

The Budget—Mr. Forrestall

enthusiasm for the masterpiece of equivocation of the Minister of National Defence in reply to a question I asked him on June 4 about our maritime role. I want to quote it because I do not want false optimism to sneak into the picture. The minister said in reply to my question:

Generally speaking, I think people who have a special interest in naval affairs should be encouraged by the policy statement by the Prime Minister, because evidently this is a role which has to be enlarged. So I suppose there is no such worry.

Are we to accept on this basis the proposition that there will be an enlarged navy? Not by a bloody long sight!

I can only suggest to the house that I do not accept this as an assurance that there will be an increased role for the navy in the immediate future; quite the contrary. In reply to written questions posed by my colleague, the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave), we learned that the Department of National Defence is giving consideration to a follow-on aircraft to replace the Argus. On the other hand, however, there is no indication that similar consideration is being given to a follow-on aircraft for the Tracker. We have had, in the last three or four weeks now, every indication in the world to believe that the *Bonaventure* is going to be scrapped. Indeed, in Halifax now they are beginning to pay off officers and put them on strength at Stadacona. In addition, there has been no denial, either in private conversations or in public statements by the Minister of National Defence or anyone else, of the very persistent and current rumours that under the base consolidation program the C.F.B. Shearwater will close. In the light of these two or three very brief examples I can only conclude regretfully that there will be a reduction in the structure and strength of maritime command.

It may well be that the Prime Minister foresees surveillance of our own territory and coastal waters as a matter of first priority; indeed, in April in Calgary he listed it ahead of continental defence, NATO and peace-keeping. But it must be pointed out, and it must be remembered by people who are affected, that from concept to full operation in our northern waters will possibly take from six to seven years. So while the mid or late 1970's might see an enlarged maritime force, I repeat that there is nothing by way of evidence to support the speculation of an enlarged navy through the five year period immediately ahead.

No small part of my concern stems from the fact that an identifiable \$150 million a

year is contributed to our economy in Nova Scotia as a direct result of the presence of maritime command in its present form. It is difficult to determine the actual generation of dollars that results from this investment. However, recent studies have indicated that some 28 per cent of the Dartmouth-Halifax economy stems directly or indirectly from this investment. I suggest that the base supports another 20 to 30 per cent.

I do not want to be an alarmist, but I must point out the grave, moral responsibility of the government to announce its intentions clearly and honestly at the earliest possible time. Some of the questions that must be answered involve the intention of the government with regard to the base consolidation program, the total number of service personnel involved; those that are to be maintained at Shearwater, at Stadacona, at the dockyards and on the ships on the east coast. We must know what is to happen at Greenwood, Cornwallis and C.F.B. Summerside. The truth must be told about the government's plan for the navy as it relates to its anti-submarine warfare role. We owe this to our friends. We must know whether planning has already started for an Arctic role for the navy, as has been suggested. We must know whether the government intends an expansion of the Bedford Institute of Oceanography paralleling as near as possible a reduction in the numbers of servicemen in the Halifax area. We must know if contingency plans are being worked out to meet any vacuum that might be created as a result of force reductions. We must know if consultations have begun with the provincial government over this matter. Rumours are persistent that they have. If consultations have started, we must know what the nature of them is; and if they have not started, why they have not.

No other metropolitan area in Canada or any other province in Canada is as dependent on a stabilized flow of defence dollars as is Halifax, Dartmouth and Nova Scotia. If reductions are to come, then we must be told so now so that planning can begin. Otherwise, the cost to the Canadian taxpayer in terms of the transition services will outstrip by many times the cost of maintaining the maritime role in its present context. Indeed, so serious is the misinterpretation of the Prime Minister's remarks at Calgary in April by the Minister of National Defence, as was evident in his reply to my question, that Nova Scotians and indeed all Canadians are entitled now to a detailed statement of what is intended.