

● (1700)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there unanimous consent for the House to proceed to Item No. 162?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONE ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West) moved that Bill C-218, an Act to declare Canada a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased, and I think it is an appropriate day, to take the opportunity to present this Bill to the House. It calls for Canada to declare itself a nuclear weapons free zone. I would like to begin by quoting a few words that were uttered in 1959. "I believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than are governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of their way and let them have it". That was said by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then President of the United States.

How true are those words. Twenty-six years later this Bill addresses the undeniable will of the majority of Canadians. It gives them what they want, a nation free of participation in the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Time and time again the people of Canada have given us a clear direction. Almost half a million people signed the peace petition caravan which called for the establishment of Canada as a nuclear weapons free zone. There are over 80 such self-proclaimed zones already in Canada. I speak of various cities and municipalities. No Member of the House can ignore any longer the results of referendums that those communities held, the numerous polls, and the growing number of peace organizations dedicated to disarmament. It is clearly the will of the Canadian people to take this action.

I know support exists among Members on all sides of the House as well. Why is it then that we still allow the proponents of nuclear arms to continue to call the shots? I remember when it was still in fashion to believe in the ability to survive a nuclear war. We told our schoolchildren that all they had to do was to hide under their desks and close their eyes during an attack. Those children have grown up, and they are not buying that one any more. We have tried to assure them that a nuclear war will never happen as long as both sides maintain a suicidal level of the nuclear ability known as mutual assured destruction. However, understanding politicians as people do, they are not falling for that one either.

Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Act

A case in point, Mr. Speaker, is the article on page three of last Friday's *Globe and Mail*. The headline reads, "Pentagon Cites Nuclear Winter as Reason for Arms Build-up". Now they are getting specific. No one wants a nuclear winter, so no one will start a nuclear war. Is it any wonder Canadians doubt the sanity of those who participate in that kind of an argument? Could you imagine what would happen if the Government adopted the same policy for gun control as the Pentagon has for nuclear arms control? It has to be a definition for the word "insanity".

We have also tried to give assurances that arms negotiations will eliminate the threat of nuclear war. I am sure all Canadians applaud any attempt at negotiating arms reductions and a lasting peace. We cannot deny, however, the fact that a generation of good intentions has passed and we are quickly approaching the point where a nuclear holocaust will become a mathematical certainty.

The majority of Canadians are no longer fooled. Despite the overwhelming amount of propaganda, misinformation and disinformation disseminated by the proponents of a nuclear deterrent, Canadians are mobilizing, as General Eisenhower predicted, to demand an end to the development of nuclear arms. Canadians realize that there must be a continuing diplomatic effort to reduce world tensions and that Canada must play an important role. But they also understand that as far as the nuclear threat is concerned, we must also take immediate action against the technology itself.

These weapons were first developed for use against the Germans and the Japanese. Since then we have befriended our previous enemy and have armed ourselves against a previous ally. Politics and alliances change, but human nature does not. There will never be real security in the world as long as nuclear weapons are allowed to exist, and they will never be dismantled if we leave it to the discretion of the superpowers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benjamin: Unless we as Canadians address the moral question of the existence of nuclear weapons, we will find ourselves debating the same red herring argument of deterrence a generation from now under a completely new set of world conditions. That is, assuming that this House and the people it serves are still in existence.

As a veteran committed to the sovereignty of our nation I see no hypocrisy in wishing a strong, legitimate defence for Canada without participation in the nuclear arms race. This Bill is a very important beginning and one which naturally follows previous Canadian precedents as a world peace keeper. In 1967 the UN General Assembly welcomed, with Canadian support, the conclusion of a treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons in Latin America. Since then there has been considerable interest in the United Nations about the establishment of other nuclear weapons free zones. In 1975 Canada voted in favor of resolutions supporting the denuclearization of Africa and the consideration of creating nuclear free weapons zones in south Asia, the Middle East, and the South Pacific.