

*Committee on Defence Expenditure*

**Mr. Speaker:** On a question of privilege.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I walked out of the council chamber one moment ago just to listen to my hon. friend.

**Mr. Fulton:** I can well understand—

**Mr. Cruickshank:** You are wasting your time here.

**Mr. Fulton:** I can well understand that the remarks being made would be unwelcome enough to the Minister of Agriculture. But if there is anything in them which is nonsensical, I think that in a matter of this seriousness and importance it would be more appropriate, if I may suggest it, that the minister, rather than just make that broad and unfounded assertion, would advance his own views and demonstrate why the views now being advanced are, as he describes them, nonsensical.

**Mr. Gardiner:** If I think there is anything worth while in the remarks to answer, I will answer them.

**Mr. Fulton:** I suggest that the minister may do that in his own time, and that in fact this matter is important enough to justify more than the type of interest which the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) has just demonstrated he takes in a matter of this seriousness.

**Mr. Cruickshank:** Talk sense, not nonsense.

**Mr. Fulton:** Mr. Speaker, there are some people to whom, unfortunately, sense will always be nonsense.

**Mr. Cruickshank:** It is too bad that the hon. member did not get the British Columbia leadership.

**Mr. Fulton:** This particular effort on the part of government members to deny the government's responsibility and, somehow or other, to fix responsibility on the army, and particularly to suggest that those who criticize the government on the basis of this report are criticizing the armed forces, has unfortunately been continued by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) himself. But he does it in a more subtle way. In his speech the other day dealing with this matter, he showed himself to be an extremely subtle gentleman indeed. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that he suggested that to make criticisms on the basis of the Currie report is to criticize the armed forces. This is the way in which he did it. As reported at page 932 of *Hansard* the minister said as follows:

Perhaps I have been overenthusiastic in the defence of the armed forces against what I felt to be unjustified charges, and sometimes I may have been overoptimistic; but it is pretty hard to work with the armed forces of Canada without having

[Mr. Fournier (Hull).]

high admiration for their fine record of achievement and without having faith in their capacity to do what is expected of them.

Mr. Speaker, with that statement as it applies to the armed forces, we all agree. What we go on to say is that it is unfortunate that the country is not as well served at the top level of departmental administration as it is by its soldiers, sailors and airmen in the services. But notwithstanding this attempt to suggest that those who criticize the government on the basis of the Currie report are criticizing the armed forces themselves, parliament should not allow itself to be led away by this attempt at diversion by association. Parliament should continue its direct criticism of the situation which prevails at the top in the department and which permitted this situation to arise.

Then further in assessing this question of responsibility, it is important to observe that there were many opportunities to discover the situation and to take effective action earlier in order to remedy it. I am not going to read again that portion of the report found at page 712 of *Hansard* where Mr. Currie makes it so clear that the minister and his immediate associates had plenty of opportunities to realize that there was this laxity in control. I refrain from doing so because it has been quoted frequently in the house. It can be found at page 712 of *Hansard*. However, what I want to emphasize is this. In addition to the frequent reports made by the department's own chief auditor, the official opposition had repeatedly requested an opportunity to examine the whole question of the efficiency of the Department of National Defence and the matter of its control of the moneys which it was spending to prepare the defences of this country. We had repeatedly asked for a committee of this house on defence. Your Honour will recall that that request was not met until last year when a committee with extremely limited powers—and one whose powers were further limited by the attitude taken by its chairman, supported by the government majority on that committee—was set up. It was not until last year that such a committee was appointed.

It is interesting to note what the Minister of National Defence himself said in reply on those previous occasions when we requested that such a committee be set up. As I say, we had asked for it nearly every year until it was first granted last year. I have taken only some extracts from three successive sessions of this house and here we find the Minister of National Defence on those occasions admitting his responsibility and the responsibility of the government for everything—not just for some things, but for