

*Abandonment of Defence Projects*

This is inevitable, and one can cite all kinds of people on both sides of the question. However, in my opinion there was no doubt that the great bulk of informed military opinion was convinced of the fact that nuclear weapons were necessary and desirable, so far as the weapons systems in Canada for which they were proposed and for which they are now being put into effect were concerned.

I doubt very much whether anything is going to be gained at the present time by great repetition of the views and opinions of experts on one side of the question or the other.

The hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Gregoire) said that Quebec wishes Canada to work for peace. I should like to make it quite clear that I think everyone in this country who is concerned with attempting to get nuclear weapons for Canadian forces is also just as much concerned to work for peace. In fact, I believe quite firmly that the best method of ensuring that we will have peace and that there will not be the outbreak of another world conflict is to keep the western world strong. To do that, each member of the western alliance has to play its due part and take its due burden of responsibility for the defence of the west. As far as Canada is concerned, in my view that involves our making use of nuclear weapons. So much for the nuclear weapons question.

I should now like to say something about the cancellation of the general purpose frigate program. The main point I have to make is that this cancellation is, in effect, a decision to reduce Canada's naval contribution to NATO. Last Friday I asked the minister of defence whether the government had made a decision to reduce our naval contribution to NATO, and his reply was no. I accept that, of course, as the case; no formal decision in that regard has been made. But it appalls me that a decision has been made to scrap the general purpose frigate program without having something else to put in its place, or without the realization that by taking the decision to scrap the program Canada has decided, in effect, to reduce its contribution to NATO, which reduction is inevitable.

Anybody experienced in naval shipbuilding programs is well aware of the fact that such a program is a very long and lengthy process. To begin with, a great deal of time is involved in attempting to assess the best type of ship to build. After that decision is reached a great deal of time is involved in drawing up the plans and finding out where to fit in the multitudinous electronic devices necessary at the present time, the armament, and so on. Then there is a further lengthy period before

[Mr. Harkness.]

construction actually gets under way and is completed. So that a naval building program is a very long term project.

The general purpose frigate program having been cancelled, I think there is no question that because nothing has yet been decided upon to take its place all these lengthy processes I have mentioned cannot be brought under way. As the present ships in the navy are taken out of commission or wear out there will be nothing to replace them. Therefore, Canada's navy in the years ahead will be reduced in size and effectiveness. I think there is no use our blinking at that fact; that is inevitably the situation.

As far as the adoption of any particular ship or weapons system is concerned, arguments for or against each one can be made. As I mentioned before, you can get expert opinion both pro and con in regard to any one of them. What has to be done is that an assessment has to be made of the value of a particular ship or piece of equipment compared with another, and a final decision come to as to which will best meet the general purpose you have in mind. One of the arguments made against the general purpose frigate is that its speed is not as great as that of a nuclear submarine. No surface ship of any size is able to go as fast as the present nuclear-powered submarines can go under water. Therefore, this argument, if made against the general purpose frigate, can also be made against any type of surface vessel of any size. The position may be changed by development of larger-sized hydrofoil vessels, but so far there has been no such development. And whether it would be successful in any event we do not know—especially the development of vessels with a good deal of endurance in the matter of the time they can spend at sea, and other matters.

I do not think that anyone who has had experience in these matters would for a moment become completely wedded to one particular ship or type of equipment and say that that was the only one of any use, that nothing else would do and that we must proceed with it no matter what the consideration. On the other hand, I think that merely to discard a particular type of weapon or particular type of ship, as in this case, without having anything to replace it, is shortsighted policy and one which does not tend to maintain or build up the strength of Canadian forces or to maintain our contribution to the NATO forces of the west.

A considerable number of people in this country would like to see military expenditures of all kinds reduced, and I can sympathize with this view. But the actual fact is that our contribution to the forces of NATO calculated as a percentage of the gross national