

Motion for Adjournment

the crown and the efficiency of committees. If we look at the terms "urgency of debate" in connection with the problem before us this afternoon as concerns other debates which may also take place this afternoon, well then I believe the urgency of debate applies not to medicare but to the attempts to determine the truth concerning the formal charge made by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Nugent). Therefore, if we consider the expression "urgency of debate" in connection with other discussions which are to follow, then the urgency of the debate must be applied to the motion put by the member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Speaker, for all these reasons, and also to rectify somewhat the fact that I should not want to see a precedent being created, since this is not the first opportunity we have to discuss the matter, I believe that the debate on the question facing the government should be allowed.

[*English*]

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that affects the privileges of the house and I would hope that the Prime Minister, as the minister responsible for the preservation of the rights of parliament, would speak up and assure us that regardless of the attitude and stand taken by the Minister of National Defence this matter is one that cannot be postponed until legislation is introduced in connection with armed forces unification or integration but should be dealt with now. Every opportunity has been given to the minister to have the committee on defence meet immediately. That would cover the situation very well. Why wait until months hence? Why wait until legislation has been introduced in respect of this program? Why not meet this situation now? There can be no possible reason for any extension of time.

This is one of the matters that above all transcends every consideration of party relationship or party antagonisms within the house. The question arises whether the evidence given in a committee was free, uncontrolled, undirected and unsuggested. If we cannot accept the evidence given in committees, that is the end of the committee system.

I feel that the Prime Minister should now take this matter in his hands and without regard to the attitude of the minister should determine it once and for all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What can be more urgent than the preservation of the integrity of committees of parliament with regard to the evidence that is presented to them? Mention was made that this matter goes back a long way. I always accept a minister's word. This is something that, regardless of our differences, must be accepted. However, today we have had an hon. member rising and stating that he has an affidavit in his possession which indicates that the evidence given by the admiral of the eastern command was altered by direction or action.

I suggest the first thing that should be done is for the government to table the evidence which the admiral was going to give and, second, the revised and expurgated edition. I dislike repetition, Mr. Speaker, but I say that unless members can depend on the answers given in the house or the evidence given by witnesses in committees, then our parliamentary system is gone. I asked the minister on August 30—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. With great deference I take the liberty of interrupting the right hon. Leader of the Opposition to remind him that what I am attempting to do at the moment is to obtain advice as to the urgency of debate in view of the motion made under standing order 26 by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is exactly what I am doing, building the argument as to why this matter is urgent. There cannot be anything more urgent in parliament than the preservation of the prerogatives and rights of parliament and the assurance that the evidence given by witnesses will not be altered in substance or in fact to meet the needs of a government or a minister of the government. I asked the following question on August 30, and this indicates the urgency, sir. It is recorded at page 7797 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the minister of defence a very simple question. Did he read the copyright story by Admiral Landymore which appeared in the *Toronto Star* on July 23 and which reads as follows:

"The section on personnel—wherein I described the actual state of affairs in my command—was thoroughly censored and rewritten—

The excuse given me for the censorship was that the minister wanted to take a positive approach to the hearings and that mine was too negative."

Mr. Starr: That is a shame.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Then I asked: Is this true or is it not?