

*From the London End*

# Britain's Defence

THE Government's defence plans for 1953-54, which were published here in a White Paper, will cost the country £1,636.75 millions, that is over £123 millions more than has been spent in the current year. The White Paper, apart from giving details as to how this money will be allocated between the three services, also contains the proposal to extend the National Service Act, 1948 for five years in order that National Servicemen who have completed their whole time military service, may be liable to recall for five more years in the event of an emergency.

The White Paper explains that the Labour Government's £4,700 million (3 years) programme could not have been completed by March, 1953, but it would have acquired a momentum in 1952-53 "which would have imposed too great a burden on the economy, particularly on the balance of payments." It goes on to explain the political arguments in favour of this scaling down of the original programme and says:

"We must balance the need for greater defensive strength against the risk that by overstraining ourselves too greatly we shall give the Communists a Woodless victory." Rearmament, therefore, is to be spread over a longer period and "held to a lower peak." If the total of all budgetary expenditure for 1953-54 is to remain around the same level as that of the current year, the proportion of military expenditure to the total will be about 32 per cent compared with 29 per cent in the current year.

The features of the White Paper which have been widely commented upon in the local press, are the economic consequences of the expenditure proposed and the climate of opinion of the British General Staff.

If the three-year rearmament programme of the Labour Government had been carried out, the defence expenditure on production would have amounted to £850 million. The White Paper, however, now estimates that expenditure under this head would amount to £650 million. In other words, the effect of the decision to scale down on the "production for defence" estimate is to divert some £200 million worth of resources from military to civilian and

export production. Tins must, no doubt, account for some of the short-time working in the metal and engineering industries, while firms that had hoped to receive defence contracts are hurriedly turning to other activities. The *Manchester Guardian* found this the reason for the small change in the occupational distribution of the country's labour supply. It says:

It is remarkable how little demand for labour the rearmament programme has so far produced. About 30,000 have gone into the aircraft industry in 1952; that small movement has been the main effect of the programme."


It has been the Government's view that the size of the programme is not a burden on the economy. It is, however, a fact that it does place pressure on particular points in the economy, and it is this which has caused the main difficulty. Britain's most promising export industries are those concerned with aircraft production and the making of machinery and other highly finished products of engineering. And it has been precisely on these industries that the pressure has been greatest. With the scaling down of "production for defence" by £200 million, it may be a possibility that exports of these products could be increased in 1953-54.

The other aspect of the White Paper concerns the greater attention that is given by the Chiefs of Staff to aerial warfare. The figures given in the table below make it obvious that the Air Ministry will now get substantially more and the Admiralty less of the total military expenditure. The Army remains the costliest and the largest single service, but this, as *The Times* commented, 'may not necessarily be an immutable' feature of the British Plan for all time." It is the potentialities of air power that seem to have caught the imagination of the military minds in Whitehall.

In the event of a full-scale modern war—should such a catastrophe ever be forced upon us—the most important criteria, at least to the military minds, would be to gain a decisive tactical advantage within the first thirty days of its declaration. It is in this period that the most ter-

rible weapons of war will be used. The *Times* considers that the initial period of any modern war will be concerned with each side "vainly hoping to snatch quick victory in the teeth of hideous reprisals." There can be little doubt that this change-over from the traditional British viewpoint of regarding the navy and army as being the decisive arbiter of what the outcome of a war would be, represents a major victory for the Pentagon. The Americans have always spoken of their air force as being of a strategic character—of a concentration of bombers rather than fighters. They are using it in Korea, though the effect from a military and political viewpoint seems to be doubtful.

In content, therefore, the White Paper presents a military attitude of an offensive warfare—an attitude somewhat too "modern" in that it neglects the after effects on the civilian population and on other questions concerning actual defence.



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**Defence Budget (£ millions)**

	Admiralty	War Office	Air	Supply	Defence	Total
1951-52	278.5	428.8	330.5	81.5	12.2	1131.5
1952-53	360.3	556.5	467.6	111.8	17.3	1513.5
1953-54 (estimate)	364.5	581.0	548.0	123.75	19.51	1636.76