

Committee on Defence Expenditure

Along with others who have made some study of this matter I believe that the Department of National Defence with its three branches of army, air force and navy, with the tremendous amounts of money it spends in procuring equipment and training men, is altogether too large for one minister. This has been pointed out to the government in the past year or two but no action has been taken with respect to that problem. I think that is most unfair to the overburdened taxpayers of Canada at a time such as this.

I doubt if there has ever been a time in the history of this country when greater inefficiency has been exemplified in any department of government than has been shown by this department, quite apart from the scandal brought to light by the report. I hope that the Prime Minister will still change his tactics and adopt a different attitude. The government owes a great deal more to the citizens of Canada than they have received since the tabling of this report or in the handling of this department which is responsible for the expenditure of so much money.

I repeat the words of the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker) that never have so many Canadians paid so much in taxes for so little defence. I shall continue to fight for a greater investigation into these gigantic expenditures and inefficiencies.

Mr. F. D. Shaw (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to speak until ten o'clock.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Shaw: To those hon. members who say "hear, hear" I suggest that they remain within earshot of the bell because as far as I am concerned there will still be an opportunity to vote before ten o'clock. I feel that on this occasion I must register a protest in order to give expression to the strong convictions I hold in connection with the course of procedure which the government has asked this House of Commons to adopt with respect to the defence expenditure committee.

When this session of parliament opened on November 20, 1952, there appeared upon the order paper a resolution calling for the establishment of a select committee of this house to continue the examination of all expenditures of public moneys for national defence and so on. I examined that resolution most carefully at the time and was wholly satisfied with it. It suggested that the committee might examine commitments for expenditure for national defence and indicated that the committee would be expected to report from

[Mr. Ross (Souris).]

time to time its observations and opinions thereon, and in particular what, if any, economies consistent with the execution of the policy decided by the government might be effected therein.

Those terms of reference are very broad. There is absolutely nothing in that resolution which would prevent the committee deciding to consider the Currie report. For many years I served on the defence expenditure committee, or the war expenditures committee or the defence expenditures and economies committee as it was called from time to time. I found that the committee always exercised pretty good judgment in ascertaining which field of investigation it should undertake. One of the first things done when the committee meets is to determine the matters into which it shall examine; it then proceeds to examine them, following which it makes its report or reports to the House of Commons.

To me the government action in moving an amendment expresses lack of confidence in the personnel of this committee. In my opinion it is almost an expression of condemnation of previous committees which have been set up to do the same type of work. I think I know why this amendment was moved. On December 15, before the house had had an opportunity of considering this motion to set up a defence expenditures committee, the Currie report was tabled.

If in referring to the Currie report I happen to call it the Murray report by mistake, I hope you will understand my reason for making that error. This afternoon I listened with a great deal of surprise to the speech delivered by the hon. member for Cariboo (Mr. Murray). As a matter of fact I was seated behind the curtains, and I could not believe my ears. I came into the chamber and I still could not believe I was hearing what was being said. Of course the hon. member for Cariboo did not tell us very much that we did not know already. But I am still confounded as to why he said what he did, except that conceivably he intended toward the end to pin responsibility for the whole thing upon one member of this House of Commons. When he was informed that any attempt to pin responsibility on an individual member of this house was literally impossible, the whole thing blew up squarely in his face.

I trust that the government will suitably reward the hon. member for Cariboo for his contribution. In fact if you are going to present him with a plaque you might come to me and I will suggest what should be put on it. I cannot tell you now because I doubt if the expression would be parliamentary.