

Abandonment of Defence Projects

Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have stuck to our target dates very well so far. We are making very good progress in the Department of National Defence. We still hope to achieve our goal of having a policy ready for consideration by the government in the new year which could be presented to this parliament before the following year's estimates are being considered. I still hope that the special committee on defence will make recommendations before we have completed our policy study so that we will have the benefit of their views.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hellyer: I said, and I state again, I would welcome a report from the committee stating the consensus of the members of that committee with regard to what the future defence policy of Canada should be. I have been told that the committee hopes to have a report ready in mid December. If this could be achieved, it would be very valuable and be of considerable assistance to the government in discharging its responsibilities. My statement to the defence committee not only set out the problems on which decisions must be made, but also was a rather accurate indicator of the timing in respect of them.

Now, I should like to refer to the specific charges set out in the amendment. The first of these is with regard to the cancellation of the general purpose frigate program. This decision was forecast in a statement to the special committee on defence. It was stated then the cost was considerable; that it was a major project involving a very large proportion of our resources, and for that reason would have to be reviewed very carefully. Particularly, it would have to be reviewed in the light of the effect it would have on future policy because there has been the charge that equipment determined policy, and there has been the suggestion put forward in many quarters that it should be the other way around—that policy should determine the acquisition of equipment.

This was certainly a consideration in the review of this particular project. There were, as I stated in the house the other day, other aspects in respect of the cancellation. These particular ships were multi-purpose, ships designed for a number of different roles; and because they were fairly small ships and so many different capacities were included as part of the design, the effectiveness of each was compromised considerably. One of the major problems, Mr. Speaker, in respect of this decision not to proceed, is the decision of what the future roles of our armed forces will be, and of the navy, which is the proud, senior branch of our armed services.

[Mr. Hellyer.]

Our general review is taking a look, first of all, at strategy. Is the strategy of the western world realistic? Does it take into consideration the change which has taken place in the last few years or does it still reflect the circumstances of 1954 and 1955? I think Canada has a considerable influence, if it properly exerts this, in determining what strategy should be. Certainly, we should be aware of the strategical implication because our contribution and our policy must at least have taken them into account; otherwise we are likely to find ourselves in a position where we are either making a contribution which is redundant, or failing to make our most effective contribution towards the peace and stability of the world.

We are doing a special review on naval problems, and particularly in the antisubmarine warfare field. We are going to determine, if we can, the relative effectiveness of different weapons systems in that respect. So far as we can determine, this has not been done effectively by any navy in the western world. There have been studies, and I would not want to give hon. members the impression there have not been. However, a specific cost-effectiveness study of antisubmarine weapons systems to my knowledge is not available. We are going to undertake one in concert with our allies. It will be designed to determine, as best we can, the relative effectiveness of submarines, both conventional and nuclear, of surface ships, both large and small, of ship based aircraft, both fixed wing and helicopters, and of land based planes. It may easily be that in the anti-submarine role a combination of these carriers is the best solution. But we must have a broad band of information, more than we have at present, before deciding just what the proper mix should be. Our goal is to get for our navy the best equipment possible for the tasks and roles that it will be assigned in the years that lie ahead.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the second specific charge was in relation to Penhold. Penhold, as hon. gentlemen know, was chosen as a base for jet training. In order to effect jet training at Penhold, a number of requirements existed. The first of those was extra land; the second was runway extensions; and the third was the use of air space. When the question of air space was considered, it did not check out.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would answer a question?

Mr. Hellyer: I would be delighted to do so, if I can.

Mr. Woolliams: Did you not, Mr. Minister, confirm that this would continue to be an air