

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Batten in the chair.

At six o'clock the committee took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The committee resumed at 7 p.m.

The Chairman: Order. House again in committee of supply, on the estimates of the Department of Justice, vote No. 1.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

1. Departmental administration including grants and contributions as detailed in the estimates, \$1,378,100.

The Chairman: Shall this vote carry?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, I know it is unusual for the head of the government to speak on the introduction of the estimates, on item 1, which initiates a general discussion. I do so on this occasion because I want to take advantage of the opportunity to make a brief statement concerning some changes that have been introduced in policy and procedures relating to the security of the operations of government and of the defence services. The fact that I am doing it—and I will be followed by the Minister of Justice—is, I hope, an indication of the seriousness which the government attaches to this problem, the importance which we attach to it and my own interest, as the head of the government, in it.

Security is one of those things that is essential and, at the same time and in some respects, rather distasteful. I think we would all prefer if we could ignore the necessity of security and do away with the procedures and precautions it imposes upon us. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, we cannot; we have no immunity from this responsibility. While we in Canada have not had for some years a sharp and immediate shock in the exposure of espionage, that does not mean the threat has vanished or that the necessity to meet it has diminished. We have had ample evidence both here and in allied, friendly countries—recent evidence—that security is as important a matter today as it has ever been.

It is still the responsibility of government to ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect the security of the nation in all its aspects. The security which I am talking about tonight—and it is only one aspect of security—and which must be provided is of two kinds. First, the government must ensure the physical safety of the secret, classified information for which it is responsible by devising effective regulations for its

proper handling and proper storage. However, physical security is in itself of little use without the added assurance that the people handling the material in question are people in whom government can have full confidence. It is in this area of personnel security that most of our difficulties lie, in which government responsibility is, I think, heaviest and perhaps most difficult to discharge. An important phase of that responsibility is to ensure that the protection of our security does not by its nature or by its conduct undermine those human rights and freedoms to which our democratic institutions are dedicated.

If our security policies ignored, or did not take sufficiently into account, the basic rights of the individual, they could operate not to defend but to destroy the liberties which are our first concern. The reconciliation of these competing responsibilities and these competing obligations is not easy. Governments in this country, in the United Kingdom, the United States, France and in free countries everywhere have wrestled, and indeed are wrestling, with this problem. There is no perfect solution to it; there is no perfect answer to it. There is no solution that does not entail some risks, risks to security or risks to individual rights, or risks to both.

Mr. Chairman, there have been recent expressions of concern in this House of Commons and elsewhere, not so much about the adequacy or, if you like, effectiveness of our defence security measures as about the fairness and justice to the individual citizens concerned. I recognize, as I am sure all hon. members of the house recognize, that concern and find it reassuring and, indeed, gratifying.

Let me make it quite clear, Mr. Chairman, that the concern which has been expressed about this matter is fully shared by this government, as I believe it was fully shared by those responsible for government in the past. The security measures which have been developed here in Canada, through sometimes bitter experience, are intended to be preventive and not punitive. Their purpose is to protect the safety, interests and indeed the freedoms of all Canadians. They are under constant and continuous review, with the purpose of striking the balance I have referred to between the protection of the state and the protection of the individuals who, in a free society, alone give the state its direction, its purpose and indeed its meaning.

Since they were introduced in this country in 1947, the so-called security screening procedures adopted have, on the whole, worked well, though of course, Mr. Chairman, there have been mistakes. But I believe we have for the most part avoided excesses both of over-caution and over-confidence. There are nevertheless admittedly certain flaws in