

Committee on Defence Expenditures

any spirit of hostility, and that sheer fault-finding should not be characteristic of that committee.

While certain rather unpleasant experiences were encountered by those of us who served upon those committees, I am quite convinced that their members did not undertake their deliberations in any spirit of hostility or in any attitude of fault-finding and so on. I feel that the same attitude should be taken by the committee at this time. I feel that the members of the committee, whether they be opposition members—and after all, I assume that probably it would be the opposition members who would do it—or others, should not go into their deliberations with the idea merely of seeking out grounds to criticize, to attack or to make it more difficult for the Department of National Defence to carry on its work.

But having said that, I would suggest that it is also the duty of the majority of the committee, who are government members, not to commission themselves as counsel to go in and block the freest and most open type of investigation or to cover up and defend where it is obvious to committee members that there is room for improvement and where it might be possible to save money for the taxpayers of this country. Let me emphasize the fact that if there is a duty resting upon opposition members, there is also an important duty resting upon the shoulders of government members of that committee.

I feel that a committee of this kind should give careful consideration to an examination of the methods of expenditure. I also feel that the committee should undertake to determine whether there can be additional controls over expenditures. After all, we must not forget that we, as a parliament, have already come to the conclusion that over a period of three years we shall spend approximately \$5 billion for defence, and that during the current year we shall spend \$1,800,000,000 on defence, or practically 50 per cent of our budget. All of us are certainly mindful of the fact that that is a terribly heavy burden to be borne by the Canadian taxpayers, but the Canadian taxpayers have approved. They realize the dangers which confront us. They appreciate the urgent necessity for taking every possible action to defend our country against aggression. At the same time they expect that the Canadian government shall exercise every precaution in order to be certain that we are getting full value for the money that is being spent.

We realize fully that government officials are not infallible. They are bound to err. Hence I do not believe it should be the duty

[Mr. Shaw.]

of that committee merely to seek out mistakes for the purpose of criticism. By all means, let the committee seek out mistakes, and evaluate them in the light of the effect that they may have on the future. In my estimation it is exceedingly important that that be the attitude of the members of this committee.

I am going to emphasize again what I consider to be the position of a member of that committee in relation to the taxpayers of the country. This committee should enable those who represent the taxpayers of the country to procure all possible information. It should enable them to procure information which many of us cannot possibly procure as ordinary members of this house and which the taxpayer cannot have unless it is procured through such a committee as this. The government must be fully prepared to provide every opportunity to enable those members to procure all of the information required. After all, the taxpayers will believe that the members of the committee are actually their watch dogs, as it were; and it will certainly make the taxpayers of this country feel much better about everything if they know that the members of that committee are right there, can get information and know what their money is being spent for.

The committee must have ample power to examine all defence expenditures; I would even go a bit further and say defence expenditures for those services directly connected with national defence; and they may have to go beyond the actual activities of the Department of National Defence in order to procure that information.

I have already indicated, Mr. Speaker—and even though it may be repetition I am going to re-emphasize it—that the majority of the committee will be government members. I assume that there will probably be an 18-5-2-1 break-down, giving the government eighteen members out of twenty-six. Such a great responsibility rests upon those eighteen that I declare that the success or failure of that committee is going to depend on those eighteen.

I am going to give you, Mr. Speaker, an indication of what I have in mind when I emphasize this matter. I well recall that, immediately after the cessation of hostilities, I had occasion to complain that, in the disposal of crown assets within this country, there was terrific waste and destruction. I also recall that it took days and days to get the matter dealt with, and I must say that there was a good deal of blocking. There were denials and, upon one occasion, a certain member of that committee—he was a government member—came to me on the side