

Abandonment of Defence Projects

base in Alberta in accordance with your own plans, and when you ran into difficulty was it not because of a conflict with the Minister of Transport (Mr. McIlraith)?

Mr. Hellyer: I do not believe I quite understood the first part of the question, but may I state the facts as I know them and if the hon. member has an additional question he may ask it.

Before our government took office it had been decided to use Penhold as a jet training base. It was in the plan; it was an accepted fact. Later, as information came across my desk, I found that not all of the things that had to be checked out in respect of it had been checked out. One of these things was the use of air space. When we communicated with the Department of Transport, this was confirmed. When their requirements were made known to us, it was obvious that there was not sufficient air space available to properly effect jet training safely at Penhold. With the facts in front of us, we had to make a decision for the safety not only of the people using the air lanes but also for the safety of the people on the ground in that district. There was no other choice open to us.

Now, my hon. friends might say that this could have been caught sooner, if the problem of air space had been checked out earlier, and this is quite true. It was not checked out earlier. It could have been checked out many months before under the regime supported by the hon. gentlemen. The main thing, so far as I am concerned, is that we caught the error before the plans got too far and before vast new amounts of the taxpayers' money had been spent.

Mr. Woolliams: Would the minister answer another question? Did you not confirm, as reported in the newspapers in Alberta, that this was to be a training base?

Mr. Hellyer: I do not know what is meant by "confirming". It is possible that earlier on I did state it would be used, because it was planned that way.

Mr. Woolliams: Was it so?

Mr. Hellyer: I don't know, and anyway I think it is irrelevant at this stage.

The third charge relates to the contemplated abandonment of other defence establishments. First of all, this is hypothetical but also, Mr. Speaker, it is quite possible. We are making an effort in the Department of National Defence to effect economies by reducing overhead. The only way this can be done is to implement changes. One suggestion that has been made hundreds of times and in hundreds of places, including many hon.

gentlemen in various parts of this house, is that we have too much overhead, too much tail and not enough fighting teeth in the Department of National Defence; that we should cut the fat and increase effectiveness. However, just as soon as somebody initiates a move in this direction, there is a general outcry. It is impossible to have it both ways. If our job is to provide the maximum fighting effectiveness that we can with the resources available to us, and to get the best use of the taxpayers' dollar in making a contribution to the defence of freedom in the western world, then some changes are absolutely essential. They are not all going to be politically palatable. You just cannot avoid it. You talk about accepting the facts of life, and these are the facts of life. You either want a large establishment and a small operational force, or you want to put more of your resources into the forces and have a smaller overhead. This is a decision that must be made.

If we want to have the maximum defence effectiveness, then economies have to be effected in other directions. This is going to cause some hardship in some cases, and it cannot be avoided. It is clear, however, that if these housekeeping decisions must be referred to in the special committee on defence, it is an abrogation of responsible government.

Mr. MacInnis: Would the minister permit a question?

Mr. Hellyer: If the hon. member would wait until I am finished.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The minister is not prepared to yield the floor.

Mr. MacInnis: I fully understand this, Mr. Speaker. We all know he is not capable.

Mr. Caouette: On a point of order, I am sorry to interrupt the minister but we have an amendment in front of us and an amendment to the amendment. What the minister is discussing right now is the amendment, while we in this part of the house feel he should be dealing with the subamendment.

Mr. Hellyer: If the hon. gentleman would give me about two minutes to refer to a statement by the hon. member for Lake St. John (Mr. Lessard) I will get right down to the subamendment immediately after that. The hon. member for Lake St. John suggested we should spend some of our defence dollars to build up other parts of the Canadian economy. I would like to state to him my personal philosophy, which is that we have to put forth more effort in all direc-