

National Defence Act Amendment

Neither do I think that this is what the members of this house would wish to hand out to them. We of the official opposition certainly have made it abundantly clear that we do not wish to be so tainted. Mr. Chairman, what the Canadian people want and deserve is \$1,700 million worth of defence and not \$1,700 million worth of Hungarian goulash.

In trying to reduce this complex debate to graspable size, I might say I get the feeling of being at a town meeting where the mayor proposes doing something which is generally agreed to be logical and desirable, but then extends the proposal to a point where it becomes something he does not define, to take care of doing something he does not specify, with the evolving proposal in its entirety running through 20 per cent of the town's budget.

• (8:20 p.m.)

I submit there is not one ratepayer group in this country of ours which, if they saw it in this light, would swallow the proposition of unification. Since the bill was first introduced in the house it has become abundantly clear that to put it mildly, the minister does not have the enthusiastic support of his colleagues in the cabinet. Obviously they feel he has painted himself into a corner, and for some reason, perhaps self-preservation, they are letting him fight his own way out of this self-created situation. The minister in the last few days has been accused of being dictatorial and like Napoleon. Perhaps he is more like a Napoleon standing on the burning deck.

If one looks behind the sort of avuncular facade as reflected in the speech of the minister of external affairs, it appears that he did suggest some diversionary feints on peace keeping and peace restoring. He did make a very good case for the preservation and differentiation of the functional activities of the armed forces. This is precisely the point I am making, and it is the antithesis of unification.

The Minister of Transport appealed to the members as civilians to judge this bill on its merits and soundness of objective. The objective of the bill—and I presume the minister would agree with me—is to achieve maximum effectiveness of defence for a minimum of outlay. However, if the bill involves procedures which violate the practices followed by the management of large and complex organizations, then I submit that, as it has been concocted, it fails on its merits.

The idea of unification has been kicking around the defence departments of the world

[Mr. Bower.]

for many years, so it is not a new idea. That fact pulls the rug from under the main support which the government benches have relied upon in pressing this legislation. Let the government withdraw the bill, go back and do its homework and then come forward with a new bill during the next session which will not strain the credulity of a practical minded public. I for one cannot support Bill C-243 which embodies a basically wrong approach to obtaining a universally desired end.

Mr. Byrne: Mr. Chairman, this debate seems to have become nothing more than an attack on personality. Much of what has been said in the past two weeks has been about individuals rather than about the subject matter of the bill. Even during the defence committee hearings some of us were charged with the fact that we did not have military experience and for that reason should not be heard. Some doubt was cast as to whether or not we were eligible for committee membership itself.

In defence of my position I said at that time that I had offered my services, and was turned down. I remained active in an industry which concerned itself almost exclusively with the production of war materiel. As a result, I believe my health suffered even more than the health of most of the members of that committee. I certainly do not apologize for taking part in this debate. I am sure that the day will come when all the members of this house can say with pride they have no military wartime service. We hope war is a thing of the past and that wartime service will not be used in this chamber as a red herring.

Let me refer momentarily to a speech made by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona, which was unworthy of him and certainly unworthy of his constituents. I am sure they must have cringed with embarrassment, if they were unfortunate enough to have watched that television report which originated in Winnipeg. It was of very low quality and I am sure the hon. member's constituents will deal with him in an appropriate manner at the next general election.

Mr. Churchill: When are you going to get away from personalities?

Mr. Byrne: The hon. member for Bow River blew in yesterday for one of his one day stands. During the committee hearings that hon. member sought to discredit my capability. Certainly that would not be difficult. I am not an eminent lawyer like the hon.