

*National Defence Act Amendment*

• (9:20 p.m.)

[Translation]

**Mr. Ricard:** Mr. Chairman, I did not intend to participate in this debate but, in so doing, I have no apologies to make since it is a privilege shared by everyone of us, members of this house.

I have no objection to anyone in this house expressing an opinion, but I would not take it kindly if someone were to try to prevent me from speaking out.

It is not on account of some military experience that I rise to speak in this debate tonight, for I have none at all. But I have followed attentively the various speeches and it seems to me that some important points need clarification.

Many questions have been put to the minister and all or most of them have remained unanswered. Another reason for taking part in this discussion is to protest on behalf of the voters of my constituency against the government, once again, trying to gag us. They may be using a method different from the one they previously resorted to, but with the support of our friends opposite, they would fain prevent us from expressing our views.

Every time a measure is introduced to prevent us from speaking, I shall make it my duty to rise and protest, on behalf of those I have the honour to represent in this house. All we want is a clear and definite explanation of what the hon. minister wants to have passed by this house, and nothing else.

Mr. Chairman, we are accused of filibustering. What else can we do? When we ask the minister to give the information we need, the information our electors request, he refuses to give it. I feel that we cannot honestly be blamed for renewing our request; on the contrary, the minister should be blamed for his uncompromising attitude, his arrogance, his stubbornness in failing to give us the information we are entitled to.

I would hope that if we repeat this often enough to him he will come to understand at last and will be willing to make half of the way and give us at least some, if not all, of the explanations we require, if we are to feel justified to exercise the rights which are ours in the house.

Mr. Chairman, if there is one important question for a country, it is the question of defence. The Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hellyer) will be the first to admit this and he will also agree with me that it is every

[Mr. Woolliams.]

member's business to know as much as possible about this country's defence.

Who, both in this house and outside, would want to depend upon a foreign country for the defence of our land? This country belongs to us; it is ours, and we must take all available means to provide for our own defence. We simply want the minister to tell us how he intends to discharge his responsibilities as Minister of National Defence.

When he introduced this bill, the Minister of National Defence led us to believe that unification would save the taxpayers a lot of money. If one looks at the figures, one cannot but notice that over the last few years defence expenditures have gone up steadily. In fact, they climbed to \$1,658 million and, this year, they increased by \$115 million.

How can the minister blame us for taking a little time on such an important matter, on such heavy expenditures and for asking him to account for them? In my opinion, Mr. Chairman, we are only doing our duty as members of parliament and the remarks made by an hon. member opposite prove what I am saying. I refer to the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Langlois) who stated the following, as shown on page 14676 of *Hansard*:

As members of parliament we have a direct responsibility to ensure that public funds are spent in the most effective way.

I suggest that to ignore the advice of experts as to ways to save money and make this country's armed forces more effective is a very serious dereliction of duty.

Well, Mr. Chairman, the present minister has completely disregarded the views of the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Langlois). He does not seem to pay any attention to the amount of the expenditures. He seems also to reject or ignore the advice of at least a dozen experts, who do not approve of his proposal. And they are career men, who have devoted the greater part of their lives to the armed forces. They have told the minister that his unification proposal was not appropriate for the country.

But the minister, in his obstinacy, remains set on imposing a plan which he conceived himself and, in spite of the wish of experts in this field, he still wants to implement a plan which, according to these experts, would not answer the needs of our armed forces.

It seems to me the minister should not be surprised that we ask him questions. It is his duty to give us information. There are also other reasons why our attitude should not come as a surprise to the minister.