

Company of Young Canadians

in the government's attitude as expressed by the minister this afternoon.

Serious charges have been made. The original attitude of the minister seemed to be that a police inquiry and a government inquiry would be adequate. This seemed to me to be a most inadequate and unfortunate response to the serious charges made by persons in very responsible positions at the federal and other levels of government.

I want to make it clear that I certainly support the original aims and purposes of the Company of Young Canadians. It is important that parliament and the public receive answers in respect of some of the charges, and the only satisfactory method under the circumstances appears to be a public inquiry. I trust that the terms of reference of the committee will be broad enough to permit a full review of the Company's activities, thus ensuring that the house will be fully informed as to whether or not the Company and its members are conforming to the purpose for which it was established or whether, on the other hand, they are departing from these purposes.

It is natural, and I understand this, that a company established for the purpose of assisting the underprivileged is bound to create a certain amount of controversy. However if members of the Company have gone so far as to engage in activities designed to undermine municipal governments, as has been alleged, then of course that is a very different story.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I do welcome the change in the minister's attitude and I support the establishment of this committee.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, the minister has intimated to the House that it is the government's intention to ask that a committee of this House investigate the Company of Young Canadians. If the purpose of appointing such a committee is to examine and evaluate the program which the Company of Young Canadians is endeavouring to implement then, of course, we would welcome this statement.

However, if one reads the minister's statement carefully, one cannot but gather the impression that the purpose of appointing the committee is to look into the fact that, and I quote the minister's own statement:

—usually responsible sources without producing evidence, have alleged the utilization of the Company of Young Canadians to cover the furtherance of subversive activities.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

I suggest that if that is the purpose of appointing a committee, then we are setting a very dangerous precedent and embarking upon a path that could do irreparable damage. This parliament is not a court of law. This parliament ought not to be used for witch hunting. If there are individuals who have conducted themselves in a manner that is unbecoming to the role of the Company of Young Canadians, then they should be dealt with by turning over specific complaints about the individuals concerned to the executive director. If the executive director does not take disciplinary action then the director, who is appointed by order in council, can be dismissed by the government.

If there are members of the Company of Young Canadians who have been guilty of illegal acts, then of course it is in the courts of the country that they should be tried. But if a committee of this House is to be asked to investigate alleged utilization of the Company of Young Canadians in the furtherance of subversive activities, which the minister himself says have not been corroborated by any evidence, then I submit it is only a matter of time until other public agencies will be subjected to this kind of sweeping indictment. I submit that to indict an agency is a dangerous procedure. If there are specific complaints, the persons responsible should be named and disciplinary action should be taken. I hope this House is surely not prepared to emulate the sinister witch hunts which were set in motion in the United States by the late and unlamented Senator McCarthy.

All of us have had some concern about the effectiveness of the program of the Company of Young Canadians. Some of the projects that have been undertaken have been excellent; some have not been successful. Part of the responsibility for this lies with the government. This organization was set up as part of the window dressing for the war against poverty. The role of the Company of Young Canadians has never been clearly defined. It has never had either the personnel or adequate resources to do the job allocated to it. The permanent council was set up only at the beginning of this month. All this time the Company has been operating with a provisional council.

Certainly, an examination of whether or not this organization is fulfilling any useful function is important. I submit that if we are going to investigate unsubstantiated charges that the organization is a front for subversive activities, there is a proper place for that to be done and it is not in parliament.