

Committee on Defence Expenditure

When the Currie report was tabled, not only were the Canadian people dumbfounded; they were shocked. There is just no question about that. When expressions such as "fundamentally loose situations", "accounting records in chaotic condition", "general breakdown in the system of administration", "serious collapse in security" and "lax control and poor discipline" appeared in the press the tax-burdened Canadian public were shocked.

They were shocked for two reasons. First, they realized that probably Canada's defences were not what they had been cracked up to be. Second, as tax-burdened Canadians who, as the hon. member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Thomas) indicated yesterday, were paying almost \$5 for every \$1 they paid in 1939 for defence, not only were they shocked; they were very angry. No discussion here and apparently no amount of explanation is going to dissuade the Canadian public from this feeling which has become so firmly held by them. Not only is it a matter of the Currie report; there is evidence upon evidence quite apart from the Currie report indicating that all is not well with respect to Canadian defences.

I will even go so far as to repeat something of what I said on November 26 last in connection with defence construction. At that time I was obliged to devote a considerable part of my speech to a situation which had surprised and shocked me regarding defence construction. Since that time a good deal of additional information has come to me which indicates further reason for investigation, and also serves to confirm what I said on that occasion. I am not normally a suspicious type of person, but I can only conclude in my own mind, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment by the government has as one of its—I dare not say "purposes", but I will say "effects"—the sidetracking of an investigation which in my estimation would cause the Currie report to pale into insignificance.

The Currie report, as we have been advised, indicates—although chaotic conditions would not enable the investigators to determine it exactly—a loss of something in the neighbourhood of \$50,000. Mr. Speaker, I dare say that at Penhold alone that sum would pale into insignificance when compared with what I am personally convinced was the situation. Incidentally, it has been corrected to some extent. One of my principal efforts was its correction, and I am not unmindful of the fact that things began to move in a hurry about the time this was brought forward and that the situation has improved a great deal. I do not hesitate to say that

because, after all, I have as my guiding principle with respect to that matter the desire to see the Canadian taxpayer get a dollar's value for a dollar spent on defence. I could have handled the situation in a different way if I had had other purposes in mind. As I say, I am glad that certain things began to happen and that certain corrections began to be made, but I am still not entirely satisfied with the situation. It is just too bad that the horse in this case got out before the door was closed. There was no reason for certain things occurring which did occur at that airport or air station, things which I know have happened at other establishments in Canada.

After the Currie report was brought down and after the house adjourned for the Christmas recess, we were informed by the press—and sometimes they come very close in their indication of what is going on behind the scenes—that the government was desperately seeking an out as far as the Currie report was concerned. I personally have come to the conclusion that they think this is the out: We will move an amendment so that the defence expenditure committee will not be allowed to go into whatever field of investigation it desires, and so that it will be pinned down to the Currie report.

The rather startling thing is that Mr. Currie did make a report and we have his report with respect to the conditions which prevail. We have his 44 recommendations. The minister asserted that 27 of them were already being carried out before the report was ever received, and I assume that he wanted us to believe from his observations that probably all 44 were being carried out now. I hope they are, but that is all the more reason, Mr. Speaker, for this being a rather strange procedure.

The minister brought in the amendment at the end of his speech on Tuesday last. He did not go into detail as to what he actually had in mind in respect to the work of the committee in relation to the Currie report, although I do recall that in referring to the dam he did indicate that it might be one matter they could go into. But the minister himself gave an explanation there which I hope was the correct one.

Now, do they simply want the committee to endorse what the minister said was already being done? After all, just what is the purpose of the amendment? If there are to be further inquiries with respect to the Canadian army works services, then I for one am absolutely convinced that if it is to be worth—I was going to say a tinker's dam but that I imagine is unparliamentary—we should have a judicial inquiry. The Minister of