

Supply—National Defence

United States' government would have said, "We will take on that role ourselves with one of our own air divisions".

The minister admitted again this afternoon that the weapons system in this aeroplane would be, to say the least, more effective with nuclear warheads than without them. If you are going to undertake a role of such vital importance, surely you are not going to undertake it with warheads which have not their maximum effectiveness. That is what we are doing. We have not made up our minds at all as to what warheads will be used; no decision has been made; no decision will be made until, presumably, the aircraft reaches Europe some time in the future. Meanwhile we tell NATO, "We will continue to discharge this role. We accept this honourable and dangerous responsibility, but we will tell you in due course whether or not we will be in a position to discharge it effectively". That is the position the government has taken in respect of this matter. Then if the decision is left until the squadrons are equipped in Europe, and if the decision should be against using nuclear weapons, the government will have to withdraw from that role. That would be a fine contribution to make to the defence of peace in western Europe. If the decision is taken that we must carry out this role in the most effective way possible, even if it requires the use of nuclear warheads in the weapons system of this aeroplane, then the airmen running these aeroplanes would have to begin to learn how to handle this new equipment, because no decision would have been made before. It is almost impossible to describe the ludicrousness of that position especially in relation to the seriousness of the matters with which we are dealing.

The Prime Minister is reported by the Canadian Press as having said in Edmonton on February 25:

Should war come, are we going to arm Canadians with bows and arrows?

The only logical deduction one can make from the position the government is putting forward this afternoon is: if war comes we do not know what we shall arm Canadians with, because we have not made up our minds. Then the Prime Minister is reported to have gone on to say:

Canada has interceptor aircraft which will be more effective with nuclear weapons.

Presumably he would make the observation—the minister made it this afternoon—that our air division will have aircraft which would be more effective when armed with nuclear weapons. Then he went on to say:

The same applies to the two Bomarc bases built in this country.

[Mr. Pearson.]

Next, he is quoted as saying:

Should war come we must have every necessary instrument. But we shall not decide until the emergency whether those instruments can be used or not.

That is the position the government is taking. Then, apparently in order to inject some reassurance into that kind of statement, the Prime Minister is reported to have added that he had read the recent report that nuclear warheads could be made available in half an hour to an hour and indicated there was some credence to be attached to that report. In other words, we are going ahead now to plan for missiles and aircraft on the basis that we shall decide later how we shall arm them; and if we decide to change the arms from ineffective arms to arms which are more effective, we can get the new ones in half an hour or an hour. That is the position the government is taking in respect of this vitally important question of equipment for the defence of peace. The best weapons must be available, but the best weapons, apparently, are not going to be available in this case. Second best will not be good enough, but we shall decide when the emergency develops what we are to do about it; we shall decide then whether the F-104 will be effective in carrying out the role allotted to it. We have got a year; the plane will not be over there for a year. Meanwhile, we allow the NATO command and the NATO forces to maintain the impression, which I am sure they have, that when the Canadian government undertakes a definite role it undertakes it sincerely and will do its best to carry it out in the most effective way. This means to the NATO high command the use of the F-104 with the kind of warhead which was meant for this role when it was undertaken a couple of years ago. I take it the minister will agree that it is a correct description of the situation to say that when this role was undertaken, and when it was decided to use the F-104 to discharge this role, it was assumed by this government and by the NATO authority that that role would be carried out effectively with the most effective weapons which would be available, carried by the most effective planes; and that this is the view the government is now taking with respect to this equipment.

Mr. Harkness: The Leader of the Opposition has again demonstrated the facility he had displayed during the last four years of seeming to be on all sides of this nuclear question. In 1958 he was urging the government to conclude an agreement and secure nuclear weapons immediately—

Mr. Pearson: That is not true.

Mr. Harkness: I have the quotations here.