

TORIES' 'NEW ATTEMPT TO DESTROY NAVY'

Ignorance, says Admiral

Government plans to reduce the Royal Navy and its dockyards are "a highly dangerous gamble with our national security," Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Hill-Norton said in the Lords.

"It represented the second attempt by a Tory Government to destroy the Royal Navy in the last 24 years," the Independent peer said during the debate on the Defence White Paper.

He said the proposals "flow from a misunderstanding of the threat, ignorance of the best means to counter it, disregard for the combined capability of the alliance, the mistaken assessment of priority and a total neglect of history.

"Defence seems too difficult a business for this Government. I am appalled by what is proposed. I am affronted by the way it has been done and I am deeply concerned about the almost certain consequences," he said.

Lord Soames, for the Government, said the White Paper was "a realistic and laudable attempt to grapple with the daunting problems of how best to defend ourselves in this dangerous world."

Royal Navy land in Portsmouth should be made avail-

able for new industries, Lord Jacques (Lab.) said in the Lords.

He told peers during Question Time yesterday it was "inconceivable" that the Royal Navy should continue to occupy the land yet offer little employment.

LAND

"What action is being taken to see the land is made available as quickly as possible, and as much as possible, and used to attract alternative industries?" he asked.

The Navy occupied all the prime industrial land in Portsmouth, Lord Jacques added.

He also called on the Government to extend the run-down period of the Dockyard.

"Would it not save the Government a great deal of money and provide better value by having a longer period of run-down to allow other industries time to establish themselves?" he asked.

Lord Jacques said the proposed run-down over three years would "ruin" the local economy and cost the Government a great deal in redundancy pay, unemployment pay, social security payments and lost taxes.

For the Government, Lord Lyell assured him it was aware of the concern locally to see any land surplus to Royal

Navy or Ministry of Defence requirements released "as soon as possible."

The matter was being considered urgently by the Government and other parties concerned, he added.

But Lord Lyell said that in the longer term, the creation of new jobs in south-east Hampshire depended primarily on the ability of firms in the area to make available goods and services which people wanted, and at prices they were prepared to pay.

"It is the Government's policy to create the conditions in which firms can be helped to become more competitive and so create the new jobs needed," he said.



Lord Hill-Norton
Tory Ignorance . . .