

Committee on Defence Expenditure

in the evening *Citizen* of December 16, under the heading "Findings anger Liberals", he said this:

The Currie report on lax administration by the Department of National Defence and works services branch of the Canadian army has aroused the chagrin and anger of Liberal M.P.'s.

A long standing distrust of defence department "brass hats" has been revived and with it suspicions of lack of energy, alertness and waste and extravagance of some of these officers.

The fear that billions in tax money has been improperly administered in peacetime is felt—

I may interject that it may well be felt, and it might well be treated more seriously by some hon. members on the other side in this house.

—and with it embarrassment that similar huge sums were handled during world war II without any misdemeanours being uncovered.

Those misdemeanours have, of course, just now been uncovered by the revelations made by the hon. member for Cariboo here today.

Government supporters are depending on the Prime Minister and the cabinet to demonstrate to those lax in their responsibilities that inefficiency and perhaps worse will not be tolerated by the taxpayers.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if government supporters were, in fact, depending upon the Prime Minister and the cabinet to demonstrate that attitude, how disappointed they must have been. In that respect, they would share the disappointment of members of the opposition because the prime responsibility stems right through from the Minister of National Defence to the cabinet. But the whole government has refused to accept responsibility, and nothing has been done. Of course, this article was referring to the hope then felt by the Liberal members of this house that this anger would be taken out on the brass hats, as they were calling the senior staff officers, and members of the army generally. That is what they were hoping. Some of them appear finally to realize the unfairness of that attitude.

For this situation does not involve criticism of the army itself. This situation, as is made so clear by the Currie report, stems from a fundamentally loose control at the top levels of departmental administration. The responsibility for that, Mr. Speaker, rests only in one place and that is on the minister of the department and through him on the government of this country.

Just in passing, Mr. Speaker, some reference should be made to the statements of General Simonds. I want to make it clear, to emphasize and re-emphasize, that there is, on the part of the official opposition, no criticism of the army for this situation. The

responsibility rests on the failure of departmental administration to function properly at the top. While I believe that General Simonds pursued an unwise and incorrect course in making the statements that he has made, I am very definitely of the opinion that he may have felt that he was forced to do so by the fact that no one on the government side said what should have been said immediately, namely, that the responsibility rested on the government at the ministerial level, and not on the staff. He may have felt himself forced into making this statement by the fact that no responsible government member came forward to say what is true, namely, that the responsibility for this situation is at the very top level.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, when this improper and shameful campaign was being carried on in the house which suggested that brass hats were responsible, the government benches maintained complete silence. This suggestion was condoned by the Prime Minister and all the members of his cabinet by their silence.

Mr. Fulford: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and just to get the record straight, the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) has taken responsibility. He was not here when this matter was first brought out, because he was doing NATO work.

Mr. Fulton: But the Prime Minister was here, and others, but nothing was said. I should also draw to your attention now that the government is so uninterested in this matter, and so little prepared to assume the responsibility which properly rests on its shoulders, that there are three—I was going to say three but a fourth has just come into the house—ministers present at this time.

An hon. Member: That is because you are speaking.

Mr. Cruickshank: They have nothing to listen to.

Mr. Fulton: Neither of the ministers responsible for the defence department is in the house during this debate.

Mr. Gardiner: May I inform my hon. friend—I know he does not want to be unfair—that there is a council meeting going on which, of necessity, had to be held this afternoon. Perhaps the three of us who are here should be at the council meeting instead of listening to this nonsense.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): I walked out of the council chamber—

Some hon. Members: Sit down.