

Committee on Defence Expenditures

at this hour to take their part in building the defence of the western world, in order that we may prevent the onset of another world war. It is regrettable, but I think it is true, that we have had to build up this strength.

I am not going to go outside of this resolution, as I said at the outset of my remarks.

Mr. Fulton: You have been fairly far afield already.

Mr. Coldwell: The hon. gentleman says I have been far afield already. I am not aware of it.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): The leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) was only an also ran compared to you.

Mr. Coldwell: As a matter of fact, I believe that if any intelligent person reads the resolution, and then reads the remarks I have addressed to that resolution, he will find that I have remained within the four corners of it. I have been discussing expenditures in connection with our defence preparedness. I have not been discussing the whole of the military, naval, air and army policy of the government.

Mr. MacInnis: Or of the governments of the world.

Mr. Coldwell: Or the governments of the world, as my hon. friend suggests. I did not interrupt the leader of the opposition, though I felt he was outside the resolution. I think, as a matter of courtesy, the house having extended this courtesy as far as it did, I should not be interrupted either.

Mr. F. D. Shaw (Red Deer): Although in substantial agreement with much that was said by the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew), Mr. Speaker, we too were somewhat surprised to find that he precipitated a debate on the defence policy under this resolution. In our humble judgment this resolution has nothing to do with the determination of whether the government defence policy is good or bad. The resolution before us states specifically that the membership shall examine into public expenditures. In fact, it says:

—examine all expenditure of public moneys for national defence and all commitments for expenditure for national defence since March 31, 1950, and to report from time to time their observations and opinions thereon, and in particular, what, if any, economies—

Then there is this phrase:

—consistent with the execution of the policy decided by the government . . .

I well recall that when a motion was moved in March, 1941, which was intended to establish the war expenditures committee, this same matter came in for extensive debate. In fact, the debate lasted for hours and hours.

I believe it was eventually agreed that the committee would not deal with government defence policy. This is a matter for the government to determine, and for which the government will be held accountable. There are occasions which afford an opportunity for debating defence policy in the house, but this is not one of them.

During the first years of world war II our early preparations for war had to move with great speed. Prior to the outbreak of the war in 1939 we were either such lovers of peace, or so blinded to what was going on in Europe, that we found ourselves most inadequately prepared. Then, everything had to be done in a hurry. Under those circumstances it was understandable that certain concessions had to be made; that excessively high prices had to be paid for certain things, and therefore it did become imperative that a committee on war expenditures be set up. It was set up in 1941. We are faced with a slightly different situation now. While there is great danger and while, as to our defence effort, there is need for haste, there are not the same circumstances which might be taken by some to justify, let us say, extravagance should there be extravagance, excessive payment should there be excessive payment, and so on.

In moving for the establishment of this committee today, the government is not establishing a precedent.

It was my privilege, Mr. Speaker, to serve for some time on the war expenditures committee. I also served, after the war, on the same committee which became known as the war expenditures and economies committee. I am quite convinced that that committee did a valuable work. I am convinced in my own mind that constructive and helpful suggestions were made to the house. Certain of those suggestions—possibly most of them—were accepted by the government. Action was taken and money was saved as a consequence of following out the recommendations of that committee.

I well recall that in 1941, and in subsequent years when the committee was reconstituted, the government laid particular emphasis upon certain things. We of the opposition were told that it was not our responsibility merely to seek grounds for criticism of or attack upon the government. We were told that it was not our duty or responsibility to adopt an attitude which would result merely in our embarrassing the Department of National Defence. We were warned at that time that the committee could not succeed if we approached our work in