

Some things ought to be said. Some questions ought to be asked. I hesitate to say those things or to ask those questions in open session. I know everything I say may go across the country, and perhaps into the outside world. In Great Britain secret sessions are held frequently. In November while some of us were in the gallery of the British House of Commons, we heard the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, state that later that day the house would go into secret session to discuss the war effort. Many hon. members in this house hesitate at times to ask questions which come to their minds, but which may be based on improper information. But we would like to have the opportunity of discussing these matters thoroughly. There are matters which have been causing some concern to the people of Canada. There was the question respecting the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. There is the question of Vichy representation, and the further question of our relationship with Russia. All these matters have been discussed across Canada, and each offers aspects which do not lend themselves to public discussion. They involve other governments and peoples.

I am asking the Prime Minister, as I had intended to do privately before the house opened, had I had the opportunity, to make it possible at an early day for hon. members to ask questions about such matters and get proper information in a closed session.

Mr. J. H. BLACKMORE (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, I was unable to hear just what the minister (Mr. Ralston) said when he was speaking about the number of troops for which the British had asked. Did they ask for only two battalions?

Mr. RALSTON: One or two battalions, and then later they asked for a modified brigade headquarters.

Mr. BLACKMORE: It seems to me, on the face of it, that that is a very small number of men to send into such a precarious position. I really find it difficult to make that out. However, there is no use crying over spilt milk, as we say. But surely in times like these it would seem to be a serious matter to send so few men.

I could not quite get the combination of circumstances which delayed the vessel carrying the equipment for these men. I did get the statement about the supply ship getting to Manila and all the rest of it, but I did not get the reason why the ship was unable to leave until so late. I am wondering why the men were not held back until the equipment was ready to go forward. If there is one thing

which has been apparent since the beginning of this war, it is that men simply cannot fight without machines. To send men forward without adequate equipment of all kinds is virtually to offer them for sacrifice. That seems to have been done in this case; at least their lives were needlessly risked.

I believe in the last analysis everyone in the house and in the country will agree that the lives of these men were far more important than the amount of good they were able to do by resisting the enemy for that length of time. It seems to me that if serious criticism is to be offered, it must be offered on this point: these men should never have been sent forward until the equipment was ready to go with them, or until there was reasonable assurance that the equipment would get there in time to protect their lives.

Having heard the story to-day for the first time, it seems strange to me that the ship with those men on board should have left port before the train arrived with the fourteen machines or the fourteen pieces of equipment. Surely the Canadian government or some other government had sufficient power over such ships to delay a sailing long enough for machines to join a ship. If not, I think it is time this house knew about it.

Mr. J. A. ROSS (Souris): Mr. Speaker, I should like to add a word by way of compliment to the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Ralston) upon the explicit statement he has made.

Mr. SPEAKER: There is nothing before the house, only a statement by the minister.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): With unanimous consent.

Mr. ROSS (Souris): A lot has been said about the eastern regiment, but I come from Manitoba and I know many of the personnel of the Winnipeg Grenadiers. I have asked many questions in the past of the Minister of National Defence concerning our reserves in case we had difficulty, and from the figures he has given to-day I take it that we were short of trained men to complete these two regiments. I do not know whether that is really so, but I do know that a young friend of mine enlisted from my own community and within three months of being attested he was on his way to Hong Kong. I think that is wrong. Probably we were short of properly trained men. I understood the minister to say that when this investigation is completed the members of the house will be given an explanation as to why these regiments were reinforced in that manner.