

Committee on Defence Expenditure

to set up a committee on national defence expenditure; an amendment to give precedence to the examination of the Currie report by the committee; and then another amendment to which I have referred and which I hope will be defeated. In any event, the Canadian people have confidence in the Prime Minister, in the members of the government including the Minister of National Defence—the whole cabinet—and the Liberal party; and the next election will be won by the Liberal party.

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the subject before this house is one which does not lend itself to the kind of remarks which have been made on a number of occasions. This house has now before it a resolution which relates to the most important department of government, and to the expenditure of approximately half of the money that is being taken from the taxpayers of this country at this time. Moreover, the ultimate effect of the discussion which is taking place, and to which our remarks should be directed, is the security of Canada and its survival as a free nation, and nothing else. We are not dealing with any mere satisfaction with the details of one report or another; we are dealing with the effectiveness of the administration of a department which is answerable to the people of Canada for the state of the armed forces and for the welfare and the maintenance of young men and women in uniform over widely separated parts of the world today.

There are young men in Korea engaged in what to them is no cold war, who must rely upon the efficiency of the administration of the department which is under consideration, and they must rely upon the acceptance by the government of its responsibility as a government for the efficiency of that department. There are also young men and women in uniform in Germany, in France, in Britain and in other parts of the world. It is to them that our thoughts should first be directed in considering the effect of any information now before us which may have been brought to our attention. Let us be quite clear on one fact. The reason that the Currie report is before us for discussion now is solely the responsibility of the government. We had on the order paper for some time a notice of a motion which would call for the setting up of a committee to inquire into defence expenditures and commitments for defence expenditures. When that motion was called a week ago today the government employed a device which is entirely within the rules, but which is unusual, of having another member of the government rise on the motion and introduce an amendment which of necessity would preclude the possibility of

an effective amendment to the motion such as was well known to be the intention of the opposition.

What must be recognized by everyone is that when an amendment has been made, such as that which was presented in this instance, one need not be in very much doubt that it will receive the support of the majority of hon. members, and therefore any sub-amendment must be added to that amendment and must embrace it. The amendment in question was one to direct the committee to give priority to the consideration of the Currie report. That is the reason this discussion has been taking place in the past week in regard to the Currie report, and the only reason.

It was well known to the government that in our opinion there was no need for the Currie report to go before the committee on defence expenditure; it was well known to the government that we asked only for action on the Currie report, but that we did seek a wider inquiry into the broad field of organization and administration of the Department of National Defence which it was obvious should take place because of the disclosures in the Currie report.

I am speaking at this time on the first occasion in this debate. I have waited in the hope that there would be some indication from the government that it would accept the suggestion which I made directly in a letter to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) on December 18 and which has been repeated on other occasions since then, that there be an inquiry into the broad details of organization and administration of the Department of National Defence. It is clear now, however, that the government intends to proceed with the course which it stated it intended to follow at the time that its position was put forward on the evening of December 17 last. Because of the extent to which an attempt has been made to divert attention from the real considerations before us I think it may be well to clarify some of those issues.

In the statement made by the government on the evening of December 17 an attempt was made to belittle the importance of the Currie report. Furthermore, an attempt was made in that carefully prepared statement by the government to create the impression that any attempt to deal with the disclosures in that report was to be regarded as an effort to take political advantage from the situation disclosed. In addition, it was indicated that the government proposed to divert attention in any way it could from the seriousness of the situation for which, as a government, it must accept full responsibility at this time.