

provisions already in existence with regard to civilian research under the national research council.

Mr. GREEN: Will the defence research board have anything to do with research into the development and use of atomic energy?

Mr. CLAXTON: As hon. members know, atomic energy is being dealt with under the atomic energy control board by virtue of legislation which was passed by the house last year. I should think the defence research board would be interested in any developments in that connection, but it will not have directly to do with the atomic developments.

Mr. GREEN: As the minister knows, the atomic energy control board was set up without any representation from the defence forces. Apparently there will be some connection between the work of that board and the work of this defence research board. Could some plan not be devised whereby our defence people will have a direct part in the development and use of atomic energy? Has the government in mind any such change, and if not, will consideration be given to the matter?

Mr. CLAXTON: Certainly, consideration will be given to the hon. gentleman's suggestion.

Mr. GREEN: Yesterday the hon. member for Kamloops suggested setting up a committee of this house on defence matters. The minister said that he would look into the suggestion and make a statement. I hope he can tell us something about that today. Something should be done along that line. It was proposed in 1945 and again in 1946, and in 1946 the Prime Minister made this answer to the suggestion as found at page 406 of the daily edition of *Hansard*:

I think the suggestion of my hon. friend is a very good one and, as the Minister of National Defence has just said, it is one that he is prepared to consider sympathetically. But once again the house will have to ask itself how many committees it can stand. We are enlarging the number and it will have a bearing on the attendance in the house. I think my hon. friend's suggestion of that particular committee is a very good one.

I fully realize the weakness in having many committees. A number are set up under the rules of the house which are of no use at all. Some of the standing committees never even meet; others meet only once or twice. These committees make very little contribution to the work of the house. But I am afraid we are drifting into the position that the people and the house are losing interest in the defence problem, which is a very serious one, far more serious than it has ever been before. That is so because of the importance of the

north country and the development of new weapons, such as the atom bomb and rocket projectiles. It is therefore important that the members of this house know what is going on in order to be able to understand the problem and give support to the defence forces. If members from every party knew the difficulties in connection with building up an adequate defence, they could keep their fellow members in their party informed, and I am sure that far more generous and understanding support would be given to the defence forces. In addition, we could go out and explain to the people what steps have to be taken. As it is now, both the house and the people are largely in the dark on this question, and I am afraid that condition will become worse from year to year. It looks as if the defence department is being made to take most of the cuts demanded for the sake of economy. In any event, there is a great deal of merit in having a committee of this house on defence matters. There is one in the United States senate and house of representatives, one for the army and another for the navy. I hope the minister is in a position to say something about that suggestion.

Mr. CLAXTON: I appreciate the very reasonably stated suggestion made by the hon. member for Vancouver South. As he says, the question of defence is one of great importance and concern. I cannot yet tell the committee what the estimates will be; but when they are made available, as they will be in a few days, I hope the house and the country will be gratified by the reductions from war-time levels, just as I believe they will feel that the sum provided for is not anything like on a pre-war basis, but is appropriate to meet the defence needs of Canada at this time as well as we can.

With regard to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Kamloops that we should have a committee of this house on military affairs, I may say that since he made that suggestion again last night I have looked into the debates to which the hon. member for Vancouver South has referred. There is, of course, a very reasonable case to be made for having such a committee. However, I should state to the committee some reasons why I believe it would not be desirable, particularly at this time.

In the first place, the hon. member referred to the fact that in the United States there are committees of both houses on army and navy matters. That is or was correct, although I think there is to be some consolidation of their functions. However, as hon. members know, in the United States there is a totally different