

The defence program

SIR — Your editorial headed "Infinite Flexibility" (August 18) showed that the writer completely misunderstood the purpose of my statement to the House of Representatives on August 16.

The purpose of my statement was to elaborate the short announcement of the Treasurer's Budget speech concerning the defence vote 1972-73, and give some indication of the scope of the major new equipment included in the five-year rolling program for future years.

This was foreshadowed in a news story from your defence correspondent which appeared on the front page on August 7.

The first sentence of my August 16 statement clearly gave the scope. It said: "I wish to outline the Government's decisions for the first year of the five-year defence program."

This was done. My statement elaborated on the Budget provisions for defence equipment, manpower and other spending for 1972-73 (which is the first year of the five-year program) and aggregated proposed spending into functional categories, which are not shown in the estimates of the individual departments.

I also announced the equipment orders which the Government had decided should be placed in financial year 1972-73. The largest of these is the destroyer program. I discussed it at length because it is big because there is no other decision part of its size, and because the cost is a large (71 per cent) part of the aggregate estimated cost of the six new major equipment projects approved by the Government for commencement in 1972-73.

VICED-REGAL

On Saturday morning Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Husluck returned to Canberra.

This afternoon Her Excellency Lady Husluck opened the 1972 Women's Australian Cross Country Championships at Capital Hill, Canberra.

Yesterday morning the Governor-General and Lady Husluck attended the 21st anniversary service of the Canberra Churches of Christ at the Church of Christ, Ainslie.

The second sentence of the first paragraph of my statement also describes the general form of the Government's plan for the remaining four years of the program.

This also was done. I stressed later in my statement that "there are important reasons why the Government should not announce specific intentions to acquire new equipment beyond the first year of the five-year defence program."

It is a very sensible and important reason why a Government should not commit itself to specified defence equipment which does not need to be ordered far between one and five years hence. They are:

- To announce a decision on technology advanced, or to adapt to any now unforeseeable strategic changes.
- Premature publication of intentions could deprive the Government of the opportunity to negotiate for more competitive financial conditions in contracts with suppliers.

Announcements of decisions to order defence equipment in the years ahead for the Navy, Army and Air Force will be made annually, as in the past, and only after negotiations have been completed.

I thought it would be helpful to give, as I did, the broad financial parameters of the spending levels four years hence, which defence planners were using as the limits within which to fit a program of spending and defence orders to satisfy competing objectives.

I did not publish the details of the way the planners subordinated expenditure on various components of the defence effort in future precisely, for the Government cannot be committed so far in advance and would not expect the Parliament to commit itself.

It is the very nature of the plans that are under annual review to see whether a changed combination or rearrangement will give a better result. This is the very essence of a rolling program in defence departments, in Australia or abroad.

I repeat that the scope of my statement was made clear. It was intended to announce the equipment, manpower and other decisions made for the first year of the five-year defence program, set in perspective against an outline of expenditures levels five years hence, and a description of the broad kind of equipment to be considered and decided by the

Government in later years. It was not intended as an overall review of defence activities. These points were generally recognised by the Australian press, but not by your leader writer based in Sydney.

A comprehensive view of defence will be contained in the Defence Report, 1972.

DAVID FAIRBAIRN, Minister for Defence, Canberra, ACT.

[We accept Mr Fairbairn's assurance that his statement was not what it was entitled, "A Ministerial Statement on the Five-Year Defence Program." When then, is there going to be a comprehensive and coherent Ministerial Statement on Defence Policy? There has been none since Mr Fairbairn became minister. The annual Defence Report is no substitute for this. Mr Fairbairn's suggestion that the shape of the Government's defence thinking cannot be revealed is quite unacceptable.—Editor, SMH.]

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Milk-money thefts

SIR.—Recent reports in several newspapers decry the imposition of a three-month jail sentence for the theft of 70c worth of milk, money.

May I present the milk vendor's side of the story? Milk runs are valued on a daily gallonage basis, and runs in this area are selling for about \$150 per gallon.

