

Canadian Forces Act

Y.M.C.A. had offered last November to send the necessary auxiliary services to Korea.

The reply given by the minister was that he did not recall that the Y.M.C.A. had done so. I should like to ask the parliamentary assistant whether it is not a fact that the Y.M.C.A. did undertake the responsibility of providing those services and, if so, why the department should deny in such an abrupt and definite manner this great organization the opportunity of providing these services without cost to the government of this country.

The answer given by the minister was to the effect that geographic and other conditions are such that under existing circumstances it is out of the question. He went on to say that consequently they had not seen fit to accept these very generous offers up to the present time. With respect to the Salvation Army, it needs no proponents in this house or in the country in support of the magnificent work that it does. With these two great national and international organizations designed to afford spiritual and material benefits to the troops, what justification is there for the department to take what appears on the face of it to be an arbitrary stand and refuse services voluntarily offered without cost to the Canadian people?

That is the attitude taken by four soldiers in Korea who wrote to me at different times, and not one of them had any connection with any of the others. All of them served in the last great war. All of them know of the work that was done by the Salvation Army and the Y.M.C.A., and it is very difficult for them, as it is for me, to understand why, whatever may be the difficulties of the terrain, the changing front or of establishing permanent bases from which these organizations can operate their facilities, if they are prepared to take the chance in an endeavour to bring aid and assistance, spiritual and otherwise, to the Canadian forces, they should be denied the opportunity to do so. I think it would be well if the parliamentary assistant would advance far more satisfactory and cogent arguments than the minister has done. His attitude simply was: Well, other countries are not doing it.

We are not concerned with what other countries are doing. Those of us who served in either of the first and second world wars know what the Y.M.C.A. and the Salvation Army did. We know they have the facilities for this type of organization. They have the experience and the personnel. They know whether they can carry it out. I would ask the parliamentary assistant to give the house and the country the real reasons why free and voluntary offers of service are being turned down. Surely there must be some

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

reason other than what appears in the answer given by the minister yesterday and the less extensive answer given on the 29th of October to justify a course which on the face of it seems inexcusable and indefensible.

Mr. Graydon: May I enter this discussion for the first time? I did not say anything on the resolution, but I was hopeful that when the minister had made his reply to the various suggestions and criticisms that had been made respecting auxiliary services members of the house would be left with a clear-cut answer as to what the government's policy really was in this regard. After having listened intently to the government's replies to the various members who have spoken, I must confess that the matter still remains in a state of grave uncertainty so far as this very important issue is concerned. I am afraid that, if the government does not make a frank clarification of the reasons why they have taken this position, the public as well as members of the house may come to the conclusion that there is more back of the government's plan than has been disclosed. In other words, there will be a section of the public who will believe that the government intends to follow this kind of policy in the years to come, and to wash out the very laudable efforts of the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army, the Knights of Columbus, the Legion and others who have participated in such a major way in these services before.

I think the government should make it clear now before we go any further that that is not going to be the policy they are going to follow, because in addition to the Korean war we are going to have an increasing number of men leaving our shores for the western European area. As the parliamentary assistant knows full well from his distinguished experience in the past, in a condition where there is a twilight between peace and war and where you have armed forces serving, the need for the services of the organizations to which I have referred becomes as important as it is in actual war operations.

I think we should not allow the bill to go through until such time as the parliamentary assistant has made it abundantly clear that the government is going to utilize the services of these auxiliary organizations. That should be done in order to remove any doubt in the minds of the people as to whether the government is embarking in secret upon a policy which will wash out all such efforts in the days that lie ahead. That is the thing that bothers me most. I think there is much more than the question of co-ordination of services so far as these various auxiliary bodies are concerned. After all, there is the question of morale both at home and where the forces