

Supply—National Defence

as well that he does not try to repeat it, because it does not get more impressive by repetition.

Let me ask the minister something about the continental defence squadrons. Would he tell the committee how many squadrons there are at present, whether they are all now equipped with the Voodoos, and what will be the function of these squadrons in the months ahead?

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, all five of the 101-B squadrons are now formed. Three of them are in their ultimate locations and are in operational use; the other two are still undergoing training.

Mr. Pearson: Is that to be the extent of our continental defence—five Voodoo squadrons? That is the total strength?

Mr. Harkness: Plus two Bomarc squadrons.

Mr. Pearson: Two Bomarc squadrons and five Voodoo squadrons. Perhaps the minister will recall that a short time ago, on January 19, the secretary of defence of the United States, when talking to a congressional committee about continental defence and referring to SAGE, had this to say:

SAGE—

SAGE is the whole Bomarc, interceptors, continental defence complex:

SAGE, however, will continue to perform a very useful and important function in peacetime and in the pre-air battle period, primarily surveillance of our air space. In peacetime, we must still continue to check out intrusions of our air space and this SAGE already does quite well.

Would the minister agree with that interpretation of the function of continental defence at this time, so far as aircraft are concerned?

Mr. Harkness: I do not know what interpretation the hon. member means. I do not know whether or not he knows what SAGE means. The SAGE system, as a matter of fact, is a means of controlling interceptors, either Bomarc missiles or fighters, and directing them on to their targets, and so on. That is the essential purpose for which SAGE exists. What the hon. member means by interpretation, I do not know. I would not know unless I took a look at it very carefully.

Mr. Hellyer: I wonder if the minister would explain this to the committee. If an alert were sounded at this moment—

Mr. Churchill: You would run.

Mr. Hellyer: —what would he do, minute by minute, to obtain the nuclear warheads necessary for the Bomarc missiles and putting them in their places at North Bay?

The Deputy Chairman: Shall vote No. 645 carry?

[Mr. Pearson.]

Mr. Hellyer: No, no. Surely, if the Prime Minister can refer to the possibility of obtaining weapons in half an hour the minister can extend us the courtesy of explaining just how this could be done. He should explain to the committee the mechanics by which this could be done if he expects us to take this statement seriously.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I am sure you will agree, Mr. Chairman, that this is a matter of the greatest importance not only to this committee but to the country. One finds it difficult to believe that in the minds of some in this committee tonight there is a ready acceptance of the vital potential importance of this matter, when we note the reaction to observations made by members of the opposition on the part of those sitting on the ministerial benches and of those who sit behind the ministers.

We are discussing what is perhaps the most important question we have discussed in this chamber during the present session of parliament. Despite this, however, all we get from hon. gentlemen opposite is a resistance, by their interruptions, to observations which are made from this side of the committee. Hon. gentlemen may not agree with what we are saying but, surely, in a matter of this importance we have a right to be heard without these interruptions and disorderly interventions.

We are discussing the question of war and peace. The Prime Minister himself is the one who laid down the basis of this discussion. Let it be known to the people of Canada that if it is the wish of hon. gentlemen opposite that in the discussion of this matter we should be confronted with this kind of resistance—

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Somebody said “nonsense”. Listen to what the Prime Minister said, and see if that is nonsense. It is the basis of this discussion. As the Leader of the Opposition has reminded us, the Prime Minister said in Edmonton:

Should war come, are we going to arm Canadians with bows and arrows?

He was not talking about political war. He was talking about nuclear war involving the destruction of the civilization of the world, the destruction of Canadian men and women as well as our armed forces. That is what the Prime Minister was discussing, yet someone says “nonsense”. The questions put to the Minister of National Defence by the Leader of the Opposition and by the hon. member for Trinity were intended to ascertain whether or not the statement of the