

National Defence Act Amendment

requirement for it. I see no reason on earth why, in a few years time, these people should not be exchangeable.

I suppose the word meant here is "inter-changeable." The hon. member for Vegreville went on with his questioning and, following a reply by General Allard, he said this:

That is more comforting than the information we have been able to get so far.

After further questioning the hon. member for Vegreville again said:

I am very happy to have been able to have this information from you, general, and it is definitely something we have not had before. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

He also said, I believe, that he had been an officer for some 51 years and that his fears had been allayed by the evidence which had been given by General Allard.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Will the hon. member permit a question? Just now he referred to the evidence given by General Allard in answer to questions asked by the hon. member for Vegreville. Where in the evidence is there any indication that the hon. member for Vegreville, who had not heard the evidence before, approved it?

Mr. Byrne: I should think the words of the hon. member for Vegreville speak for themselves.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Would the hon. member read the words of approval? The words "thank you" need not necessarily be taken as approval.

Mr. Byrne: If the hon. member wishes to have a private conversation with the hon. member for Vegreville, I will have no objection.

It has been said that newspapers across the country are rising to the challenge, that they are suddenly becoming aware of the great danger that is facing the Canadian people and encouraging the opposition to oppose this measure. However, I am not one given to quoting editorials. As a matter of fact I consider it a breach of the rules of the house to do so, and I do not intend to quote them. I am sure hon. members have noted within the last several weeks, however, that most of the reputable newspapers across Canada are saying it is time that this debate was concluded, and that the majority in the house be given an opportunity to make a decision.

● (8:50 p.m.)

Mr. Churchill: Will the hon. member permit a question at this point? It is a very

simple question with regard to concluding the debate. Can he explain to me why the government today would not allow this house to get on with other matters on the order paper rather than provide an opportunity for the hon. member to prolong this debate? We earnestly asked for a change in the business so we could do something else that is on the order paper. Why was the request not granted?

Mr. Byrne: Those who have said more than should have been said or than could justifiably have been said, now seem anxious to deny members on the government side an opportunity to speak. Of course this is another form of closure, in reverse. I am not too well aware of the rules of the house. I used to make a very concerted study of the rules, but I found that the opposition abrogated them so often that I lost interest. I just go forward now from day to day, since the opposition seems to make the rules from day to day. The question raised by the hon. member is one he should discuss with the house leader. If they come to an agreement that we should take a vote on this question tonight I will be happy to sit down at this moment. If debate is to continue, as it so obviously did this afternoon, I feel I should say a few words even if only in defence of myself if not in defence of the minister and his measure.

I regret very much having had to refer to the hon. member for Bow River at a time when he was not in the House. However, it is difficult to find a time when he is here. It has been said that we have been asked to accept this bill holus-bolus, that the minister is immutable and will not accept amendments. Surely if members take the time to look at the reprinted bill, as opposed to the bill which was given first reading on November 4, 1966, they will find a large number of amendments have been made to it. Surely it is rather too early to say that the minister will not accept amendments, that he is completely immutable while we are still discussing clause 2 of the bill. I believe therefore that this argument, if I may use an expression, has been shot down in flames.

Certainly there has been sufficient debate on this subject for one to say that it has been dealt with adequately. The standing committee on defence heard 41 witnesses. The testimony covered a total of approximately 2,000 pages; the total number of words spoken, about one million; total number of questions asked, 5,000; total number of sessions, 55; total number of weeks of hearings, six.