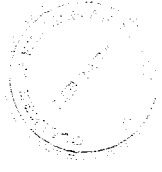


SPECTATOR



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THE COST OF DEFENCE

THE news that the defence services will cost £107,500,000 more in the year 1949-50 than the estimated expenditure in the current financial year was no bombshell. Parliament and the public have become thoroughly accustomed to the idea that the cost of defence could not be cut down further, the state of Europe being what it is, and that the problems of the Budget must be to that extent deepened. The National Service Act of last autumn, which raised the period of service from 12 to 18 months, merely registered a development which everybody knew to be inevitable. But the Bill now presented contains some surprises, in that the increase of £107,500,000 is almost entirely accounted for by the factor of quality rather than the factor of quantity. There is nothing in that which need cause an outcry. All parties are agreed that if the right type of man is to be attracted into the forces he must be properly paid—one-third of the total increase is due to better pay—that existing equipment must be kept in the best possible condition and that the newest and best weapons must be provided. It is regrettable that in some cases the Exchequer is having to pay increased prices for some essential supplies, but that alone would not give reason for an attack on the Government.

In fact if an attack develops at all it will have to cover a wider front. The question of numbers is being settled as best it can be. That is to say the period of conscription has been extended and the effort to secure the all-important volunteers has been intensified. The question of quality has also been faced, and if costs and the protestations of the Statement on Defence published on Tuesday mean anything, an acceptable answer will be found. But there remains the vital question of efficiency, and here every citizen is thrown back on his own resources of information and opinion. The Statement on Defence is of very little help. It acknowledges that there has been waste in the use of manpower and remarks that "the Service Ministers will accordingly continue to give the subject their unremitting attention." It gives an account of the activities of the three Services in the past year which is as much concerned with difficulties as with success in overcoming them. Short of a secret debate it is unlikely that much more detailed information will be forthcoming. But it is equally unlikely that the search for the truth will flag and that disturbing questions will not be asked. What evidence is there that the Army and the Royal Air

Force are ready for a really serious emergency? When will the stories of national service men wasting their time on menial jobs begin to get less frequent? And how strong—or weak—is public confidence in the present Minister of Defence? This week's debate should have thrown valuable light on that.

The Attack on Christianity

The action of the Bulgarian Government in accusing fifteen leaders of the United Evangelical Church in that country of espionage and illegal currency dealings was exactly what might have been expected. It is also a swift vindication of the unbending policy pursued by Cardinal Mindszenty up to the time of his arrest. The logic of his stand was always that the thin edge of the entering wedge must be resisted. Yesterday it was a matter of nationalising the Church schools and tightening the grip of the State on the Catholic peasantry. Tomorrow it would be the general attack on the Church as an institution and on Christianity itself. He was right. Now the attack has begun there is no knowing where it will end. Before Cardinal Mindszenty was arrested, the persecution of Hungarian Protestants, including the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass, had begun. The fifteen Church leaders now accused in Bulgaria are Congregationalists, Methodists and Baptists. It makes no difference that they are indicted for the usual miserable string of political and financial "crimes." It makes no difference that the Bulgarian Government, like the Hungarian before it, is pledged to respect elementary human rights and has hypocritically asserted that religious freedom is guaranteed by its constitution. It makes no difference that the ministers concerned are said to have made full confessions during preliminary investigation, except that the real and horrible meaning of the phrase "preliminary investigation" is underlined. These men are Christians; therefore they must be removed. Christianity competes with Communism for the souls of men; therefore it must be destroyed. The whole sickening process is made clear. And yet there are so-called progressive persons and journals in this country who choose to focus their attention solely on some real or imagined change of front in the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano*, forgetting that what is really at stake is not merely the lives of a few men, nor even the reputation of the Roman Catholic Church, but the faith and freedom of millions of Christians.

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