

*Supply—Veterans Affairs*

This is item No. 1: the minister of veterans affairs, apparently in all sincerity, set up a committee of the house to investigate complaints made by two members of the house on July 16. Then when the commission was set up, and its purposes set forth, among those purposes there was not even any mention of the charges which the commission was set up to investigate. I think every hon. member will realize that this was a flagrant disregard of the privileges of members of the House of Commons on the part of someone, and certainly it should not be allowed to go into the archives of the past and be forgotten. It remains to this day to be explained how that discrepancy occurred between the purposes set out in the order in council and the purposes for which the commission supposedly had been set up.

It is about this remarkable commission that I wish to protest this afternoon. May I point out at once that no one of the veterans concerned is in my constituency or in my province. I had contact with Mr. Kirchner and was directly interested in these men, purely because they were Canadians and veterans. But as a member of parliament responsible for the welfare of veterans and Canadians as a whole, I feel it my duty to bring this matter to the attention of the committee, and see if it cannot be cleared up.

This commission began to do strange things right from the time it commenced activities—strange things so far as I can see. There may be something I have not had brought to my attention; if there is, I shall be happy to be corrected. On November 26, 1947, as indicated at page 6234 of *Hansard*, the commission assumed authority to recommend to the minister whether he should sponsor further inquiry or action. When has it been established that any group of persons appointed by parliament as a royal commission, or as the agent of parliament, should feel itself empowered to make a recommendation to the minister as to whether he should go further into the subject under their examination? The fact that they presumed to do such a thing constitutes a most astonishing irregularity. Yet these gentlemen were responsible for that very thing on November 26, 1947. This statement I quoted at page 6234 of *Hansard* for June 30, 1948:

It was agreed that the commission would examine the files of the cases in which Mr. Kirchner had made representations and the other evidence at hand and would recommend to the Minister of Veterans Affairs whether he should sponsor further inquiry, or action.

The commission had no authority whatsoever to do anything of that kind, so far as I can see. They were appointed to look into the cases of these veterans who, according to

[Mr. Blackmore.]

the representations of Mr. Kirchner, had suffered injustice at the hands of the Department of Veterans Affairs of Canada. They should have gone about doing that, instead of undertaking to advise the minister.

Apparently most of the evidence which this commission considered was recorded upon phonograph records, and that evidence has never been transcribed. Let me ask hon. members this question: what would hon. members think of the Rowell-Sirois commission report, if all the briefs and evidence upon which they based their findings had been recorded on phonograph records and had never been transcribed and made available for the people of Canada to read? What would you think if the Turgeon grain commission had been dealt with in that way? What would you think if a parliamentary committee, as my hon. friend has suggested, spent public money and time taking evidence and having that evidence recorded on phonograph records, then neglected to transcribe the evidence so that the people could read it? A report by this McCann commission was made out supposedly on the basis of the evidence, but the people who read the report were unable to gain access to the evidence except by listening to phonograph records before they were destroyed. Surely, it was a most astonishing way to proceed, to have members go into the archives to listen to phonograph records. They would have to depend entirely upon what they could remember. Perhaps the commission was advised to take evidence in that manner, but I think this house and the country are entitled to know who gave the commission permission or advice to make records of the evidence and not transcribe them or put them into a regular report which would be available to the members of the house and the people of the country.

The next important thing concerning this commission is that the veterans' witnesses were sworn, while the witnesses who appeared to give testimony against the veterans were not sworn. All hon. members have to do is to contemplate the seriousness of the injustice indicated there. Imagine that all those who appeared in support of the veterans were sworn, and all those who appeared to give testimony against the veterans were not sworn. They were free to say anything they chose to say. Did you ever hear of a public inquiry being conducted in such a slipshod and inequitable manner as that? Our present Minister of Veterans Affairs is in no way responsible for this. It was left on his doorstep so far as I can make out. I do not think he was responsible for the set-up