

Military Establishments—Fires and Thefts

Right Hon. C. D. Howe (Minister of Trade and Commerce): Messages could have come to someone other than myself. I have seen no such message, but the law of the United States is that the embargo can be lifted two months after the certificate of final clearance is given by the United States secretary of agriculture.

SUPPLY

Hon. Douglas Abbott (Minister of Finance) moved that the house go into committee of supply.

THEFT AND FIRES IN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS
—AMENDMENT, MR. DREW

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, today I intend to present a motion such as is made possible at this stage of the proceedings of the house. It is one which I hope will receive consideration from members on all sides of the house having regard to its subject matter and also to the importance of the subject at a time when we actually have before the house the consideration of estimates for the Department of National Defence which it is anticipated may come close to \$2½ billion with the supplementary estimates that will be submitted later. Without going into the details of any matters now before any committee of the house, it is only necessary to draw the attention of hon. members to the fact that since this subject was last discussed only a few days ago attention has been drawn to still further examples of widespread theft and looting of government property in military establishments across this country.

If these things were happening in an isolated camp, or even in one or two camps, there might not be the same reason for returning once again to a subject which goes to the root of the confidence which can be placed by members of the house and the people of Canada in the administration of a department which is seeking an allocation of public funds that will amount to almost half of the total raised by taxes from the people of Canada during the coming year. Members of the house have been well aware for some time of the concern that has been expressed in the press and elsewhere about losses, thefts, incendiary fires and looting in government camps and storehouses throughout the country.

Our attention was directed to this subject very dramatically by the nature of the thefts that occurred at Petawawa. Since that time there have been further thefts in Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, British Columbia and elsewhere throughout Canada, all of a nature which suggests a complete break-down of the

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

administrative supervision of public property by the Department of National Defence. Nor is it simply a case of this concern being expressed by laymen. It would seem that this concern is being expressed in equally forceful language by those in uniform. The *Calgary Herald* of May 13 reports the contents of a letter written by Colonel J. S. Ross, officer in charge of administration, western command, to the heads of branches and staff, to the heads of services and to units and sub-units under his authority. As reported in the *Calgary Herald* of that date the letter contains the following statement by Colonel Ross:

The adjutant-general has expressed sincere concern at the apparent laxity revealed by the current scandals at Montreal and Petawawa. The trials resulting from these episodes may bring substantial penitentiary sentences to guilty parties.

However, such action will not necessarily redeem lost confidence in the army by the minister, the members of the house, the press or the general public.

There have been numerous incidents of a similar nature, all of which indicate a very distinct lack of higher level supervision. Further, it is apparent that some of the younger officers have not grasped the fact that they are custodians of crown property, and that their action in becoming involved in various fraudulent enterprises displays a moral laxity which can only be described as shocking.

The most recent scandals involve officers and men in the sale of government stores and the appropriation of government stores for their own personal use.

It is of the utmost importance that such irregularities be curbed forthwith. Accordingly you are directed to impress on all officers under your command the necessity for increased vigilance and good personal example.

Drastically increased supervision is to be exercised immediately.

Unit, subunit and detachment commanders are to fully understand their personal responsibilities.

The line of responsibility within your organization is to be clearly defined so as to ensure a clear-cut disciplinary course in the event of slackness or dishonesty coming to light.

Heads of services, units, subunits and detachment commanders will be answerable for future irregularities developing within this command.

That is the end of the quotation in the *Calgary Herald* of May 13 from a letter attributed to Colonel J. S. Ross. I have pointed out that I am reading from this newspaper report, and that is my only source of information in regard to this letter. I would point out, however, that unless it is disclosed that such letter was not written by the officer in charge of administration, western command, then this house has reason to pay particular attention to certain words contained in that letter written by an officer occupying a position of considerable responsibility in the Canadian armed forces.

May I refer hon. members to one particular sentence in the letter—and I quote again: "There have been numerous incidents of a similar nature, all of which indicate a very