

Inquiries of the Ministry

received no such correspondence before entering the House. I know that the Minister of National Defence is prepared to deal with the substance of the matter if he is requested to do so.

Mr. Brewin: I would so request him, then.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I am advised that Canadian naval units were not in the vicinity of Puerto Rico on the date mentioned in the news story which appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, that is, January 21. They were on station and shelling on January 27 and 28. On the first of these days no difficulties arose and no helicopters were airborne. On the second day Canadian ships took their place on station after ships of other countries. The safety officer sent a signal indicating that ships should cease firing because there was someone on the range. A Canadian helicopter participated in a search, with United States aircraft, to see whether the person could be located. No one was located within the area and the safety officer gave instructions to resume firing again.

With regard to one aspect of the report, I might tell the hon. member that tear gas is not carried in the inventory of Maritime Command and at no time on the day in question did the helicopter land or drop anything on the range. These are the facts of the situation as communicated to me.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Can the minister assure us that exercises of this sort will not take place in future near places where people live?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): This particular operation was carried out under the NATO Atlantic Command and the arrangements were made with the NATO states involved in the exercise. In this case the range was within the jurisdiction of the United States authorities; the question might be discussed with them, but it seems to me they are the sovereign authority in this case.

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ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**COMMUTATION OF DEATH SENTENCE WITHOUT JURY RECOMMENDATION FOR MERCY**

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): I have a question for the Prime Minister. In view of reports that the government has just commuted the death sentence of a convicted killer of a policeman, the first time this has occurred in the absence of a recommendation for mercy from the jury, will the government at least be honest with the people of Canada and make it clear that it has no intention of carrying out the existing law by presenting parliament with proposals for appropriate changes in the Criminal Code so that the people may at least have an opportunity to express their views on the subject?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I cannot make that statement because the government does carry out the law and it will continue to carry out the provi-

[Mr. Trudeau.]

sions of the law. The law never did abolish the prerogative of mercy; it always rests with the Crown.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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URBAN AFFAIRS**INQUIRY AS TO CONVENING OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-MUNICIPAL CONFERENCE**

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): I wish to direct a question to the minister in charge of housing. It has to do with a statement he made, I believe, in June 1970, in which he indicated to the House that he intended to convene a federal-provincial-municipal conference early in 1971. In view of the increasing economic and social difficulties faced by our cities, involving housing, municipal affairs, welfare, urban transportation and high unemployment, and bearing in mind that numerous provincial and municipal representatives have actively sought discussions on these matters and that the cities will likely have no representation at the forthcoming conference, will the minister tell the House why he has not been able to call such a conference as he himself proposed? What has prevented him from doing so and does he still intend to call one in view of the urgency of the situation?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister without Portfolio): I do not think I said I would convene such a meeting, Mr. Speaker. That, of course, would not be proper, since jurisdiction affecting municipalities clearly lies with the provinces. However, I did indicate the willingness of the government to be a party to three-level consultation arrangements. I believe I can say with confidence that this idea has been furthered in the course of informal talks with several ministers of municipal affairs and, more recently, by letter. When, precisely, these discussions will take place, and what form they will take, is a matter for the provincial ministers to decide, as is proper. I expect to have a more definitive response shortly.

Mr. Alexander: I believe that in June, 1970, the minister also indicated to the House—he will correct me if I am wrong—that he was prepared to establish a national urban council. I hope he is in a position to tell the House when he intends to have this organization set up, or, if not, what has caused the hold-up.

Mr. Andras: This is one and the same subject. The question of tri-level consultation was deeply embedded in the proposal for an urban council. It is one of the forms of arrangement to which I was referring and my previous comment as to the role played by the provinces applies to this as well. It is unquestionably dependent upon agreement between ourselves and the provincial governments.

Mr. Alexander: Is it possible for the minister to give an assurance that immediately after the forthcoming confer-