

REPORT FROM THE HILL



Submarines

■ The single most contentious peace and security issue on the Hill continued to be the government's planned purchase of nuclear-powered submarines – with almost everyone having an opinion.

In mid-February the Canadian Council of Churches released a letter to the Prime Minister signed by twelve religious leaders including representatives of the Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches. The letter said the submarines were a violation of Canada's own trade policy in nuclear materials and that their purchase threatened to pull Canada into "a dangerous and provocative maritime strategy." The letter was denounced by *Montreal Gazette* columnist William Johnson as "moralistic rubbish."

The Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament (CCACD) released a study at the end of February which concluded that operating costs could drive total spending for the submarine project far beyond the official estimate of \$8 billion. This complemented concerns expressed in another Centre report that building a nuclear-powered submarine fleet would threaten the spirit of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. The report said that fuel for the submarines would not be subject to verification or inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which is charged with administering the treaty. In a *Globe and Mail* article of 12 May the two authors of the CCACD report maintained that while Canada has no intention of diverting nuclear material to making bombs, by taking advantage of a weakness in the Non-proliferation Treaty and keeping the arrangement for the materials strictly

between itself and its eventual partner in the submarine deal (UK or France), Canada is setting a bad precedent.

In an address to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs on 26 March, a former Chief of Defence Staff, General Gérard Thériault, while noting that the acquisition of nuclear submarines would greatly enhance Canada's maritime defence capability, went on to say that, "it could turn out to be an unaffordable extravagance in a defence budget that is very modest. It's not the only requirement we have."

Even the British weekly *The Economist* had a view. Quoted in a Canadian Press item of 12 May, *The Economist* called the planned purchase "astonishing" and suggested that a buildup of its land and air forces in West Germany would be a more valuable contribution to NATO.

Not all the opinion was negative. Testifying before the House Committee on Defence, Rod Byers of the York University Centre for International and Strategic Studies, supported the planned submarine purchase because it would give Canada the ability to "operate independently in a high-threat maritime environment." According to the *Globe and Mail* of 6 May, Mr. Byers went on to stress that Canada should be able to operate its naval forces independently from those of its NATO allies. And writing also in the *Globe and Mail*, this time on 12 May, retired Vice-Admiral D. N. Mainguy (Vice-Chief of Defence Staff until 1985) maintained that much of the information employed by various groups participating in the public discussion of the submarines was technically incorrect. "The federal Government is choosing between two good submarines that have proved themselves at sea . . . And we need them."

In an appearance before the House Defence Committee on

7 March, Perrin Beatty, the Minister of National Defence, stoutly defended the government's \$8 billion estimate for the project. He said there had been "rather misinformed reporting on the subject of costs"; that the submarines are affordable and would "not detract from projects being proposed by the army and the air force"; and that the \$8 billion figure does not include operating and maintenance costs in as much as it is standard practice that announcements for Crown projects to "specify the costs of acquiring the equipment."

In the matter of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, Mr. Beatty said that Canadian handling of the submarines' nuclear materials "would be entirely consistent with our non-proliferation obligations." In response to questions from Liberal MP Douglas Frith Mr. Beatty replied: "If the NPT had been designed, . . . to outlaw in some way the use of nuclear propulsion for military vessels it would have said so . . . What we will demonstrate is that a country that . . . uses nuclear energy for both civil and military purposes is capable of using them consistent with the spirit of the NPT . . ."

NDP Defence Policy

■ On 16 April the New Democratic Party Federal Council adopted a report of the party's international affairs committee as an official expression of party policy. The NDP maintained its plan to withdraw from NATO should it become the government, but promised to delay a pullout until a second term of office. Other major elements of the policy included a significant restructuring of Canadian land forces and a substitution of diesel-electric submarines for the government's plans for nuclear-powered subs.

Press reaction to the new approach was mixed. James Bagnall, defence correspondent for the *Financial Post*, said the new policy contrasted sharply with the Party's response last summer to the gov-

ernment's defence white paper mainly in substantial defence expenditures the NDP now proposes. The *Toronto Star* and *Winnipeg Free Press* accused the party of "fudging" its stand on NATO while Lysiane Gagnon writing in *La Presse* called it "another good case of electoral opportunism." The *Edmonton Journal*, however, commented that the new policy "sheds the cloak of idealism; it moves away from the starry-eyed resolutions of the past and toward reality."

(For more on nuclear-powered submarines and Opposition defence policies, see "Defence Notes" – page 16)

Short Notes from the Hill

■ On 29 January the House of Commons agreed to form a Special Committee to examine and report on the Central American peace process. The committee, headed by former Speaker of the House John Bosley, began hearings in March charged with finding a way for Canada to help sustain the momentum of the Arias Peace Plan by assisting "in the design and possibly implementation of verification and control mechanisms or through other confidence-building measures." The Committee visited the region from 8 to 18 May and is expected to issue an interim report by the end of June.

■ The government agreed on 28 April to send five officers from the Canadian Armed Forces for up to one year as part of a multinational UN team of some fifty military personnel that will observe the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The United Nations Good Offices Mission (UNGOMAP) is expected to watch peacefully from the sidelines the withdrawal of 150,000 Soviet troops by the end of 1988, in accordance with a UN-mediated agreement signed 14 April in Geneva by Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States. □

- GREGORY WIRICK