

Commonwealth Conference

and which in many details does not go even as far as the press went, I should like to ask a question. Among the questions referred to by the press was that there was to be a discussion as to a more equitable distribution in defence efforts. The Prime Minister stated that Canada's emphasis was going to be on continental defence. Would the Prime Minister say something with regard to that?—because there would appear to be a complete change of attitude from that indicated in the House of Commons.

Mr. St. Laurent: I expressed no change of attitude. This conference was held in camera and there was a lot of speculation by newspapermen about what went on. I was rather surprised to read some of the reports.

The only statement I made was that Canada was taking a substantial part under the North Atlantic treaty in building up the land and air defence forces in Europe and that developments in thermonuclear weapons and in the method of delivery had brought home to us the need of providing a warning system on the American continent which for geographical reasons would have to be largely on Canadian territory. We felt that it was necessary to have that early warning system as one of the components of the deterrent effect of these weapons so that any potential enemy would realize that even a surprise attack would not make retaliation impossible.

I added that our part in the establishment of such a system would place a heavy load on the Canadian people; that a large part of the financial burden would be borne by the United States but that Canada must play her part. It was most important that these things done on Canadian soil be a joint operation and be dealt with as such; and that there be nothing that would indicate that it was not something of interest to Canada as well as to the rest of the continent.

I did say that I felt that both the Canadian and the American people would wish to feel, regarding this essential part of the shield and deterrent against war, that a proper balance was being maintained between what we were doing in Europe and what was being done on our own continent. As the industrial and productive potential of North America was of such importance in the build-up of the forces of the free world, it was felt that proper attention should be given to everything that was necessary to keep the whole defence set-up in its deterrent effect in proper balance.

I saw some report about my having made a comparison between Canada's defence expenditure and that of New Zealand. But

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

nothing I said anywhere could be a foundation for that kind of report. That was not the atmosphere in which these matters were discussed. No invidious comparisons were made in any quarter.

With reference to the assertion made that Canada was a wealthy country, I pointed out there were limits beyond which we could not go, and I felt our people would support any government in carrying what was considered its proper share in building up these joint defences. But I also pointed out that care had to be taken to maintain a proper balance in the manner in which expenditure was made, and that I did not think we were in a position where we could take on additional commitments in regard to these defences.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask one other question. To what degree is Canada making a contribution to the building of the northern screen to which the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) made reference? I ask that because of the fact that the suggestion has been made that Canada should contribute to a strategic reserve of airborne troops, and that Australia and New Zealand agreed to give one division to that end for services outside their respective countries. Did the Prime Minister take a stand against that on behalf of Canada?

Mr. St. Laurent: I would prefer to read the exact words used by my hon. friend because I do not remember anything that would justify the statement that we took a stand against what was being done by others. I believe we have wider commitments outside our own country, and more air and land forces stationed outside this country, in proportion to population, than any other of the commonwealth countries except perhaps the United Kingdom itself.

HOUSING**AVAILABILITY OF LOANS FOR HOME IMPROVEMENTS**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): I should like to ask the Minister of Public Works what is causing the delay in bringing into operation the provisions of the National Housing Act making loans available for home improvements.

Hon. Robert H. Winters (Minister of Public Works): To the best of my knowledge there is no delay. I see that at least one of the banks has advertised the availability of mortgage money for that purpose.