

National Defence Act Amendment

● (2:50 p.m.)

In spite of the judge advocate general's explanation in the committee and the minister's explanation, the meaning of those words is not clear. These should be a clear explanation of the meaning of the phrase, "ranks would be prescribed for the purposes of the Act only" and a clear explanation of its implications. The note continues:

(b) the other designations of rank that might be used would be limited to the ranks now held in the three services; and

(c) the governor in council, rather than the minister, would have the power to make regulations respecting other designations of rank.

Some contradictions seem to be inherent in the words of the last subparagraph. The governor in council so far as I am aware has always had power to make designations of rank, or to make other designations where that seems desirable for any purpose at any time. The committee ought to have an explanation of the legal effect of subparagraphs (b) and (c). Do they contradict one another? In view of the evidence before the committee and all the complaints, editorials, letters and so on about instituting a single rank system; and considering that the minister has seen the folly of his original idea to the extent that he has introduced the amendment now before us allowing in the naval environment naval ranks, in the land environment army ranks and in the air environment R.C.A.F. ranks, would he not be prepared to drop this whole clause? There is no demonstrable advantage in keeping it. As I understand it, the ranks will continue as they are at present. I hope that is so.

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Chairman, I join with the hon. member for Calgary North in asking the minister to make clear the meaning of the phrase "purposes of the act". In addition, before the house confers on the governor in council the power contained in this clause, the minister ought to explain the circumstances under which it will be necessary for the governor in council to exercise its power. I understood, as I believe the hon. member for Calgary North also did, from the minister's explanation in the committee that the common rank structure in the three service environment has been introduced chiefly for accounting purposes and that the bill does not contemplate, for example, that persons in the navy will be required to adopt an army rank. It would help the committee if the minister could explain the meaning of the phrase, "for the purposes of the Act only," and indicate what is contemplated in regard to what the

governor in council may prescribe by regulation.

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Chairman, where the bill says that the ranks shall be ranks for purposes of the act it means that they shall be ranks for legal purposes. Authority is given to the governor in council to permit different rank designations for other purposes.

The point I made clear in the committee is that it is not intended to introduce changes in rank designations at present beyond those that would be reasonably acceptable to the men and women of the armed forces. The great majority of the air force, I think, prefer the new rank designations, though the navy prefers not to use them. I understood that we would proceed with great caution in this area which is not important enough to exacerbate feelings. Over a period of time we think there will be an evolution toward single rank designations for some ranks. That may never happen in the senior seagoing ranks but much will depend, as I said before, on what other countries in the world do and how they change their rank designations. We do not in the future intend to rush the implementing of this proposal. We shall only do it in a way that is acceptable to the majority of men and women in the armed forces.

Mr. Herridge: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister a question. Clause 4 reads in part:

Section 22 of the said Act is repealed and the following substituted therefor:

"22. (1) For the purposes of this Act, the ranks of the officers and men of the Canadian Forces shall be as set out in Column I of the Schedule.

I rise to ask the minister about the honorary colonels in the military establishment of Canada, some of whom are concerned about the effect of this bill on their future rank and dress. They wonder what their authorized dress will be once this bill is adopted. Will the minister inform the committee how this bill will affect honorary colonels with respect to the rank they will hold and what form of dress will be required when this bill becomes law? I might say in raising this point that I could not help thinking of that honorary colonel, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who I am sure wonders what his rank and dress will be once the bill is adopted.

Mr. Hellyer: No change is anticipated in the positions of honorary colonels and no change is provided for in the bill. There will be no requirement for them to change their regimental dress uniforms and they will be