

National Defence Act Amendment

Recently I met a number of students, who are rather concerned about their commitments to the armed forces in the future. Mr. Chairman, we know that many students signed written commitments with the armed forces and these young men often have to do military service during the summer holidays, in order to fulfil their contract with the armed forces. I am being told that these young students have asked the military authorities long ago whether the unification of armed forces will affect their commitments with the military authorities. It would be high time for the minister to give us information on that matter, because students must, of course, work during their summer holidays and they must know immediately, before the end of the school year, if they can depend on the enlistment contracts they signed with the armed forces.

There are also, in that bill, some disturbing provisions, especially clause 6 which gives the military authorities, under the guise of unification, the power to decree compulsory transfers from one service to another, be it the navy, the air force or the army.

In my opinion, Mr. Chairman, such compulsory transfer from one of the three services implies a degree of conscription in our armed forces. Of course, when conscription is mentioned, it always hurts our friends opposite and ourselves, the Conservatives, because we know what it has done to us in the political field in the province of Quebec since 1917, because our Liberal friends have always blamed the Conservatives for conscription which was put into force in 1917 by a Union government, in spite of the fact that it was made up of Liberals and Conservatives. The fact remains, however, that we have carried, since 1919, in the province of Quebec that burden of conscription which was forced on us by an act of parliament, as everyone knows.

I feel that the clause which provides for compulsory transfer from one military service to another is some kind of camouflaged conscription and I also feel that, under that bill, the minister has the power to call young men into the armed forces when the number of men needed to meet the requirements of the armed forces falls below the minimum. The minister claims that he will need 100,000 men in uniform.

• (5:40 p.m.)

Now, I am divulging no secret in saying that, from the time we began talking about unification, enlistment of our young people

[Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix).]

in the armed forces has gone down considerably. And this is readily understandable, for those young people must leave everything to chance when they enlist. Some would rather keep their freedom, meaning that they want to be free to choose the service in which they will enlist. Some of those young people would rather be sailors, while others would prefer to become airmen or yet soldiers. Now, of course, under clause 6, military authorities will be empowered to transfer recruits from one service to the other without even getting their previous consent. In my opinion, this power provided for in clause 6 is tantamount to conscription, a type of slavery which our young people fear. They want to keep their freedom. In enlisting, they want to be free to serve either in the navy, in the air force or in the army.

In the very beginning, when the minister brought down his white paper on national defence, here was some wave of sympathy. Admittedly, our population realizes that our governments are allocating too much money to national defence. The white paper, which the minister had presented, and his subsequent statement suggested that it was possible to save money for the taxpayers through unification of the armed forces and this, I suggest, was a very good asset for the Minister of National Defence.

But when the taxpayers studied the estimates for the coming fiscal year, they noticed that the estimates for national defence had gone up by \$115 million. They wonder how the minister can possibly claim that he can save public funds through passing of the bill on the unification of the armed forces.

Mr. Chairman, considering that it will cost several million dollars in taxpayer's money to change the uniform, that is to give the same uniform to the three forces, we wonder how in the white paper and his speeches in the house and elsewhere, the minister could justifiably claim that passage of the unification bill would spare Canadian taxpayers considerable expense.

I say it again: this year, the budget exceeds that of last year by \$115 million. And yet there are other problems far more pressing than just changing the uniform of our soldiers. We had obvious proof thereof this afternoon when an emergency debate was requested in order to help the farmers of eastern Quebec. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Greene) refuses to give the farmers a minimum of \$5.10, which would represent an