

Supply—National Defence

I am not quite certain whether I understood the hon. member correctly. If he indicated that there was any thought of the Arrow ever having been used by the air division I want to assure him—

Mr. Benidickson: In NATO.

Mr. Pearkes: —that was never contemplated; never to my knowledge.

Mr. Benidickson: Certainly many military commentators of great intelligence have thought that as this was a very advanced aircraft it might very well have a role to play in NATO complementary to the role it would play in North America.

Mr. Pearkes: The difficulty would have been that there was no ground environment in Europe—nor is there today ground environment—which could have made the operation of the CF-105 effective. As I say, it was never contemplated that it would be used there.

Mr. Benidickson: I only say that there was speculation and comment from people who have more knowledge of the possibilities in this area than I have in that respect.

Mr. Pearkes: Really, I do not know how much knowledge the hon. member has on the subject.

Mr. Benidickson: I would not say any more than the Leader of the Opposition said this afternoon, namely that I played only a very modest and obscure part in the air force and recent war effort.

However, I want also to interrogate the minister a little bit further on the matter of this MC-70 of December, 1957 because I think it is relevant to our examination of the expenditures before us and the decision that was announced this morning. I have a feeling that we are very much in the rumble seat now with respect to decisions that are made in the United States. Was it in December 1957 or was it in April recently when General Norstad came to see us, that it was obvious to this government that the role of the Canadian air force in Europe required a change from the F-86 to this new fighter aircraft with a ground role under which they would not only, as the minister said, find their target but destroy it?

Mr. Pearkes: When General Norstad was here he explained in detail the type of role that he would like to give as an assignment to the squadrons of the air division presently armed with the F-86. Prior to that time there had been discussion for some time as to two or three different types of role. General Norstad was here and he made a definite recommendation. It was impossible until he

had come here for us to have decided which aircraft should be used, until the actual role had been defined. I think that is fairly obvious. The type of aircraft having then been decided upon, there are several different aircraft of that type. These all had to be evaluated, and a decision has just been reached recently that this aircraft was the one which would suit our requirements better than any of the others. I announced it almost immediately the decision had been made.

Mr. Benidickson: The minister indicated that it was still a most nebulous state of affairs, even before he came to this committee, in that he said there were provisos still unsettled as to price and the opportunity for manufacture in Canada.

Mr. Pearkes: I think when the estimates of the Minister of Defence Production come before the committee he will be able to give the hon. member much more detail about that matter. It is his department that does the purchasing. Naturally, until the final paper has been signed, I would have to put in some provisos.

Mr. Benidickson: We are advancing under the calendar rather far into 1959. Under the normal timetable I think by about September most departments put themselves in a position to indicate to treasury board what their requirements would be for the next fiscal year which I admit starts only on April 1 following. Having regard to the possibility, or the probability I think we can say, of going ahead with this decision announced by the Minister of National Defence that the NATO squadrons that now have the F-86 will be equipped with this new aircraft, surely it is possible of translating the cost into the national budget for defence of next year. Has the minister some indication of what it means in extra cost for next year that would not probably be reduced by some other expenditure that would not be required?

Mr. Pearkes: Of course, we are examining the next year's estimates now. We take into consideration not only next year but the estimates for the next five years. We are hoping that we shall be able to provide for the re-equipment of these squadrons within an estimate of about the same order of magnitude as the present one.

Mr. Hellyer: Can the minister tell us whether the F-104 which has been chosen to re-equip the air division has any other role than as a strike aircraft?

Mr. Pearkes: No, that is its main role.

Mr. Hellyer: That is its main role?

Mr. Pearkes: Yes; a strike and reconnaissance role.