

Inquiries of the Ministry

ing, for instance, of the Canadian brigade, which happens to be 6,000 strong. I know of some German brigades which are 2,100 strong. This is a question of definition and of role, and obviously in an integrated function all these factors will have to be considered.

I should also bring out the fact, since my hon. friend has underlined the two statements, the one in Washington and the one in Brussels, to which we subscribe, that it was mentioned that we favoured no over-all reduction in NATO strength. The important word here is "over-all", and I think that Canada by subscribing to a new formula is not necessarily reducing its commitment or the over-all strength of the alliance.

Mr. MacLean: As a further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, would the minister explain to the house the nature of the objections, which we understand were quite strenuous, from his counterparts in the allied countries?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Yes, Mr. Speaker I can be quite frank on that. They are mostly on questions of procedure. They want to be consulted throughout the whole series and levels of prescribed consultations, and we agreed to this. The policy itself, which flowed from the statement of the Prime Minister on April 3, is not questioned. We have a right to decide what we are going to contribute to the forces, but we have to go through the normal process of consultation.

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister of National Defence whether he put before the defence ministers of our NATO allies a timed or phased program for the reduction of our forces in Europe and tell them when these reductions are supposed to start?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I did put before them what I would call a tentative plan in order to inform them of the magnitude, the scope of the reduction, and how we wanted to go about it. Of course, in the whole operation there was a phase-out and a phase-in, a phase-out of the old operation and a phase-in of the new operation. Naturally these things were submitted for the purpose of discussion, because we never showed ourselves inflexible so far as timing and so far as roles were concerned.

Mr. Harkness: Would the minister answer the second part of the question as to when these reductions in strength are supposed to

start according to the plans of the government?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): The original suggestion was that they would start in 1970, but we did not indicate in what precise month. They are to take place in stages, but they would start in 1970 and be completed by 1972.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary question of the minister. At one of his several press conferences he refused to deny the American assertion that Canada intends to reduce its NATO strength by between two-thirds and four-fifths. Obviously the minister gave some figures to the NATO conference to discuss, and the NATO authorities are discussing them now. Would he be equally frank with the House of Commons and give us the figures that he gave the conference of NATO ministers?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I do not think I refused to deny that assertion. I said that so far as the reduction in numbers was concerned this could not be determined right away because, of course, that would be decided in consultation with the military authorities of NATO itself. It would be very hard to discuss the striking power or effectiveness of our contribution before we know what the force is going to be, and therefore again this is a speculative assumption and I cannot subscribe to it. I think I did indicate that anybody saying that now would know more than we know ourselves.

Mr. Hees: Was not the principal reason for the pretty universal anger among our NATO allies—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would suggest to the hon. member that his supplementary as phrased will be or is argumentative, and perhaps he might rephrase it.

Mr. Hees: I would be very glad to do so, Mr. Speaker. Was it not that the government of Canada made it very clear to our NATO allies that in future Canada intended to defend the peace to the last American, Englishman or any other NATO ally into whose lap it could dump its responsibilities in the future?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.