

*Supply—National Defence*

and wheeler-dealing in that dying cabinet because of it, made Canada the laughingstock of NATO and brought shame instead of honour to the Canadian serviceman. These were truly the days of low morale in the Canadian armed forces, as the hon. member well knows. There was no rationale to defence policy, and the administrative and upkeep expenses of the force had been allowed to increase with complete disregard for the vital need of budgeting for new vehicles, aircraft and ships. The whole defence department was crying out for a new policy and a new lease on life for our service-men—the unwitting pawns of the indecision and mismanagement of my hon. friend's defence policy—to their rightful place of honour in our society.

● (9:10 p.m.)

Morale is not bad in the forces. The associate minister and myself have visited all of our major bases and I can make that statement with force and truth before this house. It is not one based on wild rumours and haphazard chats in a handful of ridings, but on the opinion of professional men who know what they are talking about.

Naturally there is concern, and some worry among our highly skilled tradesmen in particular, because wages in industry in Canada have never been higher and the shortage of skilled labour has never been greater in our history. Also our personnel are the best, the cream of the crop. They must pass tough recruiting and aptitude tests before they can enlist. Their basic training is excellent and they receive valuable experience on the most modern equipment in their respective fields during their service. They also, by selection, are the healthiest people in the nation, so it is no wonder industry is beckoning and welcoming them. Therefore it is only natural that they are concerned, as all other red-blooded men with superior qualifications would be, whether they should not take advantage of the present high demand for their skills. This, as I have always said, is the prime cause of their worry.

By the same token, we are doing what we can, as any sensible employer with a large investment in his employees would, to counteract this situation and to keep our people convinced of the long-term advantages of staying in the service. This is simply good business as well as being in the best interests both of the men and women in the armed forces and of Canada as a whole. We are not sitting around lamenting about the situation;

[Mr. Hellyer.]

we are trying to do something tangible about it.

Several senior officers from Canadian forces headquarters and the area commands have had appropriate programs under way for months, along with my own staff and that of the associate minister.

The re-engagement bonus which my colleague announced last Friday in this house is one step in the process, and of course there are others under review to constantly improve and enhance the terms and conditions of service. With a voluntary force the conditions of service must not only be competitive; they must be a little better than average to help compensate for the extra expenses generated by the servicemen's necessarily nomadic life.

But it is nonsense to blame this honest soul searching by our service personnel on integration, and for purely political advantage to deduce that low morale is the result. Our military personnel had an opportunity to express themselves last November respecting the management of their affairs, and I would hardly call the result of the service vote one of no confidence in our defence policy. I must say at this point that I agree with my hon. friends opposite that the method of reporting should be changed so that the service vote is not reported separately. I will personally do everything within my power to see that that is brought about.

I look upon it, too, as undeniable evidence that our armed forces have good, long memories. They expressed quite clearly that they will not forget in a hurry the real days of low morale—the "dark days" of defence in the early sixties.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that in my opinion the philosophy of mobile forces as set out in the White Paper is sound for Canada at this time and for the years immediately ahead. The implementation of the policy in the White Paper is proceeding with dispatch. The integration of the armed forces will assist in the implementation of those policies. It will give Canada the most effective and responsive force of its size in the world and a clear margin of superiority for the money being spent. Our integration plans are the most exciting military reorganization going on anywhere in the free world at the present time, one which is being watched by all and admired by many. I have no doubt that it will become a pattern for the reorganization of military forces in other countries in the years ahead, and that we in Canada will