

Supply—National Defence

handle the aircraft with which they are equipped at the present time. But successive improvements will be made in this class of aircraft, and if we have an aircraft carrier we will make those improvements at the time they should be made.

Mr. Drew: If it were convenient perhaps it might be best if the minister would say whether the *Magnificent* is in fact in every way up to date by modern standards, and able to deal with submarines.

Mr. Claxton: That is the sort of thing no one can say until submarines are met and dealt with. But I can say that aircraft carriers of her class are being successively and progressively modified. Whether we decide to do that this year or next year remains to be seen, but for the purposes for which the *Magnificent* is designed she is doing that job today.

Mr. Drew: That answer illustrates the difficulty with which members of this house are confronted. The minister has now informed us that aircraft carriers of this type are being progressively modified, and presumably after modification are capable of undertaking this extremely important work. Nothing the minister has said is in any way a direct reply to the statement by the hon. member for Nanaimo that at present, by modern standards, the *Magnificent* is not suitable for this service. The minister has said they do not know whether they will do it this year or next year; but we are dealing with one of the greatest emergencies this world has ever known, measured in terms of dollars by the figure of \$1,800 million. That is merely the extent of the emergency in terms of dollars and cents, and I suggest that it is not sufficient to be told that perhaps this year or perhaps next year modifications may be made which would give us an aircraft carrier capable of undertaking the active service she was built and designed to perform. I leave that question there, because I am satisfied that the answer given by the minister is the most positive evidence that could be put forward of the unsatisfactory nature of the information before this house in regard to such an important piece of equipment as an aircraft carrier; and so it is with much of the other equipment that has been under discussion.

Then we were told about the training of the brigade, what it cost and what it would have cost if we had trained those men in Canada. I will revert to my earlier remarks about training in Canada only to say this. In addition to those already mentioned there is one reason why we should train our men in Canada. We are still under the necessity of

[Mr. Claxton.]

seeking to conserve our dollar resources, and every dollar spent outside the country is an added burden at a time when money is part of the very struggle in which we are engaged. I do not think it amiss, either, to mention the fact, which has been stated officially already, that the cost of training men in the United States is higher than it is in Canada. That is another reason why we should provide for that training in this country.

Now let me refer to our air defences. It is not necessary to raise any question about the plans that have been made, whether forty squadrons will be sufficient in three years. I repeat that the thing we should be concerned about is what we are going to have this year. We have four squadrons now. What are we going to have in this year 1951? What are we going to have during the months that have been described as the most critical in the history of the modern world? As the minister himself has indicated, that question is not going to be answered substantially by our own production lines during the current year. Moreover there is the question whether even now we are taking those steps which should be taken to have trained personnel available when our own production lines are able to meet the demand for the latest type of modern aircraft. I do not think the minister will challenge the statement that one of the very real problems being faced today is that of providing adequate ground crews for the squadrons being trained. Hon. members who have had the opportunity of observing what is being done know that the whole efficiency of an air force rests upon the adequacy of the training of the ground personnel. The most skilled and the most gallant pilots may survive but a very short time, even without any other considerations than the problem of the aircraft itself, unless the men who handle these extremely fast and tremendously powerful machines have had long months, yes and years, of training in the jobs of servicing aircraft of that kind. Right now we should be far ahead of where we really are in the training of the specialists who are needed for the ground crews. If we, in fact, are contemplating a real contribution of forty squadrons at some time within the measurable future, then we should be training skilled ground crews now for those forty squadrons so that when the pilots and air crew needed for those machines go into the air the whole force could be brought into being at one and the same time. Certainly, the methods that are now being followed do not assure the availability of skilled men of that kind. It seems that the members of this house should not be satisfied to pass this, as merely a matter of dollars and cents, without some assurance that the steps that are going