

Committee on Defence Expenditure

I come now to more important people and I want to say a word or two about the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent). I speak more in sadness than in anger in regard to the Prime Minister. I do not care to what party he may belong, the prime minister of this country is my prime minister. I expect the prime minister to have dignity, honesty and integrity; I expect a degree of culture and a degree of dignity. I thought that he fulfilled those conditions and I have been trying to think it today. I have often so maintained, even among those who are his political enemies and upon the public platforms of this country. I had placed him upon a pedestal. I think those who have heard me speak in public will endorse that statement. I am most reluctant to knock him off that pedestal. I have not knocked him off that pedestal; he has of his own volition stepped down to a lower level than that on which I had placed him.

When he stepped down into the mud he entangled his feet in the mire that has entangled the feet of lesser men. When he stooped to pick up a handful of mud to cast at the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr (Mr. Coldwell) the only result was, not that the mud remained upon the recipient but that some of it stuck to the hands of the thrower.

Mr. Studer: Better get washed up.

Mr. Knight: Except for the notable speech which he made last night, the hon. member has made a name for himself in this house chiefly through the medium of vulgar interjection. No man in this country can throw mud and make it stick on the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr. The hon. member has served his country in this house for many years. He is known to all of us as a man of unquestioned integrity and honesty.

I am reminded of an attempt of this sort which was made once before when my Liberal friends across there cast their eyes at the floor in shame at a speech which was made in this house by the hon. member for Yorkton (Mr. Stewart). Even though that matter had been burning in his mind and heart for twenty years, even if it was the result of old feuds and old spite, it was no more true on that account.

Mr. Ferrie: Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege—

Mr. Knight: Is my hon. friend asking a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member is speaking on a question of privilege.

Mr. Ferrie:—I think it is most unfair to speak of a member who is so sick that he cannot come here today to defend himself.

Mr. Knowles: What was the Prime Minister doing yesterday?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member for Mackenzie has not been long enough in the house or sufficiently observant to know that in these cases we do not speak personally. I am speaking now of a member of the Liberal party who undertook at one time to let loose a diatribe against the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr of which Liberal members in the house were particularly ashamed. As far as I am concerned, if the hon. member for Yorkton is sick, I am sorry to hear it. I wish him good health and every other good thing and I trust he will be quickly restored to this house. But that does not alter the fact that, while we do not engage in personalities, we are concerned at the moment with the breakdown of the government of this country.

If I can bring that to the attention of the people of this country so that they will change the government, then I am justified in doing what I am doing. There is a lot of talk in this country to the effect that we of the opposition groups are glad to take advantage of any point in order to make political capital at the expense of the government. What would you expect us to do? I say to the right hon. Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner), a gentleman whom I respect: If you were sitting in opposition on this side, what would you and your cohorts be doing? Is it not the proper function—

Mr. Gardiner: May I ask a question in view of the fact that I have been referred to?

Mr. Knight: Wait until I have finished my sentence.

Mr. Gardiner: In view of the fact that I have been referred to—

Mr. Knight: May I finish my sentence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would appear that the hon. member who is now speaking is not giving his consent.

Mr. Knight: If in the course of showing the failures and inconsistencies of this government, if in the course of propounding constructive and alternative policies to the government of the day, we of the opposition parties can win the good will of the people of this country and gain for ourselves a few votes and ultimately replace the government which we are now criticizing, is there any blame to be attached to us? Is not that one of the immemorial functions of an efficient and vigilant opposition?

Mr. Gardiner: May I ask a question?

Mr. Knight: I should like to deal with one other thing and perhaps when I am finished the right hon. minister will not want