

*NATO—European Defence Community*

this government has done its best to make the public aware of not only what it is doing but also why it is trying to do certain things in the field of external relations.

I believe there was an implied criticism, and I am not quarrelling with it, on the part of the member for Peel and more specifically on the part of the member for Peace River (Mr. Low), that a protocol document so important as this, with such far-reaching consequences for peace or war, should have been referred for detailed discussion to the standing committee on external affairs. The hon. member referred to this aspect of the question several times and to the fact that we were now ratifying this protocol. The constitutional position, of course, is clear. Ratification is the action of the government; but it has become the constitutional practice, and it is a good practice, that that executive action of the government should not be discharged until the legislature has had a chance to express its approval or disapproval. What we are doing today is giving the legislature a chance to express its opinion. But with all respect, I do not feel that we are rushing this parliament into approval or disapproval, as the hon. member for Peace River rather indicated.

I have before me the transcript of the hearings of the standing committee on external affairs. In so far as the members of that committee are concerned—and I appreciate that does not include all the membership of the house—there were three meetings this session, at which I was present, which were devoted to a general discussion of international affairs. During that general discussion a good deal of time was devoted to NATO. This protocol which we have before us was also referred to by me in speeches in this house. I mentioned it when I came back from the North Atlantic council meeting in Lisbon, and indeed the whole matter was made public some weeks ago, before we had these hearings in the standing committee on external affairs. An opportunity was given, therefore, at that time for as exhaustive an examination as any member of the standing committee on external affairs desired to make, by addressing questions to me and to the officials of the department who would be familiar with all the details of the agreements. There is certainly no desire on the part of the government, however, to rush parliament into approval or disapproval of this treaty or indeed to rush into executive action if approval is given.

I was quite interested in the concluding observation of the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Macdonnell). I agree that we should not necessarily hang back in doing a good deed, if this is a good deed, and that we should certainly do nothing by our inaction

or our hesitancy—if we feel that this is a good move in principle—to give those who are opposed to it the argument that we are lukewarm and therefore there is no reason for them to be any warmer. Nevertheless I think it is a matter of timing, and that it would be quite appropriate for the government, if the house approves of this protocol, to postpone the deposit of its ratification until we see how the situation works out in other countries which are just as deeply concerned with this matter as we are. If there had been a possibility of considering this matter a month or two from now, a discussion of this protocol at that time might have been more realistic in the light of developments in other parts of the world. I for one would have welcomed the postponement of such a discussion. But, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell), if we do not take action now we might find ourselves later in the position of being the only member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or the European defence community, which had not taken steps to bring this protocol into effect. I think that is a responsibility no hon. member of this house who favours this protocol would wish to take. So the actual act of ratification—that is the deposit of the instrument of ratification—in accord with appropriate constitutional practice, will be performed by the government in the light of circumstances if this house approves of the protocol itself.

To get back to the speech made by the hon. member for Peel (Mr. Graydon), may I say that he made what to me were some extremely interesting general observations on the line we should follow in respect of the communist attitude toward the German and other related problems. He laid down as a policy, which has been supported in other parts of the house and in other free countries, that we should not be hesitant about a protocol of this kind or about any aspect of policy in resisting communist aggression if we think that is the right policy. As he put it, I think he said we should lay down a line which cannot be crossed with impunity by any communist aggressor. Later in his statement he said we should make sure that everybody is going to keep the peace. In other words, nobody is to be permitted to cross that line. He said it should be made quite clear to a potential aggressor that if he tries to do so he will be met with the necessary strength to throw him back.

I must say that extremely decisive and definite policy has its attractions, but it also has its difficulties and indeed its dangers; because when you start on a policy of that kind—that we must lay down a line and