

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

There is the refusal to allow parliament to even discuss \$200 million of taxation imposed by order in council of doubtful legality. There is the incredible confusion and delay over the Columbia treaty. But there is one subject, Mr. Speaker, that remains at the moment uppermost in our minds as an illustration of what I have been saying in respect of government policy, or lack of policy. That subject is defence, which is the best example at the moment of government bungling and indecision, of contradictions and confusions made all the more obvious by the resignation of the minister of national defence who only a very short time ago made a gallant effort to clarify inside and outside this house the ambiguous statements of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hellyer: To clarify the unclarifiable.

Mr. Pearson: Now that minister who was engaged in clarification—and I think he should be given all the credit that we on this side would like to give him for his efforts to help his Prime Minister at that time—says in his letter of resignation:

For over two years you have been aware that I believed nuclear warheads should be supplied to the four weapons system we have acquired which are adapted to their use. Throughout this period,

the minister went on,

I believed that they would be authorized at the appropriate time.

As long as that time had not arrived, and perhaps it would not arrive until they were actually delivered into the hands of those who would be asked to use them if the awful emergency occurred which required their use, then it was possible for the minister of defence to argue that the decision could be postponed. But the appropriate time in the minister's mind had come; yet the government refused to take the action to which it had committed this country when the appropriate time came, and which action we claim they should take. Therefore the minister had no alternative as an honourable man but to take the action which he did, resignation. This underlines what we have been saying all along on this side of the house, namely that there was conflict, confusion and division inside the government on a matter of such vital importance and which surely, Mr. Speaker, made it all the more necessary to bring this question of national defence before parliament so that these confusions and indecisions could be cleared up if possible. There has never been a time in the history of our parliament, Mr. Speaker, when the record of discussion of matters of such vital importance as national defence has been so sterile and so negative. It is a long time since we have had anything approaching a statement by

[Mr. Pearson.]

the government, oral or written, about the problems of national defence which face this country. All we have been told is that there is no disagreement in the cabinet; that the responsibilities undertaken by the cabinet will be carried out. The Minister of National Defence said last week that whatever our commitments were we would discharge them; that the Prime Minister and he were agreed on that.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to interrupt the hon. member but he cannot go on a scattergun journey. He can only speak on a vote of non-confidence on a matter in respect of which he intends to move such a vote.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have observed that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) started out on two or three angles and then he came back to defence. Whatever it is, I have no objection to his having all the time he wants to; but he cannot go on one of these expeditions where he just draws a general shot at everything.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I could give the house the citation I was looking for while I was listening. It is to be found on page 201 of Beauchesne's fourth edition, citation 238(2). I know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) is familiar with that citation. It goes on to say at one point:

The debate in such a case must be strictly relevant to the item, and when it has been disposed of, no reference can again be made to it—

—and so on. Mr. Speaker Beaudoin is reported in the first column of page 3790, volume 4 of the debates of 1955 as follows:

What I am concerned about is that we should not deviate from what has been the practice with respect to the raising of grievances. It must be a specific grievance.

I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition is going to come to one specific point. I recall his opening words, that he had considered a number of subjects, and I was hoping he would eventually launch on to one in due course.

Mr. Berger: He has not made up his mind.

Mr. Pearson: The Prime Minister has graciously indicated that if I will move my motion I will be given all the time I want. That happens to be in the rules so I do not need his assistance on that.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I simply want the hon. gentleman to stay within the rules and let us have none of the old scattergun.

Mr. Pearson: I appreciate these interruptions from the Prime Minister; I wish they would all get on *Hansard*, that is all.