

National Defence

emergency. Nevertheless, this is a distinct departure and leaves within the control of the governor in council the size of our armed forces. That is a matter which is fairly important in a democratic country, and is a departure from traditional procedure in the British commonwealth of nations.

Mr. Claxton: The hon. member for Mel-bort is of course completely correct in both his statement of the position as it has been and of the change proposed. I think the justification for it is that, under existing arrangements for defence, the number of men actually involved in the defence of any country at any time is only one of a great number of factors that constitute the control of defence. At the time when the annual army act was brought into effect, in consequence of three uprisings in Britain in which the army had taken a leading part, the number and size of the army really determined what its effect would be on the state. The provision to which the hon. gentleman has referred, under which the size of the army in Britain is controlled by the annual army act, was introduced some two hundred years ago in order to prevent the army, through its size, from being a threat to the state. In Canada there never has been such a possibility, and I am sure there never could be such a possibility. With forces such as we envisage, of the magnitude of 50,000 for all three services, the army could not be a threat. But in modern times what is more important really than the size of the forces is the kind of equipment they have. In order to effect control it would be desirable not only to control the number of men but also the number of aircraft, tanks and so on. I submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that that is done most effectively today through the control of the estimates and the appropriation bill. We believe that parliament in that way has, from year to year, complete control over the armed forces. That is certainly our intention.

Mr. Fulton: I am interested in this section. I recall that we had a similar discussion two or three years ago when the minister's predecessor was minister of national defence. My recollection is that at that time a similar change was incorporated in one of the acts, removing the actual control over the limits of numbers of the army from parliament and vesting it with the governor in council. My recollection, although not clear, is that as a result of the discussion some modification was made in the proposed removal of control from parliament. While I quite appreciate the force of the minister's explanation, what

[Mr. Wright.]

I am wondering is whether it would not be possible, without making it inefficient or cumbersome from the point of view of administration, to set the maximum number in the statute itself, and leave it still open to the governor in council to set the ceilings which from time to time may be authorized within that maximum number. Would that make it a matter of great difficulty in administering the forces or in bringing about the necessary changes from time to time?—because if not I would think that consideration should be given to that suggestion.

Mr. Claxton: The only time when any government would feel it desirable to go beyond the limits imposed in consequence of the last appropriation bill enacted would be in the event of an emergency that was anticipated in the immediate future.

If an emergency were anticipated in the immediate future, certainly if I were minister of defence and had the powers available under the War Measures Act, I would not hesitate to increase the forces over the statutory limit, if it were in the national interest and it were legally permissible. Therefore in the only case—

Mr. Fulton: That is true in an emergency, yes.

Mr. Claxton: —in which we would wish for a second, or conceive it possible, to go beyond the limits of parliamentary control as exercised the last time an appropriation bill was passed would be in the event of an emergency. Then, if it were justified, we would have to take action contrary to the limitation.

Mr. Coldwell: Is not the emergency which the minister visualizes an emergency which would require the calling of parliament, in any event? Parliament would then immediately be able to authorize the necessary extension, if an extension were necessary. I think under the Atlantic agreement it is understood that each country will decide what it will do for itself. I take it that will involve, as it did in 1939, the calling of parliament, and parliament authorizing the necessary action in the event of an emergency of the kind which I think the minister visualizes.

Mr. Claxton: If my recollection is correct, no effort was made by parliament in 1939 to fix the number of the forces. I would think that parliament would hesitate to put any limits on the activities of the government at that time.

Mr. Coldwell: This is peacetime; it is a little different.

Mr. Claxton: Yes; I say that in peacetime no government would find it possible to go