

Interim Supply

than, in the language of the hon. member for Acadia, to enable hon. members opposite to go to their convention next week happy.

This is the ninth day of the debate on interim supply being requested by the government for one month. If the debate goes on much longer we shall have to introduce another request for the next month or the next two months. It is the longest interim supply debate in our history for one month's supply.

An hon. Member: It is on an extremely important subject.

Mr. Pearson: It is most important, but it is interim supply and there are many important subjects to be debated on interim supply, not only one subject. The one subject most discussed on interim supply has already been discussed, as I hope to point out, and will be discussed again in the future. As I have said, there have been over 90 speakers in this discussion on interim supply. In this debate on interim supply—and this is not a debate specifically on defence or on the National Defence Act but a discussion on interim supply—the government has been confronted with a direct challenge. Either we abandon the normal parliamentary practice of this house and of the house at Westminster in regard to the second reading of a bill which is before the house or the supply needed to meet the government's lawful obligations will be denied.

We all recognize that the denial of supply by a majority or, if they can arrange it, by a minority of the house to a government is an established means in our parliamentary history by which the house can assure that ministries remain responsible to the house. I have no complaint about that. That has been used many times in our history and very often to good effect. It can be used, of course, to end the government or to end parliament, though I am optimistic enough to think it will not have that end in this debate. While we recognize the constitutional propriety of using interim supply for this purpose, and I do, we also, I believe, recognize that this is a sanction on the government to be employed only in an emergency situation when a ministry refuses to answer to this house for its conduct or is taking a clearly unconstitutional course. I do not believe either of those considerations apply in connection with the defence bill which has been introduced into this house.

Mr. Nugent: You missed the whole point of the debate.

Mr. Pearson: Let us look at the present situation in respect of this matter. The government has brought forward a bill, No. C-243, to amend the National Defence Act. It is quite true that the substance, the core of this bill deals with a very important question. There is no doubt about that. It deals with the unification of the armed forces of this country so that they will be able to perform their functions better in the conditions of the future than they might be able to under the organization which has been effective in days gone by when conditions were not the same.

Surely, Mr. Chairman, it is correct to say that the subject matter of this bill, which is integration leading to unification, has already been referred to a committee of this house, the defence committee of this house, the first defence committee of parliament which was set up to discuss defence policies.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: When the white paper on defence was tabled quite a long time ago now, the Minister of National Defence made it clear that the passage of the motion establishing the defence committee would have the effect of seizing the committee of the contents of the white paper. Now, what were those contents in so far as unification is concerned? Are we confronting the House of Commons suddenly with this important question of unification? Are we trying to railroad it through the House of Commons without sufficient preparation?

• (9:30 p.m.)

An hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Pearson: The white paper on defence was published in March, 1964 and, as I have just said, it was referred to the defence committee. There is a paragraph in that white paper of March, 1964, nearly two and a half years ago, which deals specifically and definitely with unification.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: I will read the paragraph. It says: "Following the most careful and thoughtful consideration—

An hon. Member: By whom?

Mr. Pearson: By the government, because it is the duty and the responsibility of the government to consider these matters.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson:

Following the most careful and thoughtful consideration the government has decided that there is only one adequate solution—