

Supply—National Defence

Mr. Hellyer: Could the minister tell us if in that evaluation the chiefs of staff gave a priority on the basis of their rating?

Mr. Pearkes: I think it is a time-honoured policy which has been followed by this and the preceding government that the recommendations of the servants of the government are not disclosed in public. I do not think it is right to ask me to say whether the chiefs of staff recommended this or that plane. If I were to say today that the chiefs of staff did recommend a certain plane it may be that at some future time the government would have to take a decision which was not entirely compatible with the recommendations of the chiefs of staff. The opposition would then say, "Well, you did say that the chiefs of staff made this recommendation," and we might be in a difficult position. I say that the military and economic information was placed before the cabinet and that the decision of the government was based on military and economic grounds.

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Chairman, I did not ask the minister to tell me which plane the chiefs of staff committee recommended. I merely asked if they had given a priority, one over the other, on the basis of their evaluation. It may be a time-honoured custom not to make public the recommendations of governmental advisors, and that is probably an excellent principle which has long been held, but it is an equally time-honoured and a most important proviso that ministers of the crown, when asking for sums of money from the public purse in such astronomical amounts as \$1.7 billion, should give this committee enough information on which to make an intelligent decision. That the minister is not doing.

Mr. Pearkes: I am quite prepared to go this far. I can tell the committee that the chiefs of staff did make a firm recommendation for a certain plane.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, the minister has laid down a principle to which I certainly take no exception; that civil servants, whether they are military or civil, should not be brought into parliamentary discussions as justification for any action of the government one way or the other. That is a principle which has not been invariably observed in the last year or so. I would mention to the minister that earlier in this session the Prime Minister quoted a recommendation, or an approval or decision, of the chiefs of staff as justification for certain actions being taken by the government.

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister would give the committee for its information the number of hours that

each of the following planes was flown by R.C.A.F. pilots for evaluation purposes. Perhaps the minister would like to make a note of the planes:

French Mirage
Grumman Super Tiger F-11-F
Blackburn NA-39
Northrop 156-F (or any other mark)
Lockheed F-104G
Republic F-105

Mr. Pearkes: Obviously, Mr. Chairman, I would not have that information readily available, and it will have to be acquired.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, the minister said that one consideration—and I am sure it was an important one in the minds of the government in this decision—was the availability of the aircraft in question. Can he inform the committee whether other aircraft under consideration were equally available as the one that was quoted?

Mr. Pearkes: Yes, Mr. Chairman, some could have been purchased outright.

Mr. Hellyer: I wonder if the minister could tell us the maximum climbing incidence for the F-104?

Mr. Pearkes: These are technical details which are considered classified regarding aircraft, and it is unreasonable to expect me to disclose here in public all the technical details regarding aircraft we are acquiring in order, if necessary, to fight the battle for the defence of Canada and of the west. Surely if we give all these technical details to a potential enemy his task is simplified. I do not think I should be called upon to answer such questions.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, I understand that the NATO military authorities had what I could perhaps call a competition, though that may not be exactly the right word, to decide on a suitable strike fighter for NATO use in what was, I think, a most praiseworthy effort to agree that there should be one plane for this purpose only, and that as a result of this examination or competition, or whatever you wish to call it, the NATO military authorities chose a Fiat designed strike fighter as the best developed yet for this purpose.

I believe the minister said this plane was considered. If it was, would he tell us what efforts were made to test its capabilities and why, when it was considered by NATO as the best strike fighter designed for that purpose, it was not possible to go along with that decision? There were United States planes considered by NATO at that time when agreement was sought to be reached in NATO concerning the best strike fighter available for NATO use.

[Mr. Pearkes.]