HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 20, 1959

The house met at 11 a.m.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

ANNOUNCEMENT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON AIR DEFENCE

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, with the leave of the house I should like to make a somewhat lengthy statement on the subject of one facet of the national defence of Canada because, after all, the effectiveness or otherwise of the measures taken for national defence until international peace under law is obtained constitutes the passport either to survival or destruction. The announcement I wish to make has to do with the decision regarding our air defence which was foreshadowed in the statement made by me to the press on September 23 last.

The government has carefully examined and re-examined the probable need for the Arrow aircraft and Iroquois engine known as the CF-105, the development of which has been continued pending a final decision. It has made a thorough examination in the light of all the information available concerning the probable nature of the threats to North America in future years, the alternative means of defence against such threats, and the estimated costs thereof. The conclusion arrived at is that the development of the Arrow aircraft and Iroquois engine should be terminated now.

Formal notice of termination is being given now to the contractors. All outstanding commitments will of course be settled equitably.

In reaching this decision the government has taken fully into account the present and prospective international situation, including the strategic consequences of weapon development and the effects of the decision I have just announced upon Canada's ability to meet any emergency that may arise.

Work on the original concept of the CF-105 commenced in the air force in 1952, and the first government decision to proceed with the development and with the production of two prototypes was taken late in 1953. The plane was designed to meet the requirements of the R.C.A.F. for a successor to the CF-100 to be used in the defence of Canada. At that time it was thought some five or six hundred aircraft would be needed by the R.C.A.F., and their cost was forecast at about $1,500,000 to $2 million each.

From the beginning, however, it was recognized by the previous government, and subsequently by this government, that the development of an advanced supersonic aircraft such as the 105 and its complicated engine and weapon system was highly hazardous, and therefore all decisions to proceed with it were tentative and subject to change in the light of experience. This was known to the contractors undertaking the development, to the air force, and to parliament.

The development of the Arrow aircraft and the Iroquois engine has been a success although, for various reasons, it has been much behind the original schedule. The plane and its engine have shown promise of achieving the high standard of technical performance intended, and are a credit to those who conceived and designed them and translated the plans into reality.

Unfortunately these outstanding achievements have been overtaken by events. In recent months it has come to be realized that the bomber threat against which the CF-105 was intended to provide defence has diminished, and alternative means of meeting the threat have been developed much earlier than was expected.

The first modern long range bombers with which Canada might be confronted came into operation over five years ago, but the numbers produced now appear to be much lower than was previously forecast. Thus the threat against which the CF-105 could be effective has not proved to be as serious as was forecast. During 1959 and 1960 a relatively small number of modern bombers constitutes the main airborne threat. It is considered that the defence system of North America is adequate to meet this threat.

Potential aggressors now seem more likely to put their effort into missile development than into increasing their bomber force. By the middle of 1962 the threat from the intercontinental ballistic missile will undoubtedly be greatly enhanced in numbers, size and accuracy, and the I.C.B.M. threat may be supplemented by submarine-launched missiles. By the middle sixties the missile seems likely to be the major threat and the long range bomber relegated to supplementing the major attack by these missiles. It would