

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 21, 1951

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

PRIVILEGE, MR. DREW—CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN DEFENCE—REFERENCE TO STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. Last night it was announced over the radio, and later press dispatches carried the information, that permanent quarters are to be provided in Europe for the 27th brigade at an estimated cost of between \$5 million and \$10 million. Then this morning's radio carried dispatches that in Rotterdam today the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) had announced that Canada is to foot the bill, to use the words employed, to build four or five new aerodromes in western Europe to field an 11 squadron jet air division capable of providing tactical support for a full-fledged army. I quote from the Canadian Press dispatch as follows:

Claxton made the announcement simultaneously with the arrival of a 500-man contingent of Canada's 27th infantry brigade earmarked for General Eisenhower's North Atlantic army. The Canadian defence minister told the press conference, attended by 50 Canadian, American, British, Netherlands, French, and other correspondents, that Canada will be sending enough arms for another two European divisions, making a total of five. The aerodromes, he said, will cost in the vicinity of \$100 million.

I raise a question of privilege in regard to this statement because it involves an extremely important announcement of policy that I submit should have been given to the people's representatives in this house when a decision of that kind was made. After all, this whole subject was under discussion in this house a short time ago. If it was the intention of the government to embark on the building of airfields at the cost of the Canadian taxpayer, then most certainly the people's representatives should have been informed so that there might have been a proper discussion of the subject.

I must say that I was under the impression, and I am sure that many other hon. members were also, that the construction of installations required for participation in NATO plans in Europe under General Eisenhower would be under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization itself. I do not imagine that any hon. member was in any doubt that Canada

along with other nations would be called upon to pay its share of the various expenses that would be involved.

But when we start building aerodromes and permanent barracks, then we become land owners in a big way in Europe. The question arises as to where this same situation may arise next. A hundred million dollars is not a small sum of money. I submit that this is the sort of thing that indicates the government's tendency to disregard completely the fact that it is the executive of this parliament supported by the representatives in this house and that, no matter what majority the government may command, it is the duty of the government as the executive to report to the people's representatives when such large sums of money are being spent and when new policies are being evolved.

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, before I attempt to discuss in the house what the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) may have said I shall make sure of what he did say. I would be very much surprised if it was what the hon. gentleman has referred to because no such policy has been decided upon by the Canadian government. The Canadian government realizes that no moneys can be spent without appropriations approved by this house. Whenever the government has any recommendation to make it will submit it to the house and attempt to justify the reasons for the expenditure proposed.

RADIO BROADCASTING

CONCURRENCE IN FIRST REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE

Mr. W. A. Robinson (Simcoe East) presented the first report of the special committee on radio broadcasting, and moved that the report be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

DEFENCE EXPENDITURES

PERSONNEL OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE

Mr. W. G. Weir (Portage-Neepawa): I move:

That the following members comprise the special committee on defence expenditures as provided for in the resolution passed by the house on Tuesday, November 13, namely: Messrs. Balcom, Blanchette, Campney, Cavers, Churchill, Croll, Drew, Fulton, Gauthier (Portneuf), George, Harkness, Henderson, Hunter, James, Jones, Macdonnell (Greenwood),