

*Abandonment of Defence Projects*

which may be well-founded, in that the minister makes decisions without letting us know about them.

I admit that the minister has to make decisions. He certainly cannot wait until the committee has submitted its report to decide on the day to day administration of his department. But the members of the committee would like to be told of those decisions so that they may discuss them at their meetings.

Mr. Speaker, I notice that the proposed amendment is related, among other things, to the conversion, let us say, of the Penhold base, and I feel that is precisely a matter that should be the subject of a special study by the members of the committee on national defence.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw the attention of the house to the fact that since the committee began to meet, the members' attendance record has been remarkable, as well as their interest in the proceedings. I think that all those who attended the meetings have noted that.

In my own opinion, the information which has been conveyed to us has proved most useful. Officials of the various branches of the Department of National Defence stated their problems and made their requests. Were we to grant all the requests made by the representatives of the three branches of the services, the whole budget would be used up.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure hon. members that although they are aware of the requirements of the armed forces of the country, the members of the committee know equally well that they simply cannot appropriate the whole national revenue for a defence system against a hypothetical enemy.

On the other hand, we have had the opportunity to hear counterclaims, when retired generals, now released from their oath of office and secrecy, appeared before the committee to state their views and analyse past and present Canadian defence policy and, what is even more important, in my opinion, our policy for the next ten years.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as responsible and conscientious citizens, we should attach much more importance to future rather than past national defence policy. And even if I am prepared to blame in part the present government, a share of the responsibility should be attributed to the previous government.

I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that the report submitted by the committee on national defence will reflect the policy that the present government intends to follow in the future for the defence of the country. If the policy suggested in this report were not to be followed by the government, or by any succeeding one, then the government in power would

be the only one responsible and would have to submit to the people's judgment. As a matter of fact, I am firmly convinced that the press in general and the Canadian people will support the committee report.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out that the members of the committee showed a great deal of objectivity, especially in the last meetings.

At the beginning, we feared that there would be constant conflict between the various members but, fortunately, that was only a question of adaptation and we can now inform the house that the sittings of the committee have become truly interesting in view of the sincere questions which are asked—at least, I hope they are sincere—and the impartial and complete replies which are given by the witnesses.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the members of the present cabinet cannot state fully the policy which will be followed in the future since, in most cases, it has not even been decided upon. That is exactly what we want, because we firmly believe that in addition to the white paper to which the Minister of National Defence refers in particular, the government will have the opportunity to give serious thought to the report which will be submitted and which may well have some bearing on the decisions which will be communicated to the house.

Mr. Speaker, a non-confidence motion has been moved against the government concerning its national defence policy. When you consider the proposal made by the member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill), you wonder whom he is criticizing. Is he blaming his party for having introduced the frigate construction program or is he criticizing the present government for abandoning the program? I feel that the situation is rather confused. In view of the incomplete and inconclusive evidence we have at the present time, the least we can say is that the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre has made a hasty decision anticipating the report which will be submitted by the committee.

Mr. Speaker, we are convinced that the defence of Canada is a most important factor; however, the testimony heard so far has established practically beyond doubt that it is extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to plan any defence system of our shores in case of a nuclear war with guided missiles.

In view of this evidence, we wonder what role Canada could actually assume. I believe it is General Foulkes who told us that he was opposed to a nuclear defence role for Canada, because he felt that it would be absolutely impossible and futile. He thinks that if Canada decided to play a nuclear role, it should be offensive rather than defensive.