

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 24, 1952

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

THE MINISTRY

APPOINTMENT OF ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to lay on the table order in council P.C. 4553 passed this day, which reads as follows:

His Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of National Defence and under and by virtue of the powers conferred by section 5 of the National Defence Act, is pleased to designate and doth hereby designate the Solicitor General of Canada as a person who, in addition to the Minister of National Defence, may exercise any power or perform any duty or function that is vested in or that may be exercised or performed by the Minister of National Defence under the National Defence Act, provided that such exercise of power or performance of duty or function shall not depart from the manner in which the Minister of National Defence may have previously determined that such power should be exercised or such duty or function should be performed.

Hon. members will have noticed that legislation was forecast in the speech from the throne to provide for an Associate Minister of National Defence. Provision is made in existing legislation for associate ministers in time of war, but no provision now exists for an appointment in peacetime. The government might of course have made such provision under the Emergency Powers Act, but it was felt preferable to ask parliament to make the provision in regular statute form, and if that is done it is my intention, which I have already communicated to the Governor General, to submit to him a formal recommendation for the appointment to this post of the present Solicitor General. Meanwhile it was felt desirable to use the power vested in the governor in council by parliament under section 5 of the National Defence Act to empower the Solicitor General to perform the function, which would, in due course, be attributed to the Associate Minister of National Defence.

The Solicitor General was, until he became a member of the ministry, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of National Defence, and there is a real need not only for continuity but for the assumption of an increased share of responsibility for the heavy burden of that department. This is particularly desirable at this time as it is going to be

necessary during the course of this session for the Minister of National Defence to attend a meeting of the North Atlantic council in Paris, and while he is absent the Solicitor General will be Acting Minister of National Defence, and it is important that he should have adequate background in the meantime.

As hon. members know, a number of countries at the present time have, in addition to an over-all minister of defence, a minister for each of the three services. That is the situation in the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Australia. We have, however, considered it preferable in Canada to stress the unification of the services for purposes of administration under the control of a single minister, a single deputy minister and a single department. We believe that our system has demonstrable advantages and that the appointment of separate service ministers at this time would be a retrograde step.

As the defence program developed, it might have been expected that the volume of work required of the minister would have become lighter. That has not been the case. Unfortunately the prolonging of the conflict in Korea, the build-up of our forces in Europe, and our relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as greatly increasing the responsibilities of administering the department, have also made it necessary for the minister to be absent from the country from time to time.

That is why the Minister of National Defence and I have, for some time, been considering the possibility of making some division of the work of the Minister of National Defence. In view of the developments I have mentioned, we came to the conclusion that it is desirable here, for the time being at least, to have an associate minister as a full member of the cabinet who would participate, with ministerial authority and responsibility, in the supervision of the more immediate matters of administration which would leave the Minister of National Defence with more time for matters of general policy consideration of defence planning and relation with the defence forces of other countries.

No attempt has been made in the order in council I have read to delimit precisely the functions of the two ministers, and it is probable that no attempt will be made to do so in the legislation to be submitted later in