

Abandonment of Defence Projects

Mr. Hellyer: I am not misleading the public, but I would like to add a few things for the edification of my hon. friend, that whereas the missiles would, if there was such a war, be used in the initial attack, at this moment the big weapons, the weapons of millions of tons of explosive power, are still carried predominantly by manned bombers. So, the statement I made is mathematically correct.

Mr. Pugh: Did you put that before the defence committee?

Mr. Hellyer: At any time.

Mr. Pugh: Did you put it before the defence committee?

Mr. Hellyer: It is mathematically correct. If there were now, and pray heaven it won't happen, a war by miscalculation, these weapons systems would have a beneficial effect in that they would save many lives.

Mr. Winch: An absolute lie.

Mr. Hellyer: It is not a lie. The hon. gentleman can forecast into the future any amount he wants, and he may be quite right in respect to the future.

Mr. Winch: I am talking about now.

Mr. Hellyer: Now is what I am talking about.

Mr. Winch: Well, take the evidence of your own chiefs of staff.

Mr. Hellyer: I have, and I am more familiar with my own chiefs of staff than any hon. gentleman opposite.

Mr. MacInnis: Would the minister permit a question?

Mr. Hellyer: If you wait a minute or two I will be through.

Mr. MacInnis: The minister is trying—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The minister does not have to yield the floor.

Mr. Greene: Stupid questions later.

Mr. Pugh: Stupid answers now.

Mr. Hellyer: Because our air defences, even though they are not a major part of the total air defence of North America, are an integral part of a system designed on a continental basis. I believe we have a responsibility, for the time being at least, to carry forward with those weapons systems which we have acquired, and bring them to their maximum usefulness. It is for this reason that agreements have been signed and that the weapons systems will be brought to their maximum useful state as quickly as that can be brought about.

Under the circumstances I reject in the strongest possible terms any implications of servility; this is not true. We want to make our own decisions, but we also still believe in the sanctity of contracts, and when a duly elected government of the people makes a decision it binds them to an action which is relied on by others. Unless the other party is willing by negotiation to contract out, which in this case I am sure it is not, then I think we are duty bound as honourable people to carry it through and do our part of the bargain. In consequence we must reject this subamendment. It is unfounded and is not in keeping with the spirit of all our peoples from shore to shore.

Finally may I say this. The question of the morale of the armed forces was raised.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Before the minister continues, he has finished the subject he has been dealing with just now. Will he allow a question at this point?

Mr. Hellyer: Yes.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The hon. gentleman made the statement a moment ago that he was sure that the United States would not be prepared to contract out of the responsibility of Canada's providing nuclear warheads on the Bomarc—is that what the minister said? Has the government tried to contract out as yet, or how is the minister able to speak with such authority when he says that he is sure the United States would not agree to that?

Mr. Hellyer: I am not entirely without perception, Mr. Speaker, and in discussions with respect to defence matters I know the regard had for these weapons systems in high places in the United States of America, the importance they attach to them, and the very significant impact they had on the deterioration of relations between our two countries.

The question of the morale of our armed forces was raised. The armed forces of Canada, like the people of Canada, expect this government to produce a comprehensive long range policy and plan which will enable them to carry out their tasks most effectively in the years which lie ahead. In this respect I am sure they will give their full and complete backing to the proposals which will be brought before this house next year. Morale will be stimulated and encouraged by decisiveness and by effectiveness in the years which lie ahead, and we are going to see that everything possible is done to ensure that our armed forces are given the tools with which to do the job.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, may I remind hon. gentlemen that we are going to proceed with our studies. We hope that the special committee will do the same.