

Committee on Defence Expenditure

money out of the government, and they can still think their own thoughts. I have a feeling that they may have some thoughts about this report. I have the feeling that if the thing is stifled here and now—however pleasantly it is done—a great many people up and down the country will not like it. I think they will say, "Couldn't take it, eh?" I do not think they will like the hush-hush and cover-up, and that is what we face here so far as we can see. There has been nothing to indicate that that is not the line to be taken.

All I can say is this. We know, Mr. Speaker, that the government have all had halos made for them. The less important ministers have little halos, the more important ministers have bigger halos and the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) has a great, resplendent halo. We know how those are made. We know the publicity methods. We admire the skill of those publicity methods, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes I suppose we wish we were as good at them ourselves. But they are there; they are built up; they are swollen up. You can see them puffing themselves up now. They say, "This poor fellow will never get anywhere; he is only a member of the opposition." But, Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling about these people who are not much seen, and whom nobody knows much about—they will have a vote, and I think they will rub some of the tinsel off those halos unless something is done to investigate this thing properly.

Mr. J. A. Ross (Souris): Mr. Speaker, I wish to take part to some extent in this debate on the motion of the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) that a select committee be appointed to examine national defence expenditure. That resolution was on the order paper for some time prior to the Christmas recess. Two or three days prior to our rising for the Christmas recess the much anticipated Currie report was tabled in this house; that was done on December 15. As I said, this motion of the Prime Minister had been on the order paper before the recess; and when it was proposed the other day, the Prime Minister presented the motion without elaborating upon it himself. However, the Minister of National Defence, who had been away in Europe on government business when the report was tabled, made an extremely lengthy speech and wound up by moving an amendment to this government resolution giving to this proposed committee a directive that they should investigate Mr. Currie and his report.

In this motion it is pointed out that the committee shall consist of some 26 members. A similar committee last year consisted of

[Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood).]

that number of members, 17 of them being supporters of the government; that is roughly a majority of two to one. It was the desire and the wish of this party, because of conditions prevailing throughout the defence department as a whole and throughout various parts of this country, that Mr. Currie might be given the job of investigating the entire Department of National Defence and its ramifications. The hon. member for Nanaimo (Mr. Pearkes), when speaking on this motion and the amendment, moved an amendment to the amendment which would have brought about this result. However, it was ruled out of order by Mr. Speaker. Since then we have had another amendment to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), which asks that Mr. Currie should continue the investigation into the entire Department of National Defence.

I think we should remember that Mr. Currie's instructions, to begin with, were to survey a small portion of the Department of National Defence, namely one branch known as the works branch. When the Prime Minister spoke the other day, following the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, he was rather angry and wound up his remarks by stating that he certainly would vote against this amendment. I think it would be safe to guess that he will be followed by most of the government supporters in this house. That means the government are opposed to a proper and thorough investigation of the Department of National Defence and the conditions that now prevail in this country.

As to the report, I think it has justified the request made by the leader of this party and other members during the past three years. They have pointed out the difficulties in the organization and administration of this department and the many shortcomings therein, and in the past by resolution have asked that a committee of this house should be set up dealing with the Department of National Defence in general, its organization, administration and other matters; and on every occasion this committee has been refused by the Minister of National Defence speaking on behalf of the government. I think the leader of this party has been justified in this report.

To deal with the report itself, which is contained in the appendix to *Hansard* of December 15, on the first page in part I Mr. Currie points out as follows:

The conclusion I have come to is that, while there has been a general breakdown in the system of administration, supervision and accounting, it was only at Petawawa that extensive irregularities over a prolonged period of time took place.