

Committee on Defence Expenditure

everything—that went on in the Department of National Defence. Here is what he said as reported at page 2323 of *Hansard* of April 4, 1949:

We have responsibility, through parliament, to the people, and we face that responsibility every day.

And a little later:

I say it is a fundamental concept of our constitution that we meet parliament every day, answer questions, deal with problems of administration. We are responsible through parliament to the people—

“We, the government”, in the minister’s own words, are responsible for matters of administration. Again, as reported at page 1946 of *Hansard* of November 18, 1949, answering the request for a parliamentary committee he said this:

In other words ultimately this parliamentary committee in effect would have to do with the management of our defence forces and their administration and planning, as is the case in some ways in the United States, rather than that being done ultimately, as it is now in Canada, by the cabinet itself, with a responsible minister.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to note those words:—the management of our defence forces and their administration and planning . . . by the cabinet itself, with a responsible minister.

Again, on March 14, 1950, as reported at page 757 of *Hansard*, the Minister of National Defence said:

Here the members of the government are appointed because the party they represent holds a majority in the House of Commons. They meet parliament every day. They are responsible collectively for the exercise of the functions of government, and they are responsible through parliament every day to the people.

It is therefore obvious, Mr. Speaker, that in 1949, 1950 and all the preceding years, on every occasion when we asked that parliament should be given the opportunity to look into the question of departmental administration, the minister refused it on the ground that he and he alone and his cabinet colleagues were responsible for these matters of administration, and he gave us the assurance that everything was perfect in that respect. How different is the tune today. Does the minister now accept the responsibility? Does he now say that and prove it by acting in accordance with his words?

Mr. Cruickshank: He said that yesterday.

Mr. Fulton: The hon. gentleman is a little bit impatient and perhaps a little bit hard of hearing.

Mr. Cruickshank: The hon. member is making statements that are not correct.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fulton: Perhaps the hon. member is a little bit hard of hearing. I have drawn

attention to the fact that the minister had said the other day. “I take responsibility,” and just how meaningless those words were. What about his cabinet colleagues? And what is he doing about that responsibility?

An hon. Member: He told you.

Mr. Fulton: What is he doing about that responsibility? How is the minister discharging his responsibility to make sure that those events cannot recur? I shall have something to say about that matter in a moment when I come to the question of what is being done to cure the situation which this report reveals. But the minister now seeks to take refuge behind the fact that the job of managing his department is too big. As reported at page 939 of *Hansard* of January 13 he had this to say by way partially of excuse of what had gone on:

Naturally it is not possible in an operation of this size for these reports or correspondence to be handled or even seen by the minister, or for that matter even by the deputy minister himself. It is only the really serious cases that the deputy minister can be expected to review personally.

But, Mr. Speaker, that does not alter the fact that the minister nevertheless is responsible for the organization of his department, and that the government is responsible if the minister does not handle that organization properly, or if he does not tell them that the department has grown too big for one minister to control. And the government are doubly responsible if, when it is suggested that the department has grown too big, they do nothing about it. It is well known, Mr. Speaker, to you and to all other hon. members, that for a period of a year or more the suggestion has been made from well-informed sources that the task of handling and controlling the Department of National Defence had grown too big for one minister. The government are doubly responsible because, with that knowledge, they did nothing and allowed this situation to develop.

It is no excuse, either, to say it is too big for one minister, because they knew that or should have known it, and it is particularly no excuse to say, my staff—whether the civil service or the armed forces—did not tell me what was going on. Because whether the staff in that sense be civil or military, Mr. Speaker, the responsibility is the same. The responsibility is that of the minister at the head of the department, not that of the staff.

Because the matter has come up I want to quote an authority in reference to what the Prime Minister said about the position of the chief of the general staff in making statements, as well as in connection with this whole question of responsibility for the situation which the Currie report reveals. The authority I am referring to is the work