

National Security Measures

half of what it was before, the actual reduction in the contribution we were making to NATO was cut down much closer to 1/10th or 1/20th of what it had been. We had a heavy brigade. It was equipped with an Honest John battery and a tank regiment. Its fire power, effectiveness and so on was much greater than twice the capability of the new lightly armed combat group which we are supposed to have there. At the same time, the air division which we had in a strike-reconnaissance role had a very considerable fire power. It had a considerable deterrent effect and a considerable potential in the event of hostilities actually breaking out. I suppose we shall have two squadrons of reconnaissance planes. The minister says three. But if there are three they will be small squadrons, considerably smaller than those we had been maintaining in the air division. No fighting power, merely reconnaissance planes to take pictures and so on. Instead of being cut down to half, those squadrons have been cut down to a tenth or a twentieth of what they were in terms of effectiveness. This is what disturbs our allies. It leaves us very far from playing the part we should be playing in NATO at the present time. I certainly hope there will be no further reductions. This whole business of the agreement with the Russians and so on causes one to believe that what Russia is doing is using this as a means of weakening NATO, which has always been one of her long term objectives. It is a question we cannot help asking.

• (2:50 p.m.)

To turn to another matter, the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) urged the minister to agree to our servicemen being allowed to join some form of union. I hope very strongly that the minister and the government will give no consideration whatever to that idea. On the basis of a fair amount of military experience, both in peace and in war, I cannot conceive of anything which would be more likely to lead to a breakdown in discipline and to difficulties of all kinds than for military forces to be unionized and become part of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I certainly hope the government will pay no attention to these pleas from Mr. Edwards, I think it is, and others who support his ideas along that line. The maintenance of good discipline and morale is the basis of effective action on the part of any military unit. These qualities are difficult enough to maintain in peacetime as it is, and the introduction of an element such as was proposed by the hon. member would make it even harder to sustain discipline, keep up morale and maintain effective units. I see, Mr. Speaker, that you are rising to your feet.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of National Defence): First, I should like to express my appreciation to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) and to the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) on behalf of the Canadian Armed Forces for their kind remarks complimentary to the forces on their excellent work during the period October, November and December last.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Harkness.]

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): May I also, on a personal note, express appreciation to those hon. members and to the hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean), as well as to the representative of the Creditiste party for the amicable relationship which we have enjoyed since I assumed this portfolio? I think this establishes that it is possible to express effective and searching opposition on these questions without any personal animus. I certainly appreciate the spirit with which we have been able to conduct this relationship between each other. May I also express my appreciation to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East for having provided an occasion, the first since I have been Minister of National Defence, upon which to talk about defence matters on the floor of the House.

In the course of his remarks, the hon. member enumerated the problems which he foresaw on the defence scene and suggested these should be dealt with in the white paper. I am obliged to him for doing so. We agree to a substantial extent as to what the problems are, even if we do not agree as to what the solutions may be. I hope to be able to answer his questions more effectively when the white paper is made public. The white paper is now before the cabinet. From my standpoint it would have been easier, I suppose,—I hope it would have been easier—if it had been possible to make the white paper public in time for this debate, but such is the volume of business before my colleagues that I regret it has not been possible to finalize consideration of that document. I hope it will be done shortly.

May I take the occasion to comment on the study of military questions in the House? During the first three sessions of this Parliament, with regard to questions on national defence and related matters of foreign policy, I believe the opportunities which members have had for studying these matters and for seeking information and advice on them, and for arriving at appropriate conclusions, have been unexampled. It is perfectly obvious from the value of the reports which the committee has delivered, for example the extremely valuable one on peace-keeping, the report on Maritime Command and those on NATO and NORAD, that this work has been of great assistance to me in the discharge of my functions as Minister of National Defence, particularly in helping to crystalize some of the defence policy issues which are outstanding for decision at this time. I think it is only fair to take the occasion to compliment the members of the Parliamentary Centre for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Mr. Dobell, Mrs. Seaborn, Mr. Payne and their colleagues, who for the last several years have been of such assistance in bringing before the committee informed persons from this country and other parts of the world to discuss questions of defence policy.

In the course of today's debate a number of hon. members have made observations on defence policy and asked questions to which it is reasonable to expect some response. As to the general tenor and presentation of the speech made by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, I really cannot improve on the comments which were made by my hon. friend from York-Simcoe (Mr. Roberts) who dealt in an effective manner with what the