

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do not expect to be able to show concrete results at the end of this week. As I have explained to the hon. member, it is now up to the council of ministers to agree to the recommendation put to them by the commissioners. I point this out to the hon. member: on the one hand, we have talked to the commissioners, both at the official and ministerial level and at my own level, and they are now making this type of recommendation to the council of ministers. On the other hand, while I tell the hon. member that I have been speaking to all the heads of government of the nine, the only two which remain are the ones I will be seeing this week. Therefore it will be up to them to decide whether they want to give this authority to the commission. I will not be able to make an announcement at the end of the week, as I believe the commission will be submitting this matter to the council of ministers some time in July.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker, I say sincerely that I think all members of parliament wish the Prime Minister well on his important mission.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hees: We sincerely hope things work out the way he desires.

NATO—POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING OR ALTERING FORM OF CANADIAN COMMITMENT

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is also directed to the Prime Minister and relates to his forthcoming visit to Europe and his participation in the NATO meeting. Will the Prime Minister be accompanied by the Minister of National Defence on that trip, and will he and the Minister of National Defence bear in mind the criticism made by the United States Secretary of Defence, that several NATO allies are reducing their military budgets at a time when Russia is increasing its military budget. Will he and the minister be proposing increases in Canada's commitment?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, to answer the first part of the question, the ministers of national defence of the NATO countries will not be at the NATO meeting. They are meeting now, as the hon. member knows, and their meeting is preparatory to the meeting which will be held later this week between heads of government, plus their foreign ministers. Therefore our Minister of National Defence will not be present; neither will the other defence ministers be present.

To answer the second part of the question, let me remind the House that in this year's budget, over last year's, defence expenditures have been increased by some 12 per cent, give or take a fraction. This increase is the highest of any NATO country's, bar one. Therefore I think we are in a good position to say that we are permitting our defence establishment to keep up with inflation in real terms, whereas no other NATO country, with the exception of one, is. We think that this is a very genuine indication of Canada's concern and its determination to ensure that its participation in NATO is indeed up to standard. I hope that members opposite will not be asking us to exercise restraint in that area again.

● (1420)

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Will the Prime Minister be indicating that Canada is planning to alter the form and nature of its commitment to NATO by withdrawing its land forces, which are short of modern tanks in any event, and perhaps beefing up its air commitment?

Mr. Trudeau: That, I suppose, is a representation made by the member opposite. The Canadian government has, of course, reserved its right to make sure that its participation is the most effective possible. However, the overall commitment remains as has been stated by the minister and myself, namely that we will maintain our commitment to NATO and maintain it up to present standards. The question of whether one type of armament will be replaced by another is a question that is being reviewed at the present time.

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ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

EFFECT OF ALLEGED FAILURE TO APPLY LAW RESPECTING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT—PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF MEASURES TO REDUCE VIOLENT CRIMES

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. It relates to some of the Prime Minister's philosophic comments to students in Montreal about social unrest which coincided with the interesting speech by the Chief Justice in Vancouver about disrespect for the law. In view of a publication by Statistics Canada which indicates that murders have increased by 11.8 per cent in a year, does the Prime Minister feel it is conducive to unrest and/or respect for the law for the government to not apply the law presently on the statute books, namely the capital punishment law that is there until changed?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think it important to remind the hon. member that the government has been acting entirely within the law. He seems to forget a very important part which is that the prerogative of mercy is part of our legal structure. It has been for many centuries. I hope the hon. member is not arguing for the abolition of that prerogative.

Mr. Nowlan: In view of the interesting comment in the press that hanging will be suspended until parliament considers new legislation, which will be sometime before December 1977, does the Prime Minister have any firm date in mind? If violent crime is increasing, does the Prime Minister not think measures to reduce it should be introduced now, if there are such measures, separate and apart from the emotional debate that capital punishment will invoke?

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is making the point I myself made a few times in the past. I think it is a very fundamental one. The government will want to make sure that citizens are reassured that our laws are being applied and being respected and that severe measures will be taken to ensure that criminals, either through the parole system or the conditional release system, are not put in a position where they can endanger