

Interim Supply

So when we ask, Mr. Chairman, to follow the normal procedure of second reading on the bill we are not precluding discussion in committee and we are not precluding discussion on third reading when the bill comes back from committee.

It has been suggested, and I think it was mentioned earlier this evening, that there are precedents for submitting the substance of a bill to committee before second reading. There is at least one precedent I know, and it has been referred to on several occasions—the railway bill of February, 1965.

An hon. Member: 1964.

Mr. Pearson: I think it was 1965 but maybe it was 1964. I agree that the bill which was on the order paper was withdrawn from the order paper and the substance of the bill was sent to a committee. At that stage the government was prepared to state, and it did so state, that it did not have proposals on that matter on which it was so firmly convinced that it was prepared to proceed to the debate on second reading, and therefore it was moved, "that the said bill be not now read a second time but that the subject matter thereof be referred to the standing committee on railways, canals and telegraph lines." That motion carried and the bill disappeared from the order paper and was never returned to the order paper in that form.

Mr. Churchill: No, a better bill.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, the difference between that situation and this is that we are convinced that the policy of this bill—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson:—we are very sincerely convinced that the policy of this bill is the right policy for Canada in connection with defence matters in the future. We are staking our existence as a government on this policy. That policy will be debated on second reading, I hope, and if the majority of the house do not agree with that policy they will have defeated the government with regard to this bill.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: If the bill carries on second reading it will go to the defence committee where this matter, as I have already stated, has already been discussed, and if it carries through committee the changes that are made there will be reported back, and then on third reading the house will have a chance to decide

[Mr. Pearson.]

whether the defence bill, as and if it is amended in committee, shall become the law of the land. What can be more democratic than that, Mr. Chairman?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: That is what we have been discussing in the interim supply debate.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): You are concealing the facts.

Mr. Pearson: I am quite aware, Mr. Chairman, that there are very strong and sincere feelings held on the other side of the house about the inadvisability of this policy. There is no doubt about that and I respect those feelings. There will be an opportunity to declare those feelings on second reading.

We are a minority in the house on this side, and if the majority decide this is not the proper policy on second reading they can defeat the bill. But if it passes second reading it can then go to committee where the committee will hear witnesses, some of whom have already appeared there and who can reappear, and there will be an opportunity for everyone to discuss this matter.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): Will the Prime Minister permit a question?

Some hon. Members: Shut up.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): I was interrupted quite often during my speech and I do this in all fairness to those on that side of the house. If the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence and all his supporters are so convinced they are right, why do they conceal the facts and hide the facts? Let us take it out in the open and look at it.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, a committee of this house, the defence committee, that for the first time in our parliamentary history has been given the authority to discuss defence policy discussed the white paper for many months, and I have just stated that is where all these points of view could be expressed.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): With tampered evidence, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Pearson: If my hon. friend wants to take that position he can, but it does not affect my argument.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: Now, Mr. Chairman, that is what we have been, not exclusively but