

Speech by President of the Privy Council

Mr. Speaker: Will the right hon. Leader of the Opposition address the Chair and the house on the question of urgency of debate? I have at this point to remind hon. members again, as I do from time to time when such motions are made, that what has to be debated before the motion is accepted by the Chair is whether there is urgency of debate in the sense that it is proper for the Chair to grant the adjournment of other business of the house for the purpose of debating a specific question.

This is the only matter which concerns us at the moment, that is the urgency of debate on this particular matter and the advisability of adjourning the ordinary business of the house for the purpose of permitting such a debate.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, this motion is made in order to give the house the opportunity to discuss a matter which is of transcendent importance nationally and internationally, and to secure the views of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, whichever one is directing the foreign affairs of our country.

It might be said immediately that this matter can be discussed in the debate that is now before the house. This is true enough; it can be discussed, but this house has the right to know from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs what is the government's policy on this question, not the expurgated brush-offs that we have been receiving lately.

Now that the matter has been brought firmly to parliament in the address delivered by the President of the Privy Council I take it that what he enunciated was government policy. To accept any other conclusion in that regard would be to disregard the fixed constitutional principle that cabinet solidarity denies individual ministers the right to enunciate policies. If Your Honour were to say this matter could be dealt with in the debate now before the house, that would in no way clarify the situation. Parliament and the country have the right to know whether the minister was putting forth government policies. The wording of his speech indicates that it was written elsewhere or by those close to the Department of External Affairs. It has all the appearances of having been inspired by the government in order to create a smokescreen in respect of policies of this government. It has all the outward indicia of being a reflection of government policy which this house has not been able to secure.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

We have the right to know whether this was a declaration of policy, because no minister can sit in the cabinet and make ad hoc statements on policy contrary to the views of the cabinet, and I must refer to one or two of the statements made in order to found my argument. I wish to read two quotations from that speech, which was delivered to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs. At page 2 it reads:

I suppose the answer to these queries—

That is about the world situation in so far as Viet Nam is concerned.

—depends upon our individual consciences—

That statement, sir, is a denial of parliament. Then there is the policy enunciated on page 3:

• (11:20 a.m.)

To me it seems that U.S. policy in the Far East has been a succession of unhappy errors beginning with a gross misconception of the weakness and corruption of the Chiang Kai-shek régime in China and then failure to appreciate the relative strength of Mao Tse-tung's communist government which took power in 1949.

That statement is a slap in the face to one of our allies as well as to a member of the security council of the United Nations. Then there is this statement, which is contrary to the enunciation of government policy by the Secretary of State for External Affairs last June:

The U.S., for its part, has become enmeshed in a bloody civil war in Viet Nam which cannot be justified on either moral or strategic grounds.

Sir, if ever there was a circumvention of constitutional policy that is it, because it is the antithesis of what the Secretary of State for External Affairs said on June 10, 1965. I refer merely to the date; those who wish to look it up will find that the minister took the stand that this was not a civil war. Now we have a minister occupying the No. 1 position in the cabinet, the President of the Privy Council, saying this is a bloody civil war.

Then he went on to give his views with regard to bombing, burning and extermination by a foreign power which is taking place in Viet Nam. He said:

In this war, the strongest nation in the world has taken sides in a savage civil struggle and is using its tremendous power to force the other side to quit.

Such statements bring hope to communists in every part of the world, and this is an enunciation of policy by a man occupying a high and honoured position. Then he refers to