

*National Defence Act Amendment*

on these being available, they should be produced. Otherwise the whole force is weakened, or other countries must assume the burden, with the consequent loss of a spirit of unity and co-operation within the alliance.

The alliance has been struck a severe blow because of the action taken by France. I do not think the alliance can stand a situation in which another country would take the type of action France has taken. So far as Canada is concerned we have agreed to make certain naval, army and air forces available to NATO. In my view we must meet these commitments until such time as we secure agreement to a change in them. We must not unilaterally decrease them, simply by failing to replace equipment as it becomes worn out or obsolete. This, I am sorry to say, is what is happening at the present time with regard to our naval and air contribution to NATO. From the naval point of view, the ships which we have had available are wearing out and no replacements are being built. The naval program which had been arranged when I was minister of national defence has been scrapped by the minister. About a year ago he said that another naval program would go ahead which would include four ships instead of eight; but still none of these ships has been down. Nothing has been done. So there will be a lapse of many years before there is any replacement for the obsolete or worn out naval ships.

A considerable number of the ships which we did have, have been scrapped during the past three years and, while some technical improvements have been made to the remaining ships, the total number available to carry out the anti-submarine role which we have accepted under NATO is now less than half the number we had in operation in 1963. So far as the contention of the minister is concerned to the effect that our anti-submarine capability is greater than it ever was, from the point of view of any naval man of stature this is nothing but a laugh. He would say that it is ridiculous to make a statement of that kind.

● (8:50 p.m.)

In addition to that, of course, the manpower of our navy has declined seriously. There has been a very serious loss of highly trained technical personnel necessary to man our ships at sea, with the result that a considerable number of ships still in commission are tied up at ports. The total result is that our naval strength is not sufficient to adequately meet the naval commitments which we have

[Mr. Harkness.]

assumed as far as NATO is concerned and as far as our own local protection is concerned.

This situation has been caused by policies pursued by the minister. These policies have also resulted in the destruction of morale in the navy with the consequent refusal of trained men to re-engage. The projected disappearance of the navy as a separate service, if this bill is passed, will accentuate this situation and greatly decrease our ability to meet our commitments to NATO from a naval point of view.

Our air commitment to NATO was an air division of strike reconnaissance aircraft—F-104's armed with nuclear weapons. This division did consist of 12 squadrons but has now been reduced to eight. In December the minister announced, when introducing this bill, that it would be further reduced to six squadrons composed of four in the strike role and two in the reconnaissance role. This in effect means a two thirds reduction in the strike capability we are committed to supply NATO.

This reduction in our air contribution may have been agreed to by other members of NATO, but if so that has never been announced and we are not aware of that fact. Had it been agreed to, I am sure the minister or the government would have said so.

In so far as our army is concerned, we are committed to maintain a fully equipped brigade in Europe. In the event of hostilities we are committed to bring that up to a full division. With the reorganization of our defence forces now going on, the demoralization which now exists, coupled with the shortage of manpower, I doubt very much whether these two additional brigades could be supplied if they were needed.

In the event of a large-scale war it is essential for us to have the ability to mobilize our manpower. The reorganization of our defence set-up which has been taking place has undoubtedly cut down our ability to do that rapidly. This is particularly true because a number of training bases have been closed, and because the number of our reserve forces or militia has been greatly reduced. This inability to mobilize has been one thing which has been of particular concern to a number of highly experienced and capable senior officers who have expressed their opposition to the unification plans of this government.

Another matter which is of concern to those with military experience during war is how the proposed unified Canadian force will