

**Mr. Churchill:** —but I am being compelled to adopt an inquisitive attitude with regard to things that are happening in parliament, and with some justification. Surely we are entitled to have the government act within the law; or is this an unusual request? We will let the pundits work out that one. But other people have to act within the law, and my opinion is that the government should also.

● (2:50 p.m.)

Although the government has been anticipating an alteration in the National Defence Act, that change has not yet become operative. The unification bill was passed over, our opposition last fall and now is being studied by the committee. It has to come back to the house and be dealt with here in committee of the whole and on third reading. In the interval it may be substantially altered; who knows? Perhaps the Acting Prime Minister, if left in charge for a month rather than a week, would have this bill withdrawn and use his sound common sense with regard to the operation of parliament. This is the uncertain situation with which we are faced; the unification bill has not yet been passed, yet the estimates have been prepared as if this bill had been passed.

From my experience on the government side these estimates are started in the late summer; they go through a tortuous process; they are subjected to examination by the Treasury Board, finally are approved by the cabinet, and the blue book is printed and presented to the house. It is a long process, presented to the house. It is a long process, diligence was shown on the other side of the house these estimates were prepared in the normal manner and therefore this new terminology must have been used last summer or in the early fall, even before the unification bill appeared on the order paper.

In this situation we in the House of Commons are unable to determine whether the amount of money required is adequate for the purposes intended, as we have no means of making a comparison with other years. We do not know whether the Canadian navy is going to be supported as it was in other years, or whether its funds will be depleted and it will be virtually wiped out of existence, which we suspect may happen. We do not know whether the air force is going to be sustained as it was in the past. Here in the estimates everything is lumped together. How can the house make a sensible decision with regard to the amount of money requested unless the estimates are divided, as they have been in the past, in accordance with the law of the land?

*Alleged Irregularity in Defence Estimates*

This is what makes this a really serious matter of privilege.

The minister, in his speech on December 7, informed us that some sections of the act might not be proclaimed immediately after the bill is passed. We have been told by the chief of the defence staff that the proclamation of the bill will wait until he has authorized the minister to have it proclaimed. So there is great uncertainty as to whether the bill will be proclaimed this year even if it is passed by the house in its present form.

I submit that these estimates are based on supposition. If you follow the argument a little further, sir, you may be inclined to think other departments intending to bring in some change in their organization might do what the Department of National Defence has done, that is introduce changes in their estimates for the next year based on the expectation that some alteration in the act pertaining to their department may take place. This opens the way to substantial alterations in the financial control of this country as normally exercised by the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, I would not object if Your Honour took a little time to think this over because it is a matter of major importance to the house, and it is possible that in the course of your contemplation the Acting Prime Minister will see that something should be done and will effect the necessary changes. Perhaps Your Honour will not have to make a decision on this matter, because with such an experienced person heading the government at the present time I am sure this question can be settled without a major debate in the House of Commons.

**Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, in reply to this alleged breach of privilege I would like to say first of all that the form used in the blue book this year is not contrary to the National Defence Act in its present form. I should like to say it has nothing to do with unification of the armed forces or the bill now being considered by the committee on defence. I should like to state also that the wording of the vote this year is exactly the same as it was last year.

In support of that statement I should like to read the two votes. I am reading from last year's book, 1967, page 265, the vote for defence services, vote 15:

Operation and maintenance and construction or acquisition of buildings, works, land and major equipment and development for the Canadian forces and \$1,750,000 for grants to the town of Oromocto.