

National Security Measures

● (12:40 p.m.)

Mr. Brewin: Canada, through its defence services, has a special role to play in helping to build a world community. We are free to do this because of our geographical position. If we were in a position such as Israel, which is more or less surrounded by hostile neighbours, we would have to devote a tremendous amount of effort to the actual defence of our territory. But because we are part of the North American continent, certain consequences follow. We are neighbour to a super-power against which we could not possibly contemplate defending ourselves successfully. Then again, since it is a super-power, we ourselves can scarcely imagine being attacked from any country outside. In these circumstances Canada can concentrate on doing what it can do well, and upon what it has done well, namely the roles I mentioned at the beginning of my speech.

The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East began his remarks by complimenting the Canadian Armed Forces. I want to compliment them, too. I do not wish my compliments to lessen in any way the force of my plea to the government to squeeze out the waste resulting from the unnecessary roles now being played by the armed services. This is not the fault of the armed services but of the civilian administration. From my experience, and I have travelled with the defence committee through Europe as well as on this continent, I would say that our armed services are a highly professional, highly skilled force which does credit to Canada wherever it happens to be. I was in Cyprus and I saw what they were doing there. They are highly respected on the island. I was in Europe, and whatever we might think of our NATO role we cannot complain of the efficiency of our forces and the high regard in which Canadians are held there. If it is true, as I assert it is, that we are wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on an obsolete system which should be discarded it is up to the government to have the courage to say so and to get out of that particular system.

I have said we have a highly skilled professional armed service. I hope this will always be the case and that they will be well paid for doing their job. This brings me to a point. I would ask the minister to disregard some of the traditional advice he is probably getting and proceed toward conceding to the armed forces of this country the right to collective bargaining with regard to the conditions of their employment. I see no reason why this skilled and responsible group of people should not have the same right as others to present its claims. This has been permitted in other countries, in the Scandinavian countries and, I believe, in West Germany. It is very proper that a highly trained and, I would say, intelligent group of people should be shown this kind of consideration.

The idea is a new one. It sends chills down the spines of certain people with traditional attitudes. They immediately begin to ridicule it by asking: How can you bargain collectively in the middle of a battle? Of course, this is not intended to be suggested. What we are dealing with are peacetime activities and conditions of work of those

[Mr. Nowlan.]

who from day to day are carrying the burden of service in the military forces. If they do not want to be represented collectively there is no reason why they should be so represented, but if they want to be represented like others who work for the Canadian community they should not be treated as an inferior class. I think I have seen expressions of opinion by the minister in which he appeared to frown upon this idea but I hope he will reconsider it, because an up-to-date force deserves this sort of treatment from the community which employs it.

I began by saying I welcomed the introduction of the subject of national defence into this debate. It is not a subject which has great appeal to those outside, but it is one of tremendous importance to the security of the country and to the taxpayers of the nation. I am looking forward, as all members must be, to the white paper on defence because we as parliamentarians have a responsibility to review carefully the roles and tasks imposed upon our armed services, to provide them with the means to carry out those tasks, and to take away from them tasks which are useless and outmoded.

Mr. John Roberts (York-Simcoe): I, like the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), was delighted when I saw the Official Opposition had placed this motion on the order paper. I thought, as did the hon. member for Greenwood, that it meant the Official Opposition was seizing the opportunity on the eve of the white paper to present to the House of Commons a series of considered views on what it believed the white paper should contain. I thought it would seize this debate as an opportunity to present the Conservative view as to what our national defence policies should be.

I was somewhat surprised, therefore, to find that while the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrester) did say we should make great changes, and—rather than simply formulate a defence policy with financial limitations in mind—that we should begin with an analysis of the threat facing Canada and on that basis arrive at an appropriate defence policy, he made no analysis of what constituted the threat to Canada in the course of his speech. What he gave us was a rambling survey of certain decisions which had been taken in the past. He wondered about a lot of things. He wondered where we were going to find the resources. He wondered whether our priorities were those which had been outlined on one occasion by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). He wondered what we were going to do about NORAD. He wondered what we were going to do about maritime defence. He wondered about our readiness for anti-submarine warfare. In short, there never was a speech more full of wonderment.

On the basis of all this wonderment, what did he produce? Well, he produced some suspicions. He suspected the government was going to do something or, rather, that it was not going to do something. On the basis of suspicion of what the government was not going to do, he attacked the government for not doing what it was not going to do. Instead of a constructive analysis we heard a series of hypotheses, the construction of straw men which the hon. member then tried to knock down. I found