

Supply—Defence Production

is a committee of the whole house. It is a big, unwieldy piece of parliamentary mechanism if parliament is to approach seriously the task of undertaking a detailed review of a department with all the ramifications of the Department of Defence Production and with all the important crown corporations that are associated with it and are responsible to the minister of this department and to the same minister also as the Minister of Trade and Commerce.

Sir, what is needed is a more effective way of reviewing the operations of this department and its crown corporations. The committee on estimates has sat for the past two sessions. In each of those two years it has reviewed the estimates of four departments. So far the Department of Defence Production and the Department of Trade and Commerce have escaped the review of that committee, although we did ask at the beginning of this session that one of these departments at any rate should be referred to the committee this year. I say, Mr. Chairman, that this department is one that calls preeminently for a detailed review before a select committee of the house. In 1953 the committee on defence expenditures touched on certain aspects of the operations of this department, but so far as it touched on those operations it merely scratched the surface.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): May I make a comment? I may say that no department of government has been examined before a committee so closely as the department for which I am responsible. From 1940 to 1953 the committees on war expenditures and defence expenditures sat and considered the department every year. The work of the department was practically the only work considered by that committee on war expenditures.

Mr. Fleming: You will observe that I was not speaking about the war expenditures committee. I was speaking about this Department of Defence Production which has been in existence now for five years. I have drawn attention to the fact that there has not been at any time in that period a detailed review of the operations of that department. I have pointed out that the ramifications of this department are so extensive that this is pre-eminently a department whose operations ought to be reviewed by a committee in the well established method of review of its estimates.

Now, I was mentioning the fact that in 1953 the committee on defence expenditures had touched at certain points on the operations of this department. It was principally concerned with the expenditures charged to the Department of National Defence. It

[Mr. Fleming.]

touched on certain operations of Defence Construction Limited, but so far as a review of the operations of this department is concerned I say that it did not, and could not under the circumstances, do more than scratch the surface.

The minister's statement on Wednesday—

Mr. Dickey: Both the committees in 1951 and in 1952 dealt with the department.

Mr. Fleming: The committee in 1951 sat for only about a month and this department had only come into existence at that time, so my friend is not going to pretend there was any review of the operations of this department at that time. So far as 1952 was concerned, the concern of the committee at that time was the direct expenditure on war materials and equipment. This department did not come in, except at a few odd points, in the review by that committee. So I say, Mr. Chairman, that the time is ripe and I think there should have been such a review this year. But certainly the time is ripe when there should be a detailed review of the operations of this department in a committee where there would be an effective opportunity for reviewing the business of the department, its administration and its operation in the fullest detail. This is not possible, as everyone must recognize, in this big, clumsy committee of supply.

The minister's statement on Wednesday touched on one question. He concentrated on aircraft production and procurement, admittedly a very important subject. In his statement this morning he has briefly delivered certain observations in regard to electronics and gun production and about the five crown corporations.

Now, sir, our first responsibility must be to ask ourselves, as a committee, how closely are we to assume that this department has estimated in putting before the house its request for appropriations totalling \$22 million? As this department is not asking for sums comparable with those for which it was asking three or four years ago, any margin of error or excess in estimating is naturally correspondingly reduced. But I had occasion to look back, Mr. Chairman, to try to reckon the degree of accuracy that has characterized the estimating done in this department since its inception. I will give the committee the round figures. I find that for the fiscal year 1951-52, the department asked for and obtained a vote of \$115 million and it expended \$31 million. For the fiscal year 1952-53, it asked for and obtained \$123 million and expended \$89 million. For the fiscal year 1953-54, it asked for and obtained \$73 million and expended \$48 million. For the fiscal year 1954-55, it asked for and