

National Defence Emergency Measures

It would have been easier, and perhaps more effective, for the opposition to comment on the statements which we have just heard for the first time if they had been made by the Minister of National Defence in connection with the general statement on defence policy which presumably he will be making when the defence estimates are before the house in a few days' time. Because it is, of course, impossible to assess the value of the proposals which the government has now put before the house in relation to defence, and to comment on them in terms of the present serious situation or to justify the large sums of money which will be required to implement them, without knowing more about the objectives of defence policy and the means by which the government expects to reach those objectives. Therefore no considered statement would be expected from us at this time, I know.

Emphasis is being placed in these statements on the necessity for measures to improve the chances of national survival in time of catastrophe. I do not underestimate the importance of that subject. Perhaps it is not inappropriate, however, to point out that the only way we now have to ensure national survival is to prevent war, to abolish war as an instrument of national policy; because war now means general nuclear destruction.

Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, members of this group are fully conscious of the seriousness of the present world situation. I believe it is correct to say that all of us in this house have one purpose in our hearts, and that is the protection of our freedoms while at the same time maintaining peace.

Although we have one purpose we have, as democrats, the right to advance different proposals and methods. We are asked to comment on statements just read by the Prime Minister when we are absolutely in the dark so far as the government's proposals with respect to defence policy are concerned, to which the leader of the official opposition referred. We are asked to comment almost without knowledge of the policy and detailed objectives of the government in that respect.

On behalf of this group I can say that in principle, under present world conditions, we cannot agree that the present situation is best met by increasing our military might and our armaments. We urge the government to use moderation at this time. I have had the opportunity of talking to many Canadians of all parties, and am able to say that many of them are seriously concerned about what action the government intends to take in the near future.

We shall have more to say on that subject at the appropriate time. We urge the government to continue to press for the building up of the United Nations police force, placing less emphasis on our national forces. Let us make our contribution to collective security through an organization which comes under the control of the nations supporting the United Nations.

We readily support the proposals that are suggested for national survival to meet the frightening prospects of nuclear warfare. We are glad to know that additional numbers are to be trained to meet this threat because, in doing that, if the unfortunate should happen they will be a mission of mercy to save Canadian lives.

After we have had an opportunity to read carefully the Prime Minister's statement; after we have heard from the Minister of National Defence; after we, as it were, come out of the dark and are more into the light, we shall comment more fully and in greater detail on the statement just made by the Prime Minister.

[Later:]

On the orders of the day:

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Trinity): I should like to direct a question to the Minister of National Defence. Can the minister tell the house the estimated cost of the proposals announced earlier this afternoon by the Prime Minister and himself?

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, for the balance of this fiscal year a rough estimate has been made. There will, of course, be detailed estimates made and submitted to the house. However, the rough estimate is that these various measures will result in expenditures in the neighbourhood of \$35 million more than was provided in the book of estimates.

Mr. Hellyer: I have a supplementary question. Can the minister indicate what the annual cost will be after they are completely in effect?

Mr. Harkness: I should not like to give figures on that matter at this moment without going into it.

Mr. Hellyer: Surely they have been determined.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says "Surely they have been determined". We have some estimates on them, but from memory I do not wish to give an answer which might not be absolutely correct.

Mr. Hellyer: Will the minister take the question as notice?