

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Saturday, December 15, 1951

The house met at eleven o'clock.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

PRIVILEGE, MR. DREW—CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION
TO EUROPEAN DEFENCE—REFERENCE TO
PRESS REPORT

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege I would recall the fact that, on two previous occasions, I have directed questions to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) in regard to any obligations that may have been established under NATO, and on a still earlier occasion I called the attention of the house to press reports from Europe in which the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) had made certain statements as to plans that had been settled in regard to construction that was to take place in Europe. I pointed out at that time that this raised the question of long-term policy which had not been placed before, let alone been settled by, the house in any way. In response to the questions I have asked, the house was informed by the Prime Minister as recently as the day before yesterday that these undertakings have not been settled.

This morning, over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation news reports and also in today's press I have heard and seen the reports of the building that is to take place to house the 27th brigade in Germany. The report to which I refer is not put forward as a speculative report in any way but is a positive statement that the camps that will be built for the Canadians in the Soest area in Germany are expected to surpass even the excellent barracks the 27th brigade now has in the Hanover area, 100 miles to the north-east.

In the radio broadcast I heard the expression that our men would be living "the life of Riley" as they would be the finest barracks that had been built. Then the report went on to say as follows, and I am now quoting from the Canadian Press dispatch which reports this as information coming from Soest in Germany:

The new camps are expected to scatter the brigade over a fairly large area just as its units are now scattered over a fifty-mile area around Hanover. For reasons of economy the scattering may be modified but tentative plans are for seven

self-contained camps made up of hundreds of one-storey buildings of concrete, cement and stucco which will be built by Germans under Canadian direction.

It will be recalled that at the time the earlier press reports referred to this subject it was stated that buildings of this kind were going to be built by Germans at a cost of several million dollars, although the exact number of millions was not determined. I pointed out at that time that this could not be regarded simply as a statement affecting the construction of accommodation for the 27th brigade alone, but that it did establish a policy which would of necessity be related to possible commitments on a much more extended scale, and that a matter of this kind is something certainly which should be placed before the members of this house, particularly when they are in session. In any event, there is another question that arises, and that is, how buildings of this kind are to be determined. The statement appearing today in the press, and being given wide coverage by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, makes positive and very definite statements as to the way this is to be done, and particularly that it is to be done by German workmen under Canadian direction, and in relation to plans that have been settled on, on a very extensive scale.

I raise this question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, because I do believe that if this has been settled, particularly after the information we received before that there perhaps was some misunderstanding of the statement made by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), we should know two things: First of all, is this part of some arrangement under NATO, and, if so, what arrangements have been made with NATO? Second, what exactly are the arrangements under which Canada is going to employ German workmen to erect these buildings, and is this just some indication of a broader policy which may relate to any other forces being sent overseas?

Mr. Knowles: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, before the Prime Minister replies I wonder if I might say just a word. I hope that the leader of the opposition will not take offence at this. Likewise, I hope that the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Mayhew) will not take offence if I indicate that this is similar to the situation that we had yesterday. I hope that when we come back here for the next session we will have the matter clarified as to the rights of the leader of the opposition