students in my riding, from the community of Souris. Recently I noticed in an article in *The Globe and Mail* that some students in Montreal had essentially done the same thing; that is, they wrote to numerous world leaders asking for some reassurance that the world would remain intact to enable them to mature and grow old. In passing, I note that the article in *The Globe and Mail* refers to the fact that the students in Montreal had their letters answered by some, but not many, world leaders. I regret to say that that proved to be the case in my example of the students in Souris.

● (1230)

What is unfortunate is that those world and national leaders, including some in this House, who received this letter did not respond. That is disquieting to the students. What the students, young people and all who are concerned about peace are seeking today is some sort of reassurance that we who have some responsibility in the decision-making process are listening. Furthermore, they ask for a demonstration of our sincerity.

Perhaps one should not concede it, but quite often in politics leaders tend to posture in order to reassure. That should never be the case. It will be absolutely damaging if it proves to be the case in this instance.

My concern is that not only do we respond to those in Canada who are vitally concerned about the threat of war, but we respond in such a way (a) that we satisfy them of our sincerity and (b) that we satisfy them in such a way that they will have a direct input into the process. They see themselves as the victims if we fail. That is why the nature of this institute is all-important. Members on all sides of the House agree with the general objective. We agree with the proposal to establish the institute. We seek only to perfect that institute. We think we have a manner in which it can be perfected so that the people of Canada will believe, with real conviction, that this is their institute.

We do not need another government agency laid on to the people of Canada. Government has laid far too much on to the people of Canada in the past. One result is that Canadians have become alienated from the political process. They have grown disdainful of it. They tend to believe that government is something which happens only here and has very little direct impact on their lives. They way to resolve that is to ensure that Canadians in general understand that the peace institute this will be a vehicle which will be responsive to their own concerns.

Canadians have pointed out their fears and the problems to be resolved. I suggest they want to be an integral part of the resolution of that problem. By doing so, I believe we can make the whole political process more relevant to the general public. The people of Canada should have a direct say in the administration of the institute. They should have virtual membership in the institute. If we achieve that by turning to Canadians and their organizations, and invite them to be part of the process, we will ensure that this institute will have their support and commitment. We will also ensure that all Members of this House will be fully supportive of, and genuinely committed to, this very important principle.

If we do less, there is a tremendous danger that we are simply window dressing. There is a very real danger that we are failing those with genuine concerns and fears. What we must do is address the nature of the institute. By doing that, we will guarantee that the people of Canada will see it as their own, as they have done in other instances in the past.

As a westerner, I think of the co-operative movement which was born of the people of the west. While it has fallen upon difficult years in the recent past, for a substantial period of time it was a genuine expression of western concern. We have the opportunity to do that here once again. I urge that we invite the people of Canada, through their existing organizations, to participate in this process by informing the House of their candidates for membership on the board of directors. If we permit the people of Canada to do that, we will permit them to be, in essence, an essential part of the real being of the institute. We will be saying to the people of Canada that we have confidence in them. We will be inviting them to join