

NATO

strike attempt by either the U.S.S.R. or the U.S.A. against one another?

The Prime Minister had the courage to raise questions about the legitimacy of the possible first strike role assigned to our "A" bomb carrying aircraft in Europe. We should apply this same reasoning here at home, and we should recognize that the Russians as well as the United States have a legitimate fear of being attacked first by nuclear weapons. Perhaps we, as Canadians, could make a major contribution to the avoidance of nuclear war by seriously considering means whereby our own geographic position might be used to reduce tensions on both of our powerful neighbours. It seems to me that continued membership in NATO would make such a possibility incapable of realization.

In conclusion, I should like to suggest that Canadians should choose a course of action which reveals emotional and intellectual maturity. We will not be abandoning our friends by leaving NATO. Rather, we will be striking off on a new course which is consistent with contemporary facts. Our democratic allies in Europe are now prosperous and strong, and they are capable of defending themselves. We are now in the position of being able to join those middle power nations like Sweden and Yugoslavia who seek to chart their own courses in world history.

We are part of the family of man. We have much to contribute to the preservation of peace and the alleviation of world poverty. It is to these ends we should now devote our energy.

Mr. H. E. Stafford (Elgin): Mr. Speaker, we have heard much about our forces in Europe. Much of this may apply to a reduction in size rather than a withdrawal of our forces. Like many others in this house, I have been attempting to put the many pieces of this jigsaw puzzle together but no matter how I place the pieces I cannot develop a clear picture of any definite policy. It may be that I have been too skilful in putting the pieces together. Many of our partners in the alliance have already expressed their concern. The West German Foreign Minister, Willy Brant, expressed his anxiety at home and when he was in Canada. Britain's defence minister, Denis Healey, warned that unilateralism is very infectious. This was one of the two major subjects discussed by the NATO members when they met in Washington for the 20th anniversary of the alliance. It is no exaggeration to say that the government's

[Mr. Broadbent.]

unilateral decision regarding NATO did not add to the general stability of the alliance.

• (9:30 p.m.)

On April 14 the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) answered a question in the house from one of the hon. members opposite by stating, "We never talked about a planned withdrawal; we talked about a planned reduction". This answer would seem to indicate that we are planning only a reduction of our forces in Europe, and not a withdrawal.

I do not intend to review the many statements made in this regard. Reductions have been made in our NATO forces on four previous occasions. We did this after discussion and consultation with our partners in NATO. This time we made the decision without the usual consultation, and this has caused much consternation among NATO members. The government's announcement in this regard, although indefinite, would lead one to assume that the government has something more in mind than a slight reduction of our forces in Europe.

It seems rather unfortunate that such a decision had to be made at this time. The European balance of security has been altered by the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. This new deployment of Warsaw pact troops puts West Germany, Austria and even Yugoslavia in a much more vulnerable position. Previously, the armed forces of Czechoslovakia, even though a member of the Warsaw pact, were not such a serious threat. I do not agree with the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) that the invasion of Czechoslovakia is a sign of Russian weakness. The Soviet Union has also posed a new strategic threat by its naval build-up in the Mediterranean and in the North Atlantic.

I do not imagine that our military contribution to NATO causes the Warsaw pact nations any undue alarm. Only two countries, Iceland and Luxembourg, contribute less per capita to NATO. Our leaving NATO would not make any decisive difference militarily. It is quite a different matter politically. The Soviet Union is continually looking for some break-up or erosion of the NATO alliance. So, politically, any reduction or withdrawal at this time does suggest a weakening of the alliance and any such political disadvantage is a matter of importance.

The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands asserted yesterday that NATO had turned a cold shoulder to the proposal for