

Abandonment of Defence Projects

certainly destroy the argument that safety is the overriding principle behind the closing of this airport. The motive of safety is simply being used as a flimsy excuse. The people want to know from the Minister of National Defence and from the Minister of Transport what the reasons really are—and I mean the reasons deep down—which have caused the government to bring forward this decision concerning Penhold.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling that this debate is untimely and premature. My reason for taking this attitude is the fact that the special committee on defence has not yet produced a report which can be intelligently discussed in this house. For this, the committee can hardly be blamed. It was given a heavy task to perform and it hopes to be able to make a report in December.

In the second place, the minister has given us no statement of policy relating to Canadian defence, nor any indication of an over-all military doctrine in the light of which the decisions of the government announced from time to time could be properly considered. In all fairness, we cannot condemn the minister for this failure. I would be the first to complain if he, disregarding the committee on defence, were to announce his version of Canada's defence role. He has promised a white paper on defence by January and I hope by that time—

Mr. Kindt: On a point of order, is the hon. member who now has the floor making a speech or is he calling attention to some irregularity in our procedure?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Greenwood stood up to make a speech.

Mr. Brewin: I did not hear the interruption.

Mr. Knowles: You did not miss much.

Mr. Brewin: I was pointing out that we were debating in a vacuum because we have not heard a statement on military policy from the minister. I have said that no blame attaches to the hon. gentleman in that regard. Speaking for myself, I believe we must reject the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) because he has made it quite clear, implicitly if not explicitly, that in his view the whole purpose of the defence committee has been frustrated by announcements made by the minister. I do not share that view, and I do not accept the defeatism and pessimism of the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre with regard to the work of the committee. It is my conviction that, notwithstanding any statements made by the minister or leaks to

[Mr. Kindt.]

the press from his office, some of which I regret, the defence committee still has a vitally important role to play in helping to develop something which has been so sadly lacking in the whole Canadian defence picture. The fundamental lack in the past has been a clear definition of what Canada's defence role should be. Until that is decided we are going to continue to flounder around with piecemeal and often misguided decisions, with cancelled programs and with tremendous economic waste. It is to supply this need for a statement and a clear definition of Canada's role that I believe the defence committee can be of real value.

We have had before that committee already distinguished, capable and experienced witnesses. Nearly every one of them has stressed the need for a clearcut decision as to Canada's defence role and an up to date appraisal of the kind of war or conflict in which Canada's forces are likely to be called on to engage in or play a part, and where they can fit in.

I should like to refer to three of the witnesses in this regard. I do not propose to discuss their evidence in detail. That, of course, is a task for the committee to concern itself with. However, I should like to refer to the evidence of General Foulkes, former chief of the general staff of Canada and a distinguished soldier. As found on page 501 of the evidence before the defence committee he said that these are the questions that have to be considered:

What will be the defence requirements in the seventies? Where and from what direction will any challenges to the peace be likely to occur in the next decade? What will be the state and condition of our alliances on which we now depend for our security and to which we make defence contributions? What should be the character, size and composition of our contributions to these various organizations in the seventies? These are some of the questions that must be considered or at least some indications of the answers foreseen before decisions are taken as to whether frigates, submarines, aircraft or Bobcats should be ordered.

I venture to supplement what General Foulkes has said by saying that individual, piecemeal decisions without answering the sort of questions that the general has posed will continue to produce chaos in this particular field. As found on page 506 General Foulkes spoke of his answers to some of these questions and I want to refer very briefly to them. He said:

Now I should like to state some conclusions. Once the long term aims and objectives of the defence policy are determined, it is then possible to derive some guidance as to the equipment and manpower to implement such a policy. From the foreseeable trends, there are strong indications of a movement away from making preparations to fight a major war in Europe and tending toward the more flexible and mobile roles of preventing wars from breaking out in the NATO area, or anywhere in the world under U.N. auspices.