

*Committee on Defence Expenditure*

been said by one of their own supporters, can now be heard to say that Mr. Currie's report was not fair, reasonable and accurate in the words he used to describe the situation which he found—or to deny that—it is now a certainty that if what went on in this administration as described by the member for Cariboo is correct, then the situation described by Mr. Currie is established as fact.

That brings us very directly to what I think this house should devote its attention to—a twofold question. Firstly, where does the responsibility lie for the situation which the Currie report disclosed and what is to be done about that responsibility? Secondly what is to be done to clear up the situation which that report describes? It is significant and disturbing that, in connection with this matter of where responsibility lies, the government still seeks to evade its ultimate responsibility in connection with conditions which exist in the administration of the department—where there is such a laxity of control that these events could take place. It is true that the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) says that he accepts responsibility. But, Mr. Speaker, those words themselves, not followed by action on his part or on the part of anyone else, mean nothing. Simply to say, "I admit responsibility", and then to continue a situation which is exactly the same as it was before makes the words and the utterance of those words a completely meaningless gesture.

When we consider this question of responsibility it is most important to recall what Mr. Currie's report establishes so clearly, namely, that this was not a situation about which the minister had had no chance to inform himself and no chance to take remedial action. On the contrary, it was a situation about which he could have been and should have been fully informed long in advance of the time when it actually came to his attention.

The situation revealed by the Currie report is a most serious and complete indictment of the administration of the Department of National Defence. That department is concerned perhaps more vitally than any other not only with the security and welfare of Canada but also with the economic well-being of the country—because of the fact that it spends approximately half of all the money which is now being taken from the Canadian people as a result of the huge burden of taxation they are called upon to bear. Yet, when this house is discussing a matter of

[Mr. Fulton.]

this importance, a matter where the responsibility so clearly rests with the government—and the whole government—we find that the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) does not even bother to speak in support of his own resolution. Surely, it must be unique in the annals of this parliament, Mr. Speaker, or of any parliament, for the leader of a government, which is under such justifiable criticism on the subject of its lack of protection of public moneys, to move, without any explanation at all concerning that situation, a resolution which he knows will launch a thorough discussion of the whole question—indeed, a resolution designed for that very purpose—but to give it only a nod of the head; and to think that the people of the country would be satisfied with that fleeting show of interest. Yet that is what happened. Oh, it is true that the Prime Minister was yesterday provoked into speaking on an issue completely irrelevant to the main matter before this house and before the country, that is, the question of how this extraordinary situation arose and what is being done to deal with it or prevent its recurrence in the future. On that subject the Prime Minister was, and still is, completely silent.

When we consider the question of responsibility for this situation, and the denial of responsibility by the government, it is well also to remind ourselves of the attitude first shown by government supporters when the report was tabled in the house. You remember that attitude, Mr. Speaker. I do not think there is a member in this house who will not recall with a sense of shame that it was an attitude of seeking an immediate scapegoat, and it found expression in the words of the members on the government side blaming the "brass hats". We all remember the disgraceful and degrading efforts of government members to suggest that the army staff alone was responsible for this situation and, by seeking to make that staff the scapegoat, to relieve the Minister of National Defence and the government of a responsibility which was justly theirs.

I think that the house and the country will recall with interest an article which appeared in the press on December 16. It was written by a correspondent for whom I have the greatest respect as a well-informed member of the press gallery, and a responsible writer. But it is well known by all that he happens to be a member of the gallery who is particularly close to influential and well-informed sources within the Liberal party. I refer to Mr. J. A. Hume, the parliamentary correspondent for the *Ottawa Citizen*. In an article