

*Abandonment of Defence Projects*

3 the hon. member for Victoria, who I am sure will want to participate in this debate, was reported in the *Montreal Gazette* as follows:

David Groos (L-Victoria) said yesterday in the Commons defence committee that the government seems to be making decisions on equipment procurement programs before deciding what defence policy will be.

Further on the article said this:

Mr. Lloyd (L-Halifax) said the committee apparently would not have a chance to look at the program before the government decided to cancel or go ahead with it.

I hope that hon. member will give us his views in this debate. We were led to believe the defence committee would be permitted to assist the government by discussing in advance questions of policy, and getting statements from the minister with regard to his proposed policy, so the committee would have the opportunity of making recommendations to him. But on July 5, somewhat disturbed by some of the things that were going on, the hon. member for Edmonton West asked the Minister of National Defence this question with regard to the frigate program, as recorded at page 1868 of *Hansard* for that date:

Will the decision of the government await also the recommendation of the defence committee?

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Speaker, I have no control over the defence committee. I have no idea how long their deliberations will take, nor when they will be in a position to advise the government. I do have, under our constitution, the responsibility for making a recommendation to the government, and I will do that at the proper time.

I then asked him:

Will the Minister of National Defence refer this problem to the special committee on defence for their recommendation?

And the minister replied:

No, Mr. Speaker—

It makes it a bit awkward for a committee on defence to advise a government under circumstances such as those. However, calling back to my mind the statements of the Prime Minister early in the session that this committee was to review defence policy and make recommendations to the minister, I persisted in my questioning, and on October 1 I asked the minister of defence would he refer to the special committee on defence certain proposed changes in defence policy which he had referred to in a speech outside this chamber.

He was very evasive and said:

Mr. Speaker, no doubt the committee will wish to consider all these problems and I will be most happy if it does so.

I was not satisfied with that answer and asked him again:

[Mr. Churchill.]

—May I ask the minister again, will the committee have an opportunity before he makes his decision to inquire into and give him advice with regard to proposed changes in policy?

His reply was:

I am not a member of the committee, Mr. Speaker. I cannot really control how fast it acts. If it acts with dispatch I have no doubt it will be able to consider some of these problems before the decision is made. If it is tardy in its deliberations it may not be able to do so.

We are not told when the minister is going to make these statements or disclose them in advance to the press. He is not putting before the defence committee the subject matter that we should like to discuss with him. But what is one to do about it. I have pressed him on a number of matters. On October 22, page 3857 of *Hansard*, I asked him:

—is it the intention of the government to purchase United States armoured personnel carriers rather than the Canadian produced type?

The Minister of National Defence answered:

Mr. Speaker, no decision has been taken in this matter yet. When it is it will be announced in the usual way.

I submit the announcement "in the usual way" is to leak information to the press. We read about it in the press, and do not hear about these matters in the House of Commons. I made the mistake the other day of thanking the minister for announcing in the House of Commons the proposed reduction of the frigate program, because I found it was all in the press several days before. This is an affront to parliament. Away back on July 6 the hon. member for Three Rivers (Mr. Balcer) warned that the elimination of the frigate program would be a disastrous blow to employment in Canadian shipyards. This is reported in the *Montreal Gazette* of that date. Both the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and myself asked the minister whether he would refer the matter to the defence committee for its recommendation or await such a recommendation. The minister declined. He said that the views of the defence committee would, however, be taken into consideration along with representations from other sources. But this is after the fact, after he has taken his action, and not before. Every newspaper I have picked up recently has some story about national defence, some story based on statements which the minister has made outside the house or some statement from informed sources and so we have to watch very closely to see what he is doing. We cannot depend on him to inform the house or pass the word on to the committee. Away back on September 4, according to the *Winnipeg Tribune*, which quoted a Canadian Press dispatch, the minister indicated that he would cancel the