

Abandonment of Defence Projects

product has been going down steadily. Our gross national product has been going up; the actual forces contributed have remained approximately the same.

We have been able to counter complaints on that score by pointing out that our contribution has been that which we agreed to make, which we have kept up, and so on. If we start to reduce it we will get into the position where we can properly be accused by our allies of not pulling our weight in the total western effort. As a result, I hope the government will reconsider this scrapping of the general purpose frigate program. If they are not prepared to do that, I hope they will be able to produce immediately an alternative in sufficient time to meet the gap which will otherwise exist. However, I do not think that is possible. Therefore, the only way in which our naval strength can be kept up and our commitments to NATO met is to proceed with the general purpose frigate program.

This program, Mr. Speaker, was not conceived in haste. This frigate was the type of ship required for replacement purposes and one which had received a tremendous amount of study and development. All sorts of alternatives were considered, and eventually our naval experts recommended that this type of ship be built, as one which would be best adapted to the needs of the future for the next 15 to 20 years. That opinion was concurred in by the chiefs of staff, a recommendation made to me, and I spent a very long time going into it and subsequently recommended it to cabinet, after being convinced that the alternatives suggested, some of which some people wanted to proceed with, would not be as good.

I do not think that the period of review which the minister mentioned will change the basic situation at all. He can continue to review the subject for as long as he likes, but I think he will still be faced with the identical considerations, and the same decisions which have to be made, as I was when minister of defence. I doubt very much whether any alternative can be produced which is better, and I am quite certain that none can be produced in time.

I do not want to take undue time, Mr. Speaker, but I should like to mention one other matter, namely the question of the Penhold air base which was dealt with this afternoon by the hon. member for Macleod (Mr. Kindt). I agree with him that the excuse given, that the air base will be closed by reason of safety factors, just does not hold water. One has only to consider the fact that in the city of Ottawa there is a squadron of operational jets based at the same airport used by civilian traffic. No question has been raised

that the airport is not safe with this squadron there. As a matter of fact, the amount of traffic in and out of Ottawa is much greater than the amount of air traffic passing through Penhold. This is another decision which I hope will be looked at and rescinded. A large amount of money has been spent on Penhold and on the new buildings there. If a decision has been made to reduce the number of R.C.A.F. stations, there are other stations, on which a great deal less money has been spent, with largely second world war buildings, and things of that kind. It would be much more economical and sensible to close some of these stations than to close a station like Penhold which represents a very big investment for the Canadian taxpayer.

Mr. Balcer: May I call it six o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: It being six o'clock I do now leave the chair.

At six o'clock the house took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The house resumed at 8 p.m.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Leon Balcer (Three Rivers): Mr. Speaker, just before I came into the house, a friend of mine told me: "After what occurred this afternoon, your speech had better be interesting."

I must say that if I speak tonight, it is because I understand deeply the problems facing the house at the present time. Some people even say that the government may be overthrown by the vote on the subamendment, but I do not think it will, because the group who moved the subamendment merely used a trick as old as the hills, namely submitting a question of policy to the house, but surrounding it by all sorts of qualifications which ensure its rejection even before it is submitted.

I declare that the subamendment moved by the Ralliement Creditistes is an underhanded one, the result of which will be to maintain this government in office.

As far as we of the Conservative party are concerned, we are anxious to overthrow the government as soon as possible. We are not afraid of a general election; we hope that it will come soon. The subamendment, as drafted, is contrary to all parliamentary government principles of a federal state. And at this stage, may I be allowed to read the subamendment:

Through the servile acceptance of nuclear arms stored within the territory of the state of Quebec, in spite of the vigorous protests—