

National Defence—Committee

Gazette of Monday, May 15, 1950, this statement:

(*Gazette* resident correspondent)

In a totally unexpected move, the government will make provision very soon for the establishment of a special parliamentary defence committee.

The indication of the possible scope of this committee was made very clear at the point in *Hansard* to which I have referred, and also during the discussion in this house on April 18 of this year, when the resolutions preceding both the defence bill and the pension act were brought before the house. What the *Gazette* resident correspondent was doing in the meantime I do not know, but apparently he was not following the proceedings of the house. Equally unfortunate is the heading over this report: "Group to study defence costs." I have not decided who will discuss defence costs, and it is not within my power to make any such decision. That is a matter for the house; and the house will discuss defence costs in accordance with its decision when it resumes consideration of the defence estimates, which will be as soon as possible. Therefore as to the scope of this committee I can assure the hon. member for Nanaimo that it will have full scope to discuss Bill No. 133 within the terms of this motion, if it is adopted, in accordance with the rules of the house; and I am not going to give him any assurance that those rules will be extended. In fact I would think, to the contrary, that the house itself would wish the rules to be observed and that this bill, and the other two, should be considered as I believe such legislation should be considered, by a committee of the house. There will be no assurance from me that the proper and parliamentary scope of what is decided by this house this evening will be extended in any way, other than that the resources of the department and certainly my own support will be given to everything the committee does in accordance with the rules as they are determined by the house.

So let there be no misunderstanding. The assurance I give with respect to the scope of this committee's operations extends only to the fullest consideration of a piece of legislation of the utmost importance; and whatever is proper to that consideration no doubt will be considered by the committee in accordance with the rules.

With regard to the suggestion by the leader of the opposition that my attitude on this invalidates some argument I have advanced in the past against the setting up of a committee to deal with the whole subject of defence, of course that again is contrary to the decision of the house, and I would not like to follow the hon. gentleman on that point because it has been decided already this session. It is, I suggest, fundamental

Defence to such a committee. If that committee can appropriately deal with this limited aspect of the affairs of the department, then it could have dealt with the wider organization and its work would have been of greater value to this house and to the people of Canada.

I rise now simply to indicate that it is my intention, as I know it is the intention of other hon. members, to defer any detailed examination of the bill until later; but I hope the minister will clarify the situation in the light of the press reports to which I have referred.

Mr. Claxton: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Hon. Brooke Claxton (Minister of National Defence): I should like to say again how appreciative I am of the very helpful remarks of the hon. member for Nanaimo (Mr. Pearkes). I venture to say he is one of the few people who really know how the Militia Pension Act works. It is a complicated matter dealing with servicemen who have come in at different periods and under different arrangements all the way back to the great war of 1914-19. As I have said, our hope is that this bill will be an interim step which will permit us to deal with the difficulties that have been revealed by experience, and enable us to progress toward that measure we would like to see adopted, a much simpler and more streamlined bill along the lines of part V. So I hope the house will take that into consideration just as soon as it may be possible.

As to what the hon. gentleman said about the origin of the committee, or the proposal for a committee, may I say at once that as far as I know the first suggestion that this and other measures should come before a committee of this house was made during the discussion of this and other defence measures last November. At that time I indicated to the house my hope that the defence bill itself would go to a committee. That was on November 18, at page 1946 of *Hansard*. A little later the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Macdonnell) asked again:

Did I understand the minister to say that, with respect to the forthcoming bill—

That is, the defence bill.

—he was disposed to recommend that it be referred to a committee?

Mr. Claxton: Yes.

That answer has stood from then until now. So I was astonished, if I may meet the invitation of the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew), to read in the Montreal