

prevail in the war expenditures committee, where many matters were brought up, such as war-time housing, elementary flying training schools, air observer schools, information which would not have been of assistance to the enemy, has aroused the suspicion—

Mr. CLEAVER: I rise to a point of order. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. gentleman is entirely out of order in discussing the war expenditures committee, and in dealing with war-time housing or any of these other matters on the motion now before the Chair.

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not agree that the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker) is out of order. He is speaking with regard to public accounts, and in illustration he mentioned these other points. He is in order.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I wish to add this, that the very fact that the subcommittees of the war expenditures committees have met in secret has aroused a feeling that we in this parliament are not discharging our responsibilities, and that we are not properly scrutinizing public expenditures. And when an allegation of improvident expenditures is made in the press, by a man holding one of the most responsible positions in the service of his country—

An hon. MEMBER: He did not.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: Well, he is alleged to have made certain statements—

An hon. MEMBER: That is different.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: —and now the opportunity comes to have him brought before a committee, he should be given the opportunity to give his evidence. I ask the Prime Minister if he will give parliament and the country the assurance that if any hon. member on the public accounts committee will call Colonel Thompson, his evidence will be accepted in the committee.

Mr. HUGHES CLEAVER (Halton): Speaking, sir, to the present motion, and following Your Honour's recent ruling in regard to the remarks of the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker), and answering the suggestion he has been good enough to make, that government supporters on the public accounts committee will gang up on him and prevent evidence from coming out, I should like to make one or two remarks. The hon. member for Lake Centre made the statement, in regard to the work of the war expenditures committee, that all the sittings of the committee had been in camera, although the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie

King) had declared to the house these would be open, except where for military reasons or otherwise they should not be open. I should like to make a few comments in regard to the hon. member's statement, just to keep the record clear.

The committee was given the fullest possible powers by the house with regard to its sittings. It had the power to hold sittings in open or in camera. The main committee, in turn, passed on that same power to the subcommittee, and it was left to the discretion of each individual subcommittee as to what, if any, of their meetings should be held in camera, and as to what, if any, should be held in public.

The hon. member for Lake Centre was a member of subcommittee No. 1, for one session of the house. I was chairman of that subcommittee, and I say as chairman that the hon. member did not at any time move that a sitting of that committee should be in public, nor was any such motion ever voted on, or voted down, as he inferentially suggested a moment ago.

Mr. J. H. HARRIS (Danforth): Mr. Speaker, I should not like to allow that last statement to be accepted as covering the activities of all the committees. I would correct it to this extent, that when we met in general committee, comprising all those making up subcommittees 1, 2 and 3, I had the honour on each occasion to move that all meetings be held in open session. On every occasion we were voted down by those who support the present administration. Then, in turn, as subcommittees convened, the same question arose and in the case of subcommittee No. 2, on which it was my privilege to serve, they did open up the session and we had open discussions. This arose from a little generosity on the part of some of the members supporting the government, and from the fortunate absence of another. The vote carried by a majority of one, which kept the sessions open. On a later occasion, to the embarrassment of the chairman, the sessions were again opened, and the chairman immediately adjourned subcommittee No. 2 on that particular day to consider the position. His ideas were voted down. But he was kind enough to reconvene the committee in open session afterwards. It is patent therefore on the very surface of it that government majorities on committees almost always—at least as far back as I can remember—vote the way the treasury benches want them to vote in handling any matter which is the subject of inquiry before any committee. That condition obtains in the work of the war expenditures committee.