

Statement by Minister on Defence Needs

particularly reductions in administrative overhead, will result in the closure of certain bases. Decisions have not yet been made on this complicated matter and I believe it will be another month or two before our studies will be completed. We will give ample advance notice before closing any base. In each case a comprehensive plan will be developed, in consultation with all the interested parties, with a view to minimizing the disruptive effects on the communities, on the personnel directly involved, and on their families.

There will be a reduction in the number of civilians employed in the department. This reduction, for the most part, will be achieved by normal turnover and by transfers to suitable vacancies elsewhere in the government service. The facilities of the Department of National Defence, the Union of National Defence Employees, the Public Service Commission, the Department of Manpower and Immigration, and the Department of Regional Economic Expansion will be used to the utmost in these endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, in my statement on June 2, I said that we believed we can achieve the transition to the new defence posture, barring unexpected international developments, within a defence budget which will be maintained for the next three years at its current dollar level. Our studies since then have served to substantiate this estimate. I am confident that these resources will be sufficient to equip and maintain the force organization I have just outlined.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I should like to mention a fact that may be overlooked. Although we will be reducing our over-all regular force strength, we will continue to recruit qualified young Canadians for whom we can promise an attractive and challenging career.

For the reasons I mentioned earlier, that is all the information I can give at this time. I appreciate hon. members' desire to receive more complete details and I regret that these are not yet available. You will recall that when I spoke on this subject on June 2, I pointed out that this concern was shared by members of the forces, and I will have to ask them too to be patient a little longer. I am personally confident that both during and after the period of change we are about to embark upon, the Canadian Armed Forces will continue to exhibit the same high standards of professionalism they have displayed in the past, and will continue to be a source of pride to all Canadians.

[Mr. Cadieux (Labelle).]

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I should like to thank the minister for giving us an advance copy of the statement he has just read. However, I regret that the notice of it was so short that there was no time for a considered analysis of its full implications. Therefore, the remarks that I will make at this time will be of a preliminary nature.

• (2:50 p.m.)

It is obvious that the problem of most Canadians as well as of the minister in the matter of defence policy is that Canadians are ruled, and presumably the minister is over-ruled, by a government dominated by men whose understanding of their heavy responsibility in this matter is as shallow as the cliché "make love, not war".

The lesson of history is that every leader who has taken the course of least resistance, of which Ethelred the Unready and Neville Chamberlain are examples, and in whose hands the fate of the nation was unhappily placed has sooner or later dragged his people into disaster and war. I deplore the actual and concrete reduction in our armed forces because I believe that although our forces may seem costly, the resulting saving is minimal. I think that their reduction is not only unfortunate in itself, but also because of the impression it may create, not only among our friends and allies but also among our enemies. I deplore whatever aid and comfort our present defence policy may give to those who would destroy our way of life. We have to remember that the world has become a global village and that we can no longer retreat into national isolationism and expect that course to succeed.

The minister's statement—and I appreciate the difficult position in which he finds himself—perhaps raises as many questions as it answers. It is difficult for me to understand how, with a reduced and limited capacity, for example, we can hope to expand our commitments with regard either to continental defence or the very valid and necessary activities of our maritime command to establish our sovereignty over our coastal waters.

I think the fact that the minister was able to announce in fairly definite terms that the ceiling of manpower in the forces would be between 80,000 and 85,000 men indicates a tendency of the government to put the cart before the horse in this business, and it looks as if the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cadieux) has been given an ultimatum to