

*National Defence Act Amendment*

outlay of some \$30 million, while on the other hand \$115 million more will be willingly spent on our armed forces during the coming fiscal year.

I wonder whether the present government has any common sense. This is not demagogy, it is irrefutable fact. Let the member who wants to interrupt me look up the estimates and he will see that the minister asks for \$115 million more this year. Let him look then in the direction of our farmers: he will see that they need a higher income to make ends meet. And then we are told that the government is sensible.

Mr. Chairman, if the hon. member wishes to ask me a question, let him rise.

**Mr. Béchard:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask a question. What did the government of which the hon. member was a member do for the farmers between 1958 and 1962?

**Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix):** The Conservative government did more for the farmers than the present government ever did. I should add that the party that was in power at the time at least listened to the complaints of the farmer. In fact, they were not arrogant toward the farmers as the present government is.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix):** Mr. Chairman, if the minister wants us to vote at the earliest possible time, he should first supply us with the information we have been asking for since the inception of this debate.

We have asked questions because we need the information. We are here to represent a certain area of the population and we have a right to all information in order to know just what we are voting on.

The minister also—

**Mr. Béchard:** Just one more question, Mr. Chairman, and not an embarrassing one this time.

Could the hon. member tell us how many hundred of letters he has received from his electors concerning the debate now going on?

**Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix):** All that my constituents tell me when I visit my riding is how can the government be sincere when it claims that unification of the armed forces will result in savings for the taxpayers, when in the present budget the appropriations for defence purposes will increase by \$115 million. Therefore, I am wondering about the government's sincerity.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix):** It has also been suggested that morale was low in the Canadian armed forces. I am quite sure that the minister has kept information from the people involved with that unification. People do not know exactly where they are heading with unification and I can prove it. I met recently a young serviceman and I asked him what he thought about the unification of the armed forces. He answered: Sir, I am not too familiar with the subject, but all I know is that, in my case, perhaps it makes sense. I asked him why. He replied: We shall be on an equal footing with the seamen and the airmen—he was in the army. I then asked him to explain. He said: We had to take part in a march with airmen recently, and I was most surprised to find that since unification has been mentioned, we are given the same lunch as airmen. I asked him why. He told me: In the past, when airmen made such marches, they were allowed to bring bananas in their lunch box; now, since they began telling us about unification, they have been trying to treat us better, and that time soldiers also had bananas in their lunch box.

That goes to show that the minister has not given proper information for the military to understand the aim of his bill on the unification of the armed forces.

Mr. Chairman, I should also like to know whether this unification bill will give French Canadian members of the navy, the air force and the army the same promotion opportunities as those enjoyed by their English speaking colleagues. You know that in our various services, French Canadians have received somewhat less than preferential treatment with regard to promotions. Once in a while one of them gets a promotion.

● (5:50 p.m.)

However, in the past, French Canadian people, I think, have fulfilled their duty when the freedom of our territory and our citizens had to be protected. They have never been reluctant to perform their duty and to assume their responsibilities in this field.

In this bill on the unification of our armed forces, French Canadians who wish to join our Canadian forces should be assured they will have equal opportunities of success and promotion as their English speaking colleagues.

Mr. Chairman, those are the remarks I wanted to make during this debate. If the Minister of National Defence refuses to give us the information we have asked him for for