

*National Defence Act Amendment*

presently pursuing. His critics have all been brushed aside, and at one time or another the minister has called them emotional, unreasonable, disloyal, destructive, obstructionists, politically-motivated or lacking in responsibility. I ask the minister if it would not be equally as fair to say of this large body of Canadians who hold views contrary to his own that they do so because of their knowledge, their experience, their convictions and their sincerity. Surely the testimony given before the defence committee by so many men of such high calibre, who have given such outstanding service in war and in peace, has a ring of truth about it which cannot be ignored by the minister and the government. In my opinion, if we follow through with this bill we will destroy the effectiveness of Canada's armed forces who are charged with the responsibility of protecting this nation in time of war.

Let us return to the white paper on defence of 1964. At the top of page 14 the minister stated:

The major threat to North America at this time is from the air, and it is in the field of continental air defence that co-operation with the United States has assumed the largest proportions.

The future of continental air defence, therefore, is obviously of great concern to Canada, both because of the sizeable resources devoted to it, and because of the question of nuclear warheads. While a downward trend in continental air defence forces seems likely, yet, short of total disarmament, one cannot foresee the day when Canada will not be directly involved in some form of air defence operations.

Those are the minister's words and I ask him, does he believe them? If so, when he was making such drastic cuts in the effective strength of our forces, which today number less than 104,000 men or 20,000 less than on March 31, 1963, why did he fire by the device of premature retirement 287 senior R.C.A.F. pilots? Granted, these men were all within three years of compulsory retirement age, but they included the most senior and capable men the R.C.A.F. had flying. What happened as a result? The air force was left short of senior instructors, pilot leaders and instrument check pilots. Our transportation command with its world wide commitments was severely hit by the minister's arbitrary action. Today there are barely enough pilots left to man the planes we have.

The minister may say: "So what? I made one blunder." This brings me back to my original question. Who is advising the minister? By dismissing these pilots he acted contrary to his own statement in the white paper

[Mr. Crouse.]

regarding the importance of air defence. Surely the sensible thing to do would have been to approach these pilots on an individual basis and give them the opportunity to leave the service or stay on for an additional period, thus giving the nation the benefit of their extensive knowledge acquired through a lifetime of service. We are often told we cannot be wasteful of our resources without suffering the consequences. I believe this is equally true of our human resources. Yet this is exactly what the Minister of National Defence did when he prematurely dismissed these Royal Canadian Air Force pilots.

A similar situation with regard to morale and personnel has developed on the east coast in our navy. The great exodus of naval personnel from the service of this country does not seem to worry the minister. This may be due to the fact that in his subconscious mind he really believes that the major threat to North America is from the air and therefore we no longer need to attach any great importance to retaining a strong navy. However, this is not supported by known facts.

I believe it is safe to say that any future confrontation in which Canada may be involved will be with the communist-dominated countries controlled by the Soviet union. For this reason we have joined NATO and NORAD, and up to the present time we have made a military contribution to these organizations for the collective defence of Canada. The minister has stated that in the event of aggression against Canadian territory Canada would rely on the active support of the United States. He also stated that in Canada's national interest certain matters must come under our control.

In this regard he lists on page 13 of his white paper these items: the ability to maintain surveillance of Canadian territory, air space and territorial waters, the ability to deal with military incidents on Canadian territory, the ability to deal with incidents in ocean areas off the Canadian coasts, and the ability to contribute within the limit of our resources to the defence of Canadian air space. These are worthy objectives, Mr. Chairman, but in view of what is happening to our armed forces we cannot help but ask the question, can we live up to them?

● (5:10 p.m.)

Let us examine the statement by the minister, for example, that the major threat to North America at this time is from the air. Who is advising the minister? From whom is he getting this information? In the