

National Defence Act Amendment

I have taken a fairly active part in the affairs of the committee and perhaps I could get on reasonably well without referring to these documents. But most hon. members of the house were not members of the committee and I submit they are at a complete disadvantage in not having these documents at their disposal in such a situation as this.

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I should like to draw to Your Honour's attention the fact that on the inside of the first page of Bill No. C-243, which is in our folders, the following words appear:

The amendments made in the committee on national defence are indicated by underlining and disposal in such a situation as this.

Therefore the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre can simply look through the bill and find out where the committee made amendments, because there will be either vertical lines or the words will be underlined. I do not know whether he has the original bill with him in order to make comparisons but I am sure that like myself and other members he has a copy in his office. Even though the copy of the original bill may have been removed from his file here, surely another copy is available to him. It is customary to show the wording that was in the previous bill and the new wording and identify the amendments with vertical lines or by underlining. I do not see any great difficulty in sending someone to my office for a copy of the old bill if I want to make comparisons.

● (3:40 p.m.)

However, I am in some measure of agreement with the hon. member for Calgary North when he suggests that the minutes of proceedings and evidence taken during the latter stages of the committee hearings have just now been made available to hon. members and there should be an opportunity for them to review some of the evidence in order to familiarize themselves with it. If the normal course in committee of the whole is followed I suggest that there will be fairly long introductory speeches made by some members on both sides of the house reviewing the general principle of the bill and that by the time we get down to clause by clause discussion of the bill each member will have had an opportunity to review that portion of the evidence that he wishes to review. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in view of the many months we have spent in this session I suggest that we go ahead and finish the balance of the business on the order paper.

[Mr. Harkness.]

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I subscribe to the views of the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness). I am not a member of the defence committee. From time to time within the scope of my other duties I have attempted to study the transcripts of the proceedings of that committee. An important issue is involved here. I do not necessarily take the same viewpoint as some of my colleagues on that committee. I may or may not, but I think there is some very important evidence to be considered. I suggest that Your Honour can take judicial notice of the fact that the Prime Minister made a statement in which he said he had an opportunity some days ago to read the evidence of Air Chief Marshal Miller, that it was evidence which impressed him and that it should be considered in depth. That evidence only became available to me a few minutes ago. On an issue of this kind, Mr. Speaker, I think the whole value of the committee system is at stake. We have now obtained over 2,400 pages of evidence given by a number of witnesses, of which more than 250 pages was distributed today. There was a very excellent series of examinations and cross-examinations of these witnesses. We should have an opportunity to read all the evidence.

I do not go along with the hon. member for Medicine Hat who suggested that we can prognosticate that a certain length of time is going to be taken up with preliminary speeches. This is not necessarily the case. I am looking at the first two or three clauses of the bill, and hon. members who were not on the defence committee will be called upon to take certain positions with respect to those clauses, make important decisions and decide how they are going to vote.

At this stage I suggest it is utterly impossible for hon. members to analyse the evidence of very important witnesses contained in the last two or three transcripts, relate their evidence to what was said previously and come to an independent decision. If we are going to make proper use of the committee system I suggest it is incumbent upon the government to ensure that transcripts of proceedings are in the hands of members of the house in sufficient time for members to read them, examine them and make a decision on them. It is utterly impossible at the beginning of the debate today for myself and other members to examine the very important evidence given by the latter witnesses who appeared before the committee and say, "This is the view I am going to take."