

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 7, 1961

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

ANNOUNCEMENT OF INCREASE IN ARMED FORCES —STATEMENT ON EMERGENCY MEASURES

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it will, I believe, assist hon. members in their discussions during the next few days if the house is informed at this time of certain decisions taken by the government. I shall deal with certain phases, and my colleague the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Harkness) will deal with one or more others. These statements are not intended to take the place of the more comprehensive statements of ministers on estimates, including the statement that I shall be prepared to make on emergency measures when the estimates dealing therewith are under consideration.

I think it is generally agreed that the international situation has deteriorated since we last met, and tension has increased. Much of this has arisen from the statements of Premier Khrushchev in respect of the intentions and attitudes of the Kremlin toward West Berlin and allied questions. The government, after consultation with allied governments in NATO, has come to the conclusion that certain measures should be taken to strengthen Canada's preparedness for defence both at home and overseas.

We have decided to increase the overseas and naval forces assigned to NATO as follows:

To bring R.C.N. ship complements up to the strength necessary for a prolonged emergency the present complement will be increased by 1,749 officers and men.

The fourth Canadian infantry brigade in Europe will be strengthened by 1,106 all ranks, and there will be made readily available in Canada 1,515 as reinforcements.

The R.C.A.F. No. 1 air division in Europe will be strengthened by a total of 250 officers and men.

To allow for the strengthening of the brigade and air division in Europe, and for further strengthening over and above the foregoing, an order in council has been passed increasing the present ceiling on personnel strength in Europe from 12,000 to 14,000.

The increases to NATO assigned forces will be accomplished by transferring fully trained personnel now in home establishments.

In addition, to improve the general military effectiveness of our forces at home, and particularly those earmarked for the strategic reserve and available for use in Europe, it is intended to increase the strength of army formations by 8,950 personnel, and air force units by 989.

These measures will require a total increase of approximately 15,000 members in the regular forces, and it is intended to proceed immediately with the recruitment of this personnel. To authorize this increase under the National Defence Act an order in council has been passed increasing the limit of the numbers in the regular forces from 120,000 to 135,000. I shall ask leave to table the orders in council in question at the conclusion of my statement.

In the interests of maintaining the present high efficiency of the brigade overseas it has been decided, as already announced, to defer until next year the return to Canada of the Black Watch battalion now with the brigade and its replacement by a battalion of the Black Watch from Canada.

The decisions I have outlined will not have the effect of forming new units or formations but will bring existing forces to a higher state of preparedness and will make more effective the armed forces' contribution to the civil defence emergency organization. It is hoped that these decisions will be regarded not as provocative but rather as a manifestation of Canada's intention to stand solidly with its NATO partners.

In reviewing our defences we have concluded that in the event of nuclear war there would be a need for a larger number of men trained in survival operations than we now have. As things are today, the militia has an effective strength of approximately 42,000 men. Should Canada be attacked, many more men would be needed for survival operations and for the support of regular army field forces.

Consequently the government has approved a plan to increase the number of men trained to take part in survival and rescue operations should the need arise. It has been decided to train up to 100,000 men on special