

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 23, 1951

The house met at two o'clock.

### NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN DEFENCE  
—REFERENCE TO STATEMENT OF  
MINISTER OF NATIONAL  
DEFENCE

**Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister):** With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to refer to the question of privilege raised by the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) on Wednesday with respect to certain statements reported to have been made by the Minister of National Defence at Rotterdam the previous day. The information I have received from the Minister of National Defence is to the following effect:

It was of course known to the press that Canada would be having a brigade group and eleven squadrons in Europe, and that that would require accommodation and airfields. It was indicated in the house on October 22 by the Minister of National Defence that airfields and accommodation were not available on the continent, and that the first of our squadrons would have to be sent to England pending the construction of airfields. The minister's declaration is to be found at page 280 of *Hansard* for October 22.

It was also known that the cost of construction would have to be met, and that we in Canada have always said that we expected to contribute our share. It was also known that our effort had been to ensure that this would be done in a way to avoid our becoming direct owners of property in Europe. The minister states that at the press conference in Rotterdam he did not give any figure of \$100 million or any figure at all; that in fact no new information was given except as to the number of airfields required for eleven squadrons; that that was a figure which is arrived at by dividing the number of squadrons by the capacity of an airfield; and that no other new information whatsoever was supplied.

There were two news stories published in the Ottawa papers but our information is that one of those stories, at least in part, had been prepared before the press conference at Rotterdam. This matter is one that was covered by the communiqué of the NATO council meeting in Ottawa on September 20,

1951, and is referred to in paragraph 8 of that communiqué which reads as follows:

The council noted that agreement had been reached on the financing of an "infrastructure"—

That is a new word which is put between quotation marks.

—program of airfields, communications and certain installations for the support of forces. These projects will continue without delay.

I am satisfied that no new policy was announced, and that the minister would have been very careful not to announce any policy in that respect which had not been communicated to this house. It has been our firm intention, although this is something for which responsibility has to be taken by the government, to give full information to the house before attempting to carry out any decisions that are arrived at, in order that the house may have an opportunity of expressing its views upon the decisions and saying whether or not it is in agreement with those decisions.

**Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition):** I submit, Mr. Speaker, that what has been put before the house by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) does not adequately deal with the question of privilege which has been raised. The point of concern to the members of this house and to the people of Canada is the very ancient principle that the first responsibility of parliament is the control of money. It is not a question of whether members feel that they were slighted in not hearing about declarations of this kind first. The important thing is that neither the question of policy involving very heavy financial commitments, nor the undertaking to other nations through the press that we were going to make such commitments, should be made at any time without the elected representatives of the people in parliament deciding on such a point.

The Prime Minister has stated that he has been informed by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) that he did not use the figures in the press conference to which reference has been made. Naturally, the Prime Minister is in the position where he has presented to the Minister of National Defence the reports that have appeared, and to which reference has been made. In relation to the words that were used, may I say that they were not statements of mine but were reports appearing in the press which were referred to