

National Defence Act Amendment

I am disturbed, and I am sure many Canadians have been deeply disturbed, by the premature retirement of so many of Canada's ablest soldiers, sailors and airmen. I am disturbed by what is happening to our armed forces. I am disturbed by what is happening to the great traditions of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, and the Royal Canadian Air Force. I can see that some integration might be a good thing. Certainly, there is some integration in the forces now, and we accept it, and think it should be given a fair show. However, unification of all our forces is another matter.

In the past we have had in Canada, in peace and in war, some of the finest sailors, soldiers, and airmen in the world. I can see no value in putting our armed forces in uniforms of one single colour. There is no question of course that we want efficiency and economy in the administration of our armed forces. We realize only too well that defence costs a great deal.

I would urge the Minister of National Defence, with all the power at my command, to stop and take another look at what he is doing. Because, if this great experiment on which he is embarked should prove to be the wrong one, irreparable damage will be done to our armed forces and to our whole defence system, which could require decades to correct.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, when I took part in this debate at the resolution stage I appealed to the minister to refer this important matter of national defence to the standing committee. He did not pay heed to that appeal, and I thought that, having advanced to the second reading stage, the appeal had been lost. I had not intended to take part in this debate during second reading, but wish to do so now because of two things which occurred today. First, the minister in reply to a question posed by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) indicated that the present discussion was taking place on what he called a primitive level of knowledge.

● (9:00 p.m.)

He did not specify the names of those who were participating on that level of military intelligence, but I think it is a significant commentary on the lack of clearcut and specific information that has been forthcoming from the minister and his advisers during the course of the discussion which now has spread over more than a two-year period.

Debate is supposed to broaden knowledge; it is supposed to clarify issues and assist in

[Mr. MacRae.]

determining policy. If at this stage of the discussion, having advanced to the second reading of the bill now before us, which will be discussed in detail in due course, the minister still refers to the contributions of members of the opposition and others taking part in the debate as being on a primitive level, I am sure he is partly, if not entirely, responsible.

I have read very carefully the statement made on December 7 last with a view to broadening my knowledge of the fundamental purposes and policies of the minister. I wanted to avoid being classified among those hon. members who possess a primitive knowledge of these matters. But for the life of me I cannot discover in that speech a specific policy, particularly a policy which might lead to the conclusion that unification, as the minister keeps insisting over and over again, will establish greater economies in Canada's armed forces and produce an organizational set-up which might be described as more efficient than that which would exist under a program of integration. I say right at the outset that I am all for integration and have always been in favour of integration, as is everyone who has concerned himself with military matters, in the wake of the tremendous technological changes that have taken place in the past two decades. But it is this word unification that is confounding even the pundits.

Just to demonstrate that point, the minister's speech on December 7, listed under very nice headings, is a lovely essay in the organization of prose. It is full of words and phrases, a few of which I should like to quote as illustrations to indicate the dilemma that faces an ordinary member of parliament in trying to interpret the mysteries of this wonderful program of unification. Here is what Mr. George Bain said when commenting on the problem that he faced in interpreting the gobbledegook prose in which the speech was phrased:

Everybody who knows anything about defence knows that an ample supply of logistical hardware is one of the prime needs of the day. Obviously, if logistical hardware is to be of any use at all, it must be systematized.

So there you are: "It seems to me, if I may say so, that the defense department in its current posture is not giving enough attention to systematized logistical hardware." After that, you can say anything; you are a certified expert.

Functional management capability. Is anyone against functional management capability in our defence department—communists excepted, of course? Balanced digital options. It may not mean much, but, by George, it has a ring to it, hasn't it?