

Abandonment of Defence Projects

Mr. Diefenbaker: With perception.

Mr. Hellyer: With perception and with understanding, and I hope with comprehension as well.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do too.

Mr. Hellyer: In accordance with our responsibilities we will prepare and bring before this government next year, before the following year's estimates are introduced, a comprehensive policy related to the strategic concepts of the western world. It will enhance Canada's contribution to the freedom of the western world, to the peace of all the world, and which will provide a plan and chart a course which will have the backing and support not only of the armed forces of Canada, but I hope of the special committee on defence as well, and the vast majority of people from coast to coast.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Woolliams) rising to ask a question?

Mr. Woolliams: Yes, Mr. Speaker; the minister did say he would answer. As I understood the position of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), he said that Canada would accept nuclear warheads, and when they got them, negotiate out of them. Is that still the Liberal policy?

Mr. Hellyer: To the best of my knowledge he said no such thing. He pointed out very specifically that this commitment which had been undertaken on behalf of Canada was an attempt to work out a much more comprehensive and sensible policy for the years which lie beyond.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. MacInnis) rising on a question?

Mr. MacInnis: I have a question to ask the minister. When I asked a question earlier the minister made a statement which suggested that the special committee would be dealing with this matter. I think his words were "an abdication of government responsibility". I would ask the minister whether the statement which the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) made when the committee was about to be set up—

An hon. Member: What is the question?

Another hon. Member: He does not know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May we please have some order and give the hon. member a chance to ask his question.

Mr. MacInnis: The Prime Minister, in setting up the special committee on defence, said that it would be for the committee to

[Mr. Hellyer.]

deal with all aspects of defence, including policy. How does the minister consider the remark that he has now made as anything but a contradiction of what the Prime Minister previously said?

Mr. Hellyer: I did not hear in what the hon. gentleman said any suggestion that this question of housekeeping would be referred to the committee for decision.

Mr. MacInnis: On that very question the minister must be able to answer the point made by the Prime Minister when he referred to all aspects of defence, including policy. This would, I imagine, include the housekeeping aspect. How can he say that his statement tonight is not a contradiction?

Mr. Hellyer: It most certainly is not.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, I did attempt to ask two questions, and on both occasions the minister said he would reply when he had finished. The minister also said that he is more aware of the opinions of his chiefs of staff than any other hon. member in the house. This was when he was speaking on the issue of the Bomarc. Does that mean that the chiefs of staff have not been accurate in their submissions to the defence committee?

Mr. Hellyer: Not at all.

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Queens): Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate I recognize at once the great importance of the question of defence policy as far as this country is concerned. It is something that exercises the minds of a great many Canadians, and in addition to that it is one of the costliest projects that Canadian taxpayers are involved in. At the moment we are confronted with the question of certain decisions which have been made, and others pending, which have a great bearing on what our defence policy is going to be in the future.

It was said during the campaign before the election last April that this is something which a committee of the house should decide. I am one who agrees that the airing of views in public, with a view to making as many Canadians as possible conversant with the various points of view having to do with defence and the various problems involved, is a useful exercise. But I think the government cannot have it both ways. Last March 26, while speaking in Kingston, the Prime Minister had this to say:

A Liberal government also would set up an all-party Commons defence committee right away to take the defence issue away from partisan politics. The committee's work would be part of a Liberal government review of Canadian defence policy to determine an appropriate role for this country.