

*Committee on Defence Expenditure*

trials in Ottawa and at Washington where enemies of the country were brought to book on charges of espionage.

The very press of the country would be handicapped if the character of the printers was not such that documents are released on a certain date for publication. And there is not one printer from one side of this country to the other, from one coast to the other—not one publisher—who would think of violating an official speech sent out by leaders of the nation to be released at a certain hour on a certain day.

I say the whole tradition of the printing industry in Canada is the very highest, and that there has always been that desire to safeguard confidential information and to make the printed word a sacred thing in this country. So much for the printers.

I am one who has not been swept off his feet by these revelations from Petawawa. They are serious, of course. I would be the last to condone wrongdoing such as has been shown at Petawawa. Each member in the house has been placed in the position where it is necessary for him to express himself with respect to the charges which have been made against the Department of National Defence. At the same time I think we should keep the picture in proper focus.

For the most part the crimes and misdemeanours at Petawawa were not to be compared with those committed elsewhere in Canada not so long ago. The opposition seeks to shake the very foundations of the country because some junk dealers made off with certain materials from Petawawa. I desire to tell this house of wrongdoing which overshadows the whole story of Petawawa.

In the wake of war—and the very spirit of war is waste and destruction—there have always been revelations of this kind. Speaking in this house on December 1 the hon. member for Nanaimo (Mr. Pearkes) drew attention to scandals associated with the Crimean war. Then he came along farther to the South African war, and referred to the waste associated with that conflict, and the aftermath of that unfortunate war, which took a good many Canadian lives, too.

I am old enough to have been in Ottawa in 1908 when there was another Petawawa scandal. Certain officers were charged with this, that and the other thing. I think it all simmered down to the fact that a lot of moth-eaten uniforms, and so on, surviving from the South African war, which the army service corps had in storage, in warehouses in Ottawa, had been surreptitiously removed and sold, or something else. That was a

[Mr. Murray (Cariboo).]

seven-day scandal in Ottawa, and was an aftermath, as I say, of the South African war.

The hon. member for Nanaimo did not go on to refer to world war I. If he had, he could have told, from firsthand knowledge, of the profiteering and waste which was tolerated. This is no time to revive references to those events—the horse deals of that era, the thefts and pilfering that went on. I am inclined to believe that Petawawa is merely incidental to the conclusion of world war II and the cold war era, in which we have existed these last few years.

Perhaps this house has never heard some of the revelations concerning the Alaska highway. I bring that up today, because I represent the riding through which the Alaska highway was constructed, and I feel it my duty, as an independent member of parliament, to bring forth the truth wherever it is possible to do so.

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” I would like to give some of the facts regarding the Alaska highway, of very recent memory. Violent death was too often recorded in connection with the building of that highway. There the plunder, and the outright theft and destruction of goods, from 1942 onward, was such as to cause Canadians to hide their faces in shame, to think that anything like that could happen in Canada. Fortunately things did not get into the press and were not kicked around in the House of Commons for political purposes, as have been the comparatively trivial crimes and misdemeanours at Petawawa.

Let me draw attention to one thing that happened on the Alaska highway in February of 1943. Two truckloads of TNT explosives were driven into the town of Dawson Creek and, through the utter carelessness of the contractors responsible, and the army officials who had control of the contractors, an explosion occurred which killed 21 persons, wounded an unknown number and wrecked most of the town. Two soldiers were burned to death in the Dawson Creek jail, like animals caught in a trap, as a result of the fires that spread from that explosion.

Well, one might say that that was a war period, that the Americans were on the Alaska highway, and that we had no responsibility. The Alaska highway was farther away from any theatre of war in 1942 than it is today. It was a scandalous thing, and responsibility for it has never been officially fixed, although large sums of money were paid in damages and many buildings were rebuilt to replace those destroyed. A modern