

*Supply—National Defence*

I do not often quote retired General Macklin, but his comment on this subject is quite appropriate. He is reported in the *Montreal Gazette* of May 18 as having said:

After you have read it—

The white paper.

—you will know less about the real state of our defences than the Russians know.

This is a widely held opinion and has been referred to by a number of editorial writers.

**Mr. Benidickson:** That was the purpose.

**Mr. Hellyer:** For the first time since world war II Canadian chiefs of staff are not allowed to discuss defence matters—not policy but just background information—with newspaper reporters. What is the government afraid of? Is it possible that the government's decisions do not have the backing of the chiefs of staff? The government also refused to allow General Earle Partridge, commander in chief of NORAD, to give a press conference to Canadian newsmen. Then General Lauris Norstad, the supreme commander of NORAD in Europe, was advised not to have a press conference for Canadian newsmen in Ottawa. Opposition requests that General Norstad remain to brief members of parliament on the actual military situation in Europe, a courtesy which was extended by General Gruenther, who gave members a most interesting and informative briefing off the record, were refused.

**Mr. Benidickson:** A briefing on two occasions.

**Mr. Pearkes:** May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? I do not think he was here a year ago, but does he recall that General Norstad then did have the opportunity of speaking to all members?

**Mr. Hellyer:** I was not here then, as the minister well knows, but I was referring to his most recent visit.

**Mr. Benidickson:** I think my statement was incorrect. I recall the Gruenther visit and the Norstad visit, and that is what I meant when I said two occasions.

**Mr. Hellyer:** The present government made sure that General Norstad did not, at this time at least, have the opportunity to talk to members of parliament. The Minister of National Defence did not make military personnel available for briefing members of the Senate and Canadian House of Commons who represented Canada at the recent Canadian-United States parliamentary group meeting, even though the United States members of the delegation had the advantage of the fullest possible briefing and several were members of the congressional and senate appropriations committees on defence. It is true

the minister himself and the deputy minister did make themselves available, for which members of the delegation were very grateful indeed; but of course the minister and the deputy minister only gave members of the delegation such information as would, they thought, not be embarrassing to the government here and certainly not sufficient to prepare us to deal with and talk intelligently to the members of the United States delegation.

Furthermore, the Minister of National Defence has consistently and repeatedly refused to give serious answers to the questions asked in the House of Commons. He has given the house and the Canadian people the impression that either he himself is not fully informed on defence matters, or that parliament and the Canadian people who are asked to foot the bill have no right to sufficient information to be able to judge the merits of the government's proposals.

This, Mr. Chairman, is an entirely different viewpoint from that held by members of the present government when they were on this side of the house. I should like, if I may, to quote from *Hansard* of June 21, 1956, page 5275, where the present Postmaster General is reported as follows:

Second, in this matter of changing our attitude, Mr. Chairman, it would seem the necessity for the wartime attitude that everything connected with national defence, defence expenditure and all varieties of activity in that field should be cloaked in secrecy may have to be altered. I do not think it is quite reasonable to expect the people of this country to continue year after year to willingly vote any amount of money requested by the Department of National Defence unless that department is prepared in peacetime to go further than it has to date in co-operating with this house in laying before it the details of many aspects of its operations.

It has been pointed out, and rightly so, that there are some things which should not be made public; but let me ask, Mr. Chairman, is there some marvellous capacity residing only with the armed services of this country which makes them the safe repositories of restricted information and renders a small committee of this house a doubtful repository for the same information?

The government may not want parliament and the Canadian people to know, but we have every right to know and it is a crying shame that we have to get all of our information from the proceedings of United States congressional and senate committees and other sources. It is possible, of course, that information supplied by the minister might not be any more accurate or up to date than what we receive from the United States committees; but if he would take this house into his confidence we would be able to judge for ourselves. I urge the minister during the course of this debate, when he will have lots of opportunity by way of