

*National Defence Act Amendment*

had made in securing and providing for the maintenance of liberty and freedom so that they were able to bring up their families to enjoy the benefits of a democratic system of government. I am sure that every member of this house whether he has served in the armed forces or not, as well as every other Canadian, would agree that Canadian forces have made a tremendous and effective contribution to the defence of freedom and liberty in days gone by. Therefore it is logical that there are those who say that what has been good enough for Canada in the past is good enough today. They contend that what has served us so effectively in the past will continue to serve us effectively in the future and that our forces should remain as they are.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker—and this is the position that the Minister of National Defence and the associate minister are taking—there are those who contend there must be a radical change or reorganization of Canada's armed forces if they are to meet the demands and challenges of the future. As a result we now have before us the proposals which are incorporated in the particular bill now under discussion.

I should like to refer to the defence committee which was established some time ago. I suppose this present proposal was a new concept, and I remember in the 1950's, before my enforced holiday following the 1958 election campaign, making the suggestion that Canada should have a non-partisan defence policy just as it had been following, generally speaking, a non-partisan foreign policy. I suggested that a committee should be set up to study the whole matter and to give advice and counsel to the minister and the government in arriving at defence policy. That suggestion was not accepted. Later, Mr. Speaker, it was suggested that a committee ought to be set up and the government was urged to do so. We then found during an election campaign that the Liberal party picked up the proposal—I am not sure whether they took it solely from us or from us and somebody else as well—and established a defence committee.

It was my privilege to serve on that committee for a time and I appreciate the experience that was gained. However, I must say I was sadly disillusioned in a very short time over the role that the defence committee was to play in the formulation of policy or in a study of defence matters. The minister stated before the special committee on defence on June 27, 1963, that the committee would give

hon. members an excellent opportunity to inform themselves on defence matters and to contribute to the determination of defence policy for the years ahead.

Perhaps the first part of his statement has proved to be true. At least, it has as far as I am concerned because I must admit that my understanding of defence matters was very limited and in fact is still very limited even today. Therefore it did give us an opportunity to study defence matters and to inform ourselves. However, as far as contributing to the determination of a defence policy for the years ahead is concerned, I can see no such contribution anywhere.

I can remember the minister coming to the defence committee or into this house on occasion and making statements setting out policy even on matters under discussion at the time by the defence committee. Whether he was anticipating the views of the committee or not is open to question, but I think some members of the committee and some members of the house took it that the minister was just going ahead on his own without reference to the committee, laying down policy and then saying: "Well, you can inform yourselves on the policy and here it is but you are not going to have any part in the determination of the policy".

I suppose I was rather naïve in expecting such a thing would happen, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps other hon. members were naïve too. But I insist that as far as the committee's work is concerned I cannot see that it has had any effect whatever on the determination of a defence policy for Canada.

Having said that, as a general principle we support the course that is being followed in the reorganization of the defence forces of Canada. I would make the reservation that we do not necessarily agree with everything contained in the bill, but we have taken the position on other bills before the house that debate on second reading involves the policy or principle and is not a debate on all the details and provisions of the bill. In discussing this question with my colleagues we have agreed that this course if desirable and advisable.

Many distinguished officers have voiced opposition to the program. We have read constantly in the newspapers of this or that officer making such and such a statement in criticism of the unification program. We have had a mass of material sent to our desks outlining their objections in great detail and why they are objecting. This matter has been raised