If a thief steals four pints of milk, or the equivalent in cash,

and because of this theft the customer dispenses with the milk vendor's service and buys her milk at a shop, then the value of that run has been reduced by \$75. In addition to this, the vendor's wage has been reduced by an amount equal to the small profit which he makes on a daily sale of four pints.

Food for thought, we feel, for those who commiserate with the thief "who only stole 70c."

T. J. and B. J. MARSHALL, Leppington.

Black bans by builders' labourers

SIR.—This union represents building workers who perform arduous tasks in the least congenial circumstances. The industry is a particularly unstable and insecure one and we have succeeded in recent years in sharply improving the wages, conditions and standing of our members.

The militant actions in the 1970, 1971 strikes have been greatly distorted. The real position is that no physical violence was perpetrated against a single individual during these strikes.

During the two strikes and following them we issued invitations to both the Premier, Mr Askin, and the then Police Commissioner, Mr Allan, to institute a full and open public inquiry

into the building industry, land deals, and the developers.

The Government consistently refused such an open inquiry, where not only allegations of violence could have been raised, but all of the activities of the developers, one of whom you may have noticed was reported recently to have increased their profit by 69 per cent on the previous year.

Once again I repeat that no physical violence was initiated by any member of this union and the only slight damage to property arose when foolish employers completely ignored the democratic expression of 10,000 striking builders' labourers and attempted to smash the strike with the use of scab labour.

The scab fell on the part of these few employers was responsible for "inflaming the situation and that small group of employers must bear the heaviest responsibility."

What a strange double standard your newspaper has when it says tonight about the Australian conscripts blood being spilt in the futile Vietnam War but is prepared to cry tears of blood over the demolition of a few bricks erected by scab labour.

JACK MUNDAY, Secretary, Australian Builders' Labourers' Federation, NSW Branch.

Sydney.

The best comment on this is provided by Mr J. P. Dieter, assistant secretary, Labor Council of NSW, who, in a letter published by the "Herald" on August 17, said: "It would be well known to any serious student of industrial relations that the official trade-union movement has condemned violence unambiguously wherever and by whomever. This applies to the tactics of the Builders' Labourers' Federation who, for practising these methods, were suspended from the Labor Council in May, 1971.—Editor, SMH."

SIR.—Your arguments (editorials, August 11 and 14) about the adverse effects of selective black bans, such as those imposed by builders' labourers, are inaccurate.

Your view that these bans cause unemployment assumes that earmarked funds for a building development are not re-allocated elsewhere and that available resources cannot be employed elsewhere. Neither of these assumptions is necessarily or even likely to be true, and especially so when Government full-employment policies are pursued.



"An unbiased reporter of facts, respected by Government and Opposition — our weather commentator!"

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Many citizens, Mr Munday included, must bemoan the demise of the Save Sydney Committee and the limited (but valuable) efforts of the National Trust. The absence of an effective town planning organisation is Mr Munday's problem. In the meantime, the black ban provides a breathing space to search for new ideas as the "battered" report of the Royal Institute of Planners on The Rocks shows.

NEL RUNCIE PATRICK WHITE Centennial Park.

With authorities careless or intimidated or ill-advised, grave responsibility rests with the judgment of a few conscientious citizens. And bearing Mr Munday, who has accepted this responsibility, does nothing to improve town planning, to strengthen councils, to stop reckless over-development, all of which are, after all, the bane of honest politicians and honest civic-minded developers.

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Witness the recent abortive efforts by the City Council to prevent an Eastlake-type fiasco occurring in Cook Road, Centennial Park. The developers' proposals are against not only the wishes of residents in two council plebiscites, an amenities survey, and opinion expressed at public meetings of residents, but are also against the election platform of Civic Reform itself.

Unfortunately, ill-considered action by the City Commissioner and ineptitude in correcting the situation by the City Council have established precedents which developers apparently feel compelled to exploit, irrespective of social cost.

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