

Adjournment Debate

The Minister of National Defence, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) and Conservative Members representing the area have all pushed that project very hard. Instead of protecting the interest of their constituents, these people have been vigorously trying to impose their militaristic views. Once again, the Conservatives are failing to keep their promises about consultation. They stoop to threatening people by implying that if they voice opposition to the firing range they will endanger the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean economy and the Bagotville base. Mr. Speaker, I should have said the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard) instead of the Secretary of State.

• (1805)

This attitude on the part of the Government is totally unacceptable. It is an insult to the residents of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean as well as a violation of such basic democratic principles as consultation and respect for citizens, men and women alike. Indeed, the Coalition, the Jeannois and the people of Saguenay easily convinced me that the whole firing range has become a moot issue and that funds earmarked for this purpose must be channelled towards more useful endeavours. By this I mean education, health care, day care, environmental protection and, of course, the creation of permanent jobs.

Investments must be made in the local community to promote regional socio-economic development instead of exporting our financial resources to acquire costly and noisy bombers which can only play havoc with our environment, scare away our tourists, destroy local fishing and hunting industries, and seriously threaten our safety.

In this respect, Mr. Speaker, allow me to point out that the Conservative firing range fits beautifully within a comprehensive Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean militarization strategy which flies in the face of our pacifist ideals and puts military interests ahead of those of the population. Should the Conservatives fail to retreat, as far as I know this will be the first time in Canadian history that a major firing range would be established in this country in peacetime. For a growing number of people this firing range has become an obsessive fear, and you can take my word for that. In fact, everyone knows that the Conservatives want to make us swallow another can of tainted tuna. Eat it, you'll like it, is what they are saying.

Mr. Speaker, it all means that today we have yet to see a thorough impact study that can give us some reassurance about this firing range. The Government has discreetly released bits of information to support its cause. However, the information thus released has raised a number of questions. For instance, Mr. Speaker, when we know that the firing range and its air approaches will have an impact covering up to one fifth of the province of Quebec, why didn't the Government assess potential economic, social and environmental disruption? What would be the intensity of the sound impact of these low-altitude exercises? What about the risk of ricocheting

projectiles? And why does the Government insist on setting up a firing range so close to populated areas?

Mr. Speaker, considering all these questions and many others that have remained unanswered, and considering the adverse impact the firing range will most certainly have in any case, I find it necessary to challenge the establishing of a firing range and to insist forthwith on the holding of joint public hearings in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area. As a member of the NDP, I feel this is a reasonable proposal, very much in line with our democratic principles. And I deplore the fact that the present Conservative Government has found a far less constructive way to deal with public discontent. It has decided to play deaf and to tell people, as did the Hon. Member for Roberval not long ago, to stop trying to sex mosquitoes.

If the Government is that interested in mosquitoes, I think it ought to know that the people in the area are not particularly keen on them and are even less keen on seeing a squadron of F-18s invading their skies.

I would have thought the Government would be in a blue funk about the next election, when voters in the Saguenay and Lac-Saint-Jean area will have their say.

Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP agree with the people in the area that the only acceptable response to the firing range is no, not here and not anywhere else.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I suppose it is honourable to want to withdraw from our NATO and NORAD obligations, but that does not happen to be the position of the Government of the day. I think the Hon. Member should pay at least some tribute to the fact that there is legitimacy with respect to the concerns for the safety of our nation and the preservation of its sovereignty.

I note with some interest the continuing interest of the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) in the establishment of an air weapons range in the Lac St. Jean area. However, this subject appears to have become somewhat of an obsession, I would suggest, to the Hon. Member and perhaps to some of his colleagues.

The very issue the Hon. Member raised appears to have been dealt with more than adequately on three previous occasions during Question Period, during an adjournment debate, during a meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence and finally through a written petition on the Order Paper. Notwithstanding the Hon. Member's efforts and those of his colleagues to convey the impression that the local population opposes the establishment of this essential firing range, it is a fact that 60 mayors in the area, in writing, have expressed their strong support. It is our understanding that the vast majority of the people in this region do not agree with the position stated this afternoon and in the past by the Hon. Member.