

Mr. J. G. DIEFENBAKER (Lake Centre): No more important duty rests upon this house than careful scrutiny of all expenditures. Where there is any suggestion of over-expenditure, as is alleged to have been stated by Colonel Thompson, the place to determine that is in this house or in the committee, and not in newspaper articles. We now find ourselves in this position. One newspaper says that Colonel Thompson made a certain statement; other newspapers say he did not make it. The Minister of National War Services (Mr. LaFleche) in a statement on Friday which was very difficult to follow, seemed to take no stand whatsoever on the question. The position now is that although allegations have been made in a responsible newspaper, the members of this parliament are not to have the opportunity to examine the accounts. It is all very well to say, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) has said, that the public accounts committee will be convened and that Colonel Thompson may be called before it if the committee so decides. You will have a committee of fifty members—and as in all committees the government will have an overwhelming majority. Why the government should seem to be desirous of not having Colonel Thompson brought before this committee I do not know. I suggest that the attitude will not be changed when the public accounts committee is convened.

We have the war expenditures committee which meets behind closed doors. When the committee was set up the Prime Minister said that the committee would meet in the open except when otherwise decided. Yet from the very beginning as soon as we got into the committee there was no question about it at all. The decision announced in the house by the Prime Minister was not carried out.

Mr. CLEAVER: Will my friend permit an interruption? I know he does not want to misrepresent—

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I will permit an interruption when I am through with my argument. As soon as the subcommittees were set up the motion was made and in every case it was decided, except in the case of one subcommittee, that they should meet behind closed doors. What is the result? Everyone knows that a certain degree of secrecy must be observed, the paramount desire being the safety of the state. But the safety of the state does not demand that instances of over-expenditure should not be brought to the attention of parliament when heard in the war expenditures committee. Yet the lips of

[Mr. Speaker.]

every member of the war expenditures committee are sealed as to the information they secure in that committee; they may not bring it before parliament.

Mr. CLEAVER: Before leaving that would my hon. friend allow me? I know he does not wish to leave an incorrect impression.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: What is the question?

Mr. CLEAVER: Is it not a fact that it was left with the individual subcommittees to determine how each of their sessions should be held, whether in camera or in public. Also is it not a fact that as to the subcommittee on which my hon. friend sat for one entire session of the house no motion was ever made that it should sit in public? I am chairman of that subcommittee and I make that statement.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: All I know is that the Prime Minister gave the promise that the committees would meet in the open except when in the interests of the safety of the state the committee might otherwise decide; and in every case when a vote took place the vote was always that they should meet in secret.

Mr. MAYBANK: Would the hon. member permit one more question?

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: Yes.

Mr. MAYBANK: I would ask the hon. member whether he himself ever proposed a motion that they meet publicly, and had it voted down. It does not seem to agree with what was said across the house.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I raised the matter in this house—

Mr. MAYBANK: In committee.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: Yes, and raised it in the committee.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: Just a minute; I raised it in the committee, and other members of the opposition raised it in the committee, and in every case they were voted down. Now—

Mr. CLEAVER: I do not like to have to interrupt again, but I was chairman of the committee on which the hon. member sat, and he did not nor did any other hon. member move such a motion.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member should not interrupt.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I do not mind answering questions, but I do object to speeches being made. The fact that such conditions do