

National Defence Act Amendment

I feel the defence committee performed some fine work, and I congratulate its members for having earnestly looked into the Canadian military question and especially for having suggested amendments and improvements which the entire population expects from the government.

I happened to read this morning an article by Clément Brown about unification. He had this to say about our discussions which started today:

There is first, by order of importance, the armed forces unification bill, already read a second time and recommended, in spite of the Conservative opposition, without amendment by the parliamentary committee. That bill could give rise to a long debate since the Conservatives are against unification. All the more so since Prime Minister Pearson himself implied that he wants to consider the advisability of proceeding without delay with unification, when the most distinguished witnesses to appear before the parliamentary committee have advised the government to make haste slowly.

In my opinion, the main purpose of Bill No. C-243 is above all to unify the three armed services. I feel that such unification is not only advisable but essential. I fail to see why in the military field as in all other fields, expenditures should not be reduced as much as possible.

Therefore, I am rising this evening in order to express the views of our group concerning the unification of the three armed services, because we consider primarily the savings to be made. According to military technicians, it would also be beneficial to the unity of the army itself on the economic level, which would necessarily reduce administrative costs.

I heard this afternoon the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) talk about the uniform. In my opinion, that matter is of minor importance. Whether the soldier is given a blue, green or gray uniform, it does not change anything to the effect of the bayonet or the cannon, it is simply a matter of fashion. If experts in military fashion are needed, they should be consulted. But when some hon. members talked about the new uniform or said that an effort was made to impose the same uniform to the three services, that was, in my opinion, a very weak argument and I was surprised to hear the hon. member for Edmonton West—a man whom I admire also—object to that bill on that score. It seems to me that most soldiers I talked to in my area are looking forward to a single command, to unification. I am therefore mildly surprised that the Conservatives, as a whole, should so oppose the bill.

All kinds of excuses will be given for holding up the business of the house, such as the one we heard this afternoon, namely that all the committee reports had not been tabled. Mention was made of the delay in tabling the minutes and proceedings of the committee entrusted with the study of the bank bill. I suspect the same thing is going to happen again because the last reports were distributed to us at the beginning of the sitting. I got the last reports on arriving at my office, and at that, not in the final version but merely copies of the transcript.

Well, this is a procedure which I have not ceased to deplore in the five years I have been here. I deplored it even under other governments and it should not be resorted to in order to delay a discussion by putting forward such a worthless argument, as if it were a major reason to adjourn a debate that is so important and so urgent that—

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member allow a question?

Mr. Gauthier: Certainly.

Mr. Lambert: Is it not a fact that, in the case of the Deposit Insurance Act, the reports of the proceedings were late and that the debate on the bill dealing with the Bank of Canada Act was delayed for four days because the French translation was not finished? I think that perhaps you will agree with me in this regard.

Mr. Gauthier: I agree that the reports took four days to reach us and that consideration of these documents was delayed until they were printed. But the debate began when the last report was received. That is what I mean. The same happened today: discussion was begun when the last report reached our office. In the other instance, we had to wait four days because about 12 French reports were missing. Let me speak as I did at the beginning, as a simple civilian. As civilians, we notice mainly the military budget. I said earlier that we were expecting a reduction in the expenditures, but when we look at the military budget, we notice that this year, in spite of all the minister's predictions, it is yet much higher than last year.

I do not know whether this is due to the fact that the country's expenditures are higher or whether the cost of updating our armaments have increased but everybody, the people in general find that a military budget of about \$2 billion for a small country of 20