

Supply—National Defence

• (4:50 p.m.)

It is not as though national defence policy and its implementation were a deep, dark secret reserved only for experts. He could share his information with members of the house.

There is one other matter to which I should like to advert at this stage. It is the subject of personnel. I regret that this problem has arisen. I feel it is a crying shame that we should have a problem of morale, as we do, in certain sectors of the armed forces of this country. I do not like to see it and I do not want to gloat over it. I refer to it because time and time again I have asked the minister questions as to the maintenance of the strength of the forces and the effectiveness of recruiting. Of course, based on private knowledge acquired from various sources, I knew there were many deficiencies of highly skilled personnel in a number of areas. Yet, when I asked the minister about the situation, as did others, we heard bland reassurances from the hon. gentleman, with a beautiful smile, that all was best in the best possible of worlds so far as Canada's defence forces were concerned. There were no problems. Morale was high.

Either the minister was emulating a certain bird and hiding his head in the sand or he was trying to cover up. He can take his choice. That is the impression he gave. It was revealing to get, in answer to a question put on the order paper at the beginning of this session, an indication of the number of people who had voluntarily retired or who had not re-engaged prior to their normal retirement date or upon reaching that date. If we look at those figures we will see that at least 25 per cent of the naval strength retired in these circumstances during the last 18 months, 20 per cent or a little more in the army and roughly the same percentage in the air force. This is extraordinarily high. We know that ships are tied up in Halifax. There are difficulties in maintaining service forces overseas. Certain units have to be plugged with personnel drafted from other units. We know that in the air force there are many difficulties at the N.C.O. level and at the technical level.

There is a confession of failure in the fact that on Friday the Associate Minister of National Defence had to announce a program of re-enlistment bonuses. Regardless of economic conditions, and we have had good economic conditions in this country before,

never has there been this problem of trying to retain men in our forces. Let the minister ask members of this house and he will find out how many of them have had letters from servicemen either in their own constituencies or from nearby bases asking how they can get out. Why has the minister been obliged to impose the six months written notice rule in order to try to maintain strength? I would say this is part of the penalty of the action taken in 1964 when the minister brought out his white paper amid that great fanfare of trumpets and said there was to be a sweeping reduction, that 10,000 or more men would be cut from the forces and that \$100 million would be saved every year.

The point is that a high proportion of the servicemen asked themselves: Am I one of those 10,000? Is my job disappearing? What is my future? With this uncertainty confronting them they would be illogical and, indeed, somewhat foolish if they did not begin looking for a berth in civvy street and if, having found one, they did not take it, albeit in many instances with a heavy heart. Let there be no doubt that many a serviceman has retired much against his inclinations. However, these people have responsibilities to their families and to themselves. It should not be thought that this situation applies only to the lower ranks. It involves many senior officers in whose careers Canada has a tremendous investment. And they will not be replaced.

With regard to the air force and the 500 pilots and navigators who were released following June, 1964, it is my impression that one of the greatest dangers we face with regard to the air segment of our defence forces is that we shall soon lack men of middle experience, particularly at commissioned level. Having got rid of or driven out so many of our younger people, we shall find in five or ten years that we do not have suitable men to occupy the positions which will then be vacant. There will be a great many vacancies.

As to re-enlistment bonuses, the associate minister has told us this policy will apply to N.C.O.'s and men. What about commissioned officers? There is no entitlement for commissioned officers on re-enlistment. How about these short service commissions and measures which would attract people formerly in the air force who could be brought back? What limitations will be applied concerning dependents? What will be the length of the period