

National Security Measures

myself asking why the hon. member had not waited until the white paper was before the House. At least, he would then have been able to criticize on the basis of definite programs and proposals. But instead of seizing the opportunity to give advice to the minister—and the minister is a reasonable man open to advice, ready, almost to a fault, to accept criticism and constructive comments—the hon. member allowed it to pass by. Here was a chance for the Official Opposition to put in its oar and assist in the consideration of a more sensible and rational defence policy for Canada. I regret the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, a man who is capable of giving this kind of help, chose not to do so. I trust that when the white paper is presented we shall be given a full description of what the Conservative party would present as a defence policy.

• (12:50 p.m.)

I was, however, pleased to hear one point that was made by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, who together with myself was involved in the report of the external affairs committee dealing with maritime affairs. At that time we found ourselves in some disagreement about the approach taken by the Canadian government to maritime defence, particularly in relation to anti-submarine warfare. In one place in his speech to-day he said change indicated that we should take a sceptical look at some of the things we have been doing, particularly in relation to anti-submarine warfare. I was delighted to hear that because that was the view which I presented to the external affairs committee, a view which was attacked specifically at that time by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East.

Mr. Forrestall: It is the other way round: you attacked my view.

Mr. Roberts: Well, we were in disagreement at that time and I am delighted to see that things have now reached the stage where the hon. member is supporting the position that I took.

On the other hand, I must say that the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) presented the kind of speech that in a way I had hoped the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East would present, because he did outline a set of priorities which he felt should determine Canadian policy. While I would not say that he necessarily presented them in the proper order of importance, the priorities that he expressed are the right priorities.

I was particularly pleased with the reference he made to the peacekeeping role. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to be chairman of a sub-committee of the external affairs committee which examined in considerable detail this whole problem of peacekeeping. I would like to associate myself entirely with the remarks of the hon. member. I came to exactly the same conclusions as he did; that the peacekeeping role that the Canadian forces have performed with so much distinction in the past is one which is greatly appreciated at the United Nations and by our allies in the western alliance.

This is something that we should continue to do. We have some unique qualifications, both in terms of techni-

cal expertise and in terms of a political position, which make us an acceptable peacekeeper in most countries in the world. It would be a very regrettable day if any government ever decided to diminish the emphasis we now place on the maintenance of a peacekeeping capacity for the Canadian Armed Forces.

One of the hon. members taking part in today's debate emphasized that there is still a threat to Canada. If we harken back to the days when NATO was established in the late forties and early fifties, there was then a clear and evident military threat which the countries of the western alliance perceived and came together to defend themselves against. It would be a mistake to consider that the threat is unchanging and that the world has not changed. Perhaps it would be a very conservative view of history, a conservative approach to our forces, if we always concerned ourselves with the threats of yesterday and not with the threats of today. The world has evolved in the 20 years that NATO has existed, and while there is undoubtedly still a threat, the nature of the threat has changed considerably. What has changed even more is the capacity of other western nations to confront that threat.

In the late forties and early fifties Europe was still recovering from the effects of the last war. It had a shattered economy and in some ways a shattered morale, and the kind of participation that we in Canada then undertook in NATO was exceedingly important. In the past 20 years, however, there has been a revival of the European economy. We have seen in relation, for instance, to the freeing of the German mark the enormous present economic strength of Europe. There has been a rebuilding and a revitalization of Europe. We are now in the position, one we were not in in the early 1950's, where the countries of Europe themselves can play a much greater role in sharing the burden of our common defence than they were able to do.

In the passing years Canada, too, has changed. Our perspectives have changed. We have new domestic problems and we also have new interests in foreign affairs, not only the same ones that we had 20 years ago. So our perspective has changed just as at the same time the capacity of Europe to defend itself has changed. Therefore, it is not surprising that after 20 years we should have reassessed our role in NATO.

The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East criticizes us for ignoring the view of our allies. That is not what we did, Mr. Speaker. We consulted with our allies and we talked to them about our problems. We discussed the change in perspective. Of course, they were not exactly joyful at the fact we made a relatively minor reduction in our forces; they were not joyful that they would have to take a bigger share of the burden. But there were consultations and discussions about how these reductions should take place. If we were not to take the position that, after all, the final determining voice in what Canada's defence policy should be is our own assessment of what our interests are, then what kind of defence policy or foreign policy would we have?

Is the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East suggesting that we should never implement a policy that we