

*Interim Supply*

I notice that the Prime Minister is now with us but that the Minister of National Defence has departed. Some hon. member has sent me a note asking what significance there is in all this, but I am afraid I cannot answer. Perhaps we will find out later.

Now to the matter at hand. I put this question seriously to the Prime Minister. After all, he does have a fearful responsibility in this matter. Is it better that national defence policy in this country be the work of one party or that it be the work of all parties? Is it better that it be the work of one man or of a couple of men, or is it better that it be the work of as many men as possible?

In February two years ago the Minister of Transport of that time submitted very important legislation affecting the Railway Act to a committee of this house without it first having received second reading. As we all know, this is the argument now being used to explain the present course of action by the opposition. It was submitted to committee so as to try to get the best possible consensus on the matter, and opinions were heard from all over Canada.

Although I was not a member at the time, I suppose members gave their opinions, but in the result the bill never did come back to the house from the committee. However, the government was able to take all of the submissions and the views of the members and bring in a new piece of legislation which is now, after second reading, before a committee for study and we hope it will be passed in a short while.

This action was taken by the Minister of Transport who no one can say is a shrinking violet in the political sense. He is a man of very great political astuteness. He took this course to try to get a very important piece of economic and transportation legislation as much away from the cockpit or bullring as possible and to have as much party support as possible. I think that his tactics will succeed and that he is to be commended for following that course.

When the legislation is passed, admittedly the Minister of Transport at some time or other will say what a splendid thing he did, and more power to him. We all try to get ourselves in that position. But every last member of the House of Commons will also be able to say that a very significant role was played by all parties in this house and that this piece of legislation was a credit to parliament as a whole.

This is the plea I make to the Prime Minister and also to the Minister of National

Defence who has now returned to the house. Would it not be better that national defence policy be the handiwork of all parties if possible? If the Minister of National Defence has come up with a certain program, admittedly unique but something that will stand the test, then nothing on earth will ever knock that program down before a committee, whether the bill is before it after second reading or whether the committee studies it before second reading.

You cannot steal a good idea from a man if it is a good idea. He has nothing to be afraid of if he firmly believes in his ideas and knows that nobody else's ideas will work. He will be able to persuade us that he is right in the normal atmosphere of a committee where we can get at the facts and palaver back and forth much more than we can in this colosseum of a place. So I make that point.

Should we not be formulating our defence policy before such a committee? Whether we should have unification, amalgamation, or come what may, should not our defence policy have some regard to what the Department of External Affairs has in mind or even some of our domestic departments? Perhaps we should hear from the Secretary of State for External Affairs on this question, and the Prime Minister might also set forth his views as to what he would like to see accomplished by our national defence policy. If we had that sort of approach I believe we would be able to come up with something we could live with, something that would be acceptable from one end of the defence spectrum to the other, from the top, retired echelons down to the bottom serving privates.

During the course of heated debate in this house attacks have been made upon this, that or the other retired officer. These men were good enough to serve our country well and to be given top positions in the Department of National Defence. What has turned them into such dunces overnight? Nothing has. They are as good men now as they were then. But they left or had to leave the forces because of their disagreements with the Minister of National Defence. I think we cheapen ourselves here when we attack these men recklessly, and I am going to say a little more about this in winding up my speech.

One of the points made by the minister was that the views presented against unification or amalgamation are the views of the upper ranks only, but this is not so. I suppose there are about 12,000 men and women in the naval families in Halifax. My colleague and I hear