

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

of which was given by our ambassador to the NATO council in December of that year.

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to many of us to note that the first time any mention was ever made in this house of the fact that Canada had had its ambassador advise the NATO council of this commitment was when the Prime Minister spoke in the house on Friday last. I think we are entitled to much greater forthrightness and to a much greater body of intelligent and honest fact on the subject of national defence so that we can come to some intelligent conclusion on it. The government has been less than candid with the house and I for one seriously regret that lack of candor. There are many more things I would like to say about our NATO commitment but time is running out.

Mr. Clancy: Would the hon. member accept a question?

Mr. Hellyer: Yes.

Mr. Clancy: Would you tell me the year and the month the NATO agreement was signed?

Mr. Hellyer: I would ask the hon. member to read the Prime Minister's speech of last Friday when he advised the house that we had accepted the commitment in the summer of 1959 and that our ambassador to NATO had advised the NATO council of that decision. That was during the year 1959.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, we were all surprised and I think disappointed when the United States state department felt it was necessary for them to make a statement correcting some of the information which had been put forward in the House of Commons on Friday last. It was indeed an unprecedented act but one which must be put into perspective; one which was caused by the indecision of the Canadian government and by no one else. Relations between our two countries had sunk to an all time low and the United States must have despaired of the present government ever coming to any decision, one way or the other, in respect to these urgent defence matters. I am sure that this is the same opinion which the Minister of National Defence must have reached in order to take the step which he did this morning.

In his statement the following day, apologizing for the tone of the press release, Mr. Rusk said that the United States would accept any clear decision on the part of the Canadian government. He did not underline the word "clear" when he was speaking, but the message was very clear without his doing that.

[Mr. Hellyer.]

An hon. Member: You know.

Mr. Hellyer: I can very well understand the exasperation of the United States government. The Canadian government pressured the United States government into continuing with the Bomarc weapons system at a time when it was under severe attack in this house and in the congress of the United States. It did this in order to save face after the incredibly incompetent manner in which it had handled the cancellation of the Avro Arrow. Much of the confusion and indecision dates from that time.

The Prime Minister in his statement to the house in February, 1959 told us that the Bomarc had to do the same job for which the Avro Arrow had been designed. Well, as most of us know, that press release was written in the Prime Minister's office and not by the chiefs of staff. So was started a continuous problem from which the government has never completely escaped. It started from the date he gave to this house information which was incomprehensible, incomplete and incorrect. The Bomarc was never intended to replace interceptors. It was part of a theory at that time of interception in depth: first the interception fought out over the tundra, then the area defence of the Bomarc line, at that time planned to go right across the continent, and then the spot defence with the Nike-Hercules near the United States missile installations and their greatest urban centres. This was the theory. It was known to every person associated with national defence in this country and in the United States. Yet the Prime Minister in his statement took no cognizance of the military facts and advised the house that the Bomarc was in fact an alternative. Little wonder that the Canadian government had to pressure the United States into carrying on with the program when it was under such heavy fire.

Not only did the United States agree to carry on with the program but they agreed to pay the largest part of the cost. Then when the first missile site is completed, when the installation is all set and ready to go, the missiles are installed and in place, what does the Canadian government do? It does not fulfil its end of the bargain. It gives the United States government the gratuitous back of its hand. That was not a very friendly way to repay kindness on the part of a nation which was doing its best to co-operate in those very difficult years.

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Hellyer: Yes.

Mr. Aiken: I should like to ask the hon. member, in view of what he has just said, if he has changed his mind since he made the