

*War Appropriation—Air Services*

the discussion on the estimates of the Department of National Defence for Air, and some objection was taken. The hon. member for Yale said:

I suggest that these answers be allowed to go on *Hansard* and at some time convenient to the minister for air and to the minister for naval services, supplementary questions can be asked.

I assume that supplementary questions are to be asked on those matters which were placed upon *Hansard* that day.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: If hon. members who are particularly interested in the questions referred to on that page are not here, I would point out that on February 29 the minister made a statement in regard to the closing of airports across Canada. He remarked, as reported in *Hansard*, at page 1029:

We are not proposing a winding-up of the air training plan, even progressively, on the contrary we are providing, and have agreed with the United Kingdom for a continuation of the plan after March, 1945, the date on which the 1942 agreement expires, but a continuation with a reduced output, which reduced output will not be noticeable or in effect before eighteen months hence.

In the next column of the same page he said:

I have already stated that the Royal Air Force transferred schools will be the first to close, beginning about midsummer and running well into next year. With respect to others, there are many factors to be taken into consideration.

The minister mentioned about nine of them—whether the property is leased or owned, whether it is required for civilian purposes, such factors as travelling expense between types of schools, costs of operation, disturbance to civilian economy, geographical location, air training conditions, fog area or obscure visibility, air congestion, et cetera.

About two weeks later he announced the closing of about twenty-eight schools, including eight in Alberta and eight in Saskatchewan. I should like to know from the minister, first, what relation these various items listed on page 1029 of *Hansard* have as regards other training schools across Canada, and whether the reasons which are given on that page are those which caused the closing of these schools in western Canada. Our experience in the west would lead us to believe that the conditions for flying training schools there were much superior to what they were in eastern Canada. Certainly the number of hours in which these schools are not operating because of air conditions or disturbance to civilian economy, obscure visibility or air

[Mr. Power.]

congestion, would make us believe that the western area is the most favoured and suitable for air training.

The other question that occurs to us is this. With a plan of constant expansion continuing even until the late months of 1943, people are somewhat at a loss to understand the complete reversal of policy which necessitates the closing of twenty-nine of these schools across Canada, when we would have imagined that the plan would have worked to a certain level of peak production and then tapered off gradually. The continued opening of schools even late in 1943, followed immediately in 1944 by a reduction of about twenty-five per cent of the air schools in Canada, would seem to show a lack of planning there and, as I say, people are at a loss to understand it. Is there any statement which the minister can make in that regard?

Mr. POWER: I have already made several statements with respect to the closing of these schools. I made a statement to the press on December 3 when the first closing of schools took place; I made a statement to the press and to the house on February 16 as a result of a meeting with the United Kingdom representatives, and I also made reference to the subject of the closing of schools in introducing my appropriation on February 29. Perhaps the concrete reasons were not sufficiently clear to the house, and with the permission of the committee it might be well for me to go over them again as briefly as I can.

What we must bear in mind first is that the purpose of the British commonwealth air training plan was to man all aircraft which the commonwealth produced and which were planned to be manned by men from the British commonwealth. That was number one. Number two was that the contract between the partners, signed in June, 1942, expires in March, 1945, when normally all schools would have been closed, because that is the expiry date of the contract. It must also be understood that Canada trains flyers not only for its own squadrons but for the whole of the British commonwealth. It has an unlimited commitment to train flyers.

In the course of its work under this agreement Canada, before the end of this month, will have trained its 100,000th aircrew. On March 31 we had trained 92,000, to which must be added 5,000 who belonged to R.A.F. schools before R.A.F. schools became a part of what was called the combined training organization, and roughly the 3,500 whom we turn out every month.

The first intimation we received that there might be a curtailment in air training capacity