

*The Address—Mr. Pearson*

happened to that official of the Canadian government if he had been an official of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys and had been criticizing the United States government's choice of a missile. He would have been reprimanded, but not so in this case. Air Marshal Slemon's statement was widely interpreted as a contradiction of government defence policy on this matter, and that is to us a reasonable interpretation to come to. The government, or at least the Minister of National Defence, seemed at least to welcome the statement. Confusion is now worse than ever, and therefore this plane, which the minister stated in October had outlived its usefulness, basing his observations no doubt on the Prime Minister's statement, suddenly became something else again.

We were again told by the minister in November that a manned interceptor would be required for years to come. So A. V. Roe and Company took heart and the workers at A. V. Roe and Company took heart even though another part of the minister's statement on the same day when he was talking to the press emphasized that there was no change from the policy in the September statement made by the Prime Minister which was interpreted as meaning the end of the CF-105.

Mr. Speaker, no wonder people wondered what was going on and were baffled by all this confusion in a matter of such vital importance. What then should be done about defence and particularly about the decision, the implications of which will be so far-reaching, to go ahead with or to abandon the CF-105, a decision which has strategic, technological, economic and the broadest political implications, especially in the bearing it will have on our relations with the United States of America and on the future of our aircraft industry? The sole responsibility for the policy decision in this matter, as in defence policy generally, remains in the hands of the government, and they should have met it before now. That is the tradition of British parliamentary government and we on this side do not wish, as we did not wish when we were in office, to depart from it in favour of making policies through parliamentary committees.

Nonetheless, decisions made by the government have to be submitted to parliament for approval or disapproval. Every member has his own responsibility in this regard and, not least, members of the opposition. This is especially the case when we face decisions of such far-reaching importance as those which are facing us now in the realm of defence policy. Surely, therefore, it is desirable, surely it is essential that we

should be in possession of every fact that bears on this matter, subject, of course, to the overriding claims of security. We have had little or no information from the government up to the present but the press is full of statements from officers, active and retired, from industries and unions and from experts and non-experts dealing with this matter. The confusion that has resulted has not been cleared but, as I said, has even been confounded by official statements by spokesmen of the government.

Therefore I suggest to the government that there should be set up as soon as possible a special but small parliamentary committee—it could be a subcommittee of the committee on estimates; perhaps that would be better—to give this question the kind of searching and complete examination which it has not yet received, and give it immediately. I know that the minister would have to give up a good deal of time to a committee or subcommittee of this kind because he is the one on whom we would have to rely most for information and views, although other witnesses should be available as well. This, Mr. Speaker, would not be a delaying action because the decision is not going to be given to us until March 31. When this decision is made, surely members of the house, before they are called on to consider this matter with all its far-reaching implications and eventually approve or disapprove the decision, should have possession of those facts, and surely the best way to get possession of them is through the kind of parliamentary committee or subcommittee I have mentioned which I would hope would begin to meet almost at once.

I know that you will say that this is an unusual procedure. It is, but the situation is unusual. We are reaching, if we have not already reached, a cross-roads in our defence policy. The developments of the past year or two have been very important indeed. Surely this parliament, representing the Canadian people, cannot afford to consider policy in this matter except within the context and the compulsion of these developments in the last few years. That is why I suggest we must have the facts if we are to find the best and the broadest-based solution for a problem which is of vital importance to our whole national future. The responsibility is on the government. We as the House of Commons cannot take that responsibility even if we desired to do so. It is our responsibility in making up our minds as to the rightness of the government decision to know the facts, and I suggest that perhaps the best way of getting them is by the procedure I have mentioned.