

REPORT FROM THE HILL



In the House

■ Opposition questions about the government's planned acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines persisted in the Commons throughout the spring and into the summer. On 6 June Liberal MP Lloyd Axworthy raised the fact that UN Ambassador Stephen Lewis had condemned the submarine purchase at a Montreal conference. In responding, the government made it clear that Mr. Lewis, who left his post on 1 August, was speaking for himself. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's endorsement of the government's proposed free trade deal with the United States in an address before a joint session of Parliament on 22 June, prompted Liberal MP Len Hopkins to inquire on the 23rd whether the price of her support was the choice of the British over the French submarine. Mrs. Thatcher referred to the purchase in a passage praising Canada's contribution to NATO. British submarines she declared, "are quite the best, and Canada must have the best."

On 4 and 5 July, Question Period was dominated by the news of the destruction of an Iranian passenger plane by the US Navy. The government rejected opposition calls for an international inquiry into the incident through the United Nations, while supporting the convening of an extraordinary session of the International Civil Aviation Organization to consider the matter. In a heated exchange, Minister of International Trade John Crosbie, rejecting the NDP's call for support of a UN naval peacekeeping force in the Persian Gulf, made it clear that the government fully supported the efforts of the US

and other Western allies "to protect international shipping and freedom of navigation in the Gulf."

Parliamentary Committees

■ The most substantial Parliamentary report to appear during the summer was titled "Supporting the Five: Canada and the Central American Peace Process." Issued on 5 July, it was the first report of the five-member Special House Committee on the Peace Process in Central America that had been set up on 29 January. Apart from the normal hearings, the Committee's study had included an intense ten-day visit to all five countries in the region, plus a trip to Washington and New York to consult with key players in the US Congress and at the United Nations.

The main thrust of the report is found in the first two recommendations: "Canada should do everything in its power to support the Central American five in their own search for peace, in ways they deem useful"; and, "Canada should play an important role in helping to mobilize the international community – in particular, multilateral institutions and a wide range of middle powers – in support of peace, democracy and development." The Committee's conclusion was that Canada should do its utmost to foster the tendencies to regional co-operation that the agreement represented.

Among the other recommendations were: that Canada pledge \$100 million over a five-year period as an incentive to a larger multilateral economic development effort; that Canada strongly support regional efforts to create a Central American Parliament; that Canadian diplomatic representation in the region be enhanced to ensure a presence on the ground in all five countries; and that Canada favourably consider any request to participate in a verification or peacekeeping force even if it "pertained to only some or even one of the five

countries, provided that none of the five formally opposed Canada's participation." In the latter case, the Canadian government has already accepted a provisional request from the five countries on 7 April to participate, along with Spain and the Federal Republic of Germany, in an "auxiliary technical group" to design a verification and control mechanism that would meet regional security requirements. Despite several efforts, however, the Central American foreign ministers have been unable to confirm this request and the three outside governments cannot proceed until they do so.

In June the House Standing Committee on National Defence issued a report on the Armed Forces Reserves. It reiterated the calls for support to upgrade the Reserves that have been heard for some years from both the House and Senate Defence Committees. Last year's Defence White Paper announced a new Total Force Concept that would effectively integrate Reserve with Regular forces, rather than maintain the Reserves as a separate and subordinate element. The report warned, however, that while the Committee endorsed the Total Force Concept, it urged National Defence to "re-examine its overall manpower targets with the aim of providing the necessary human and material infrastructure to sustain our Forces for at least the first 120 days from the outbreak of hostilities." National Defence's current target is a Total Force of 180,000 (90,000 Regulars, 65,000 Primary Reservists and 25,000 Supplementary Ready Reservists) by the year 2002. The Committee's concern was that, given a casualty rate estimate of one to three percent per day on Europe's Central Front, the totals currently planned for 2002 could be "disastrously low with the quantum leap in the destructive potential of conven-

tional weapons since the Second World War."

Short Notes from the Hill

■ On 11 July Parliament adopted a new Emergencies Act which will replace the 1914 War Measures Act. The Act saw various changes since it was first introduced into the House, the most important of which denies Cabinet any power to make rules "providing for the detention, imprisonment or internment of Canadian citizens or permanent residents ... on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

■ In June the House Standing Committee on Human Rights issued its first report entitled, "Human Rights Behind the Iron Curtain" based on a series of meetings with interested parties across Canada. It recommended that Canada continue a vigorous policy of human rights advocacy with respect to "Iron Curtain" countries, insisting that the government only support the Soviet Union's proposal for a Moscow conference on humanitarian co-operation if certain conditions are met such as the release of imprisoned members of Helsinki monitoring groups.

■ On 14 June the House Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade presented a report on the military conflict in Ethiopia with particular reference to the impact on aid delivery. It included recommendations aimed at ensuring that the benefits of humanitarian assistance are reaching the people and not the government of Ethiopia.

■ On 20 June, following the military coup in Haiti, Mr. Hudon, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, reiterated the government's policy of recognizing the state of Haiti rather than any particular government and said Canada would maintain its present level of diplomatic representation. □