

Supply—Justice

the reports, I still think that even though the security of Canada is concerned the details cannot be of a nature to justify this action being taken in regard to a man who is in fact found guilty without a charge being laid.

But why carry on, Mr. Chairman; there have been days and days of debate on this matter. I still feel very unhappy about the situation. There are too many questions left unanswered. This man has been placed in a position that I believe is absolutely untenable; he has been called a criminal without a charge being laid. He has been found guilty although he may be innocent. I do not understand this. But I do hope that I have the understanding of a member of parliament, and as one who has sat in provincial and federal parliaments for over 32 years in opposition, to realize that an advance is an advance, and an admission, even if it is only a partial admission, by a Prime Minister and government that perhaps they should take a second look at a given situation is something for which we should be grateful. I hope I have the understanding to accept with good grace the advance that has been made and the proposal to meet, at least in part, the request made in the fight that has been waged in this house for many days by opposition members for understanding, decency and Canadian justice.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, there are a few questions I should like to ask the minister in connection with a most unusual matter that occurred in the last 10 days. I hope he will give me his attention because I do not want him to feel that what happened this afternoon meant that the chair had been pulled out from under him. I hope he does not have that fear.

My question has to do with a case that went through the courts over a period of years. I refer to the Georges Marcotte case. In no way am I offering any views on the question of commutation. I realize the difficult decision the governor in council had in regard to that case because of the question of identification. However, a most unusual occurrence took place within the last 10 days. One of our major Canadian newspapers carried a report of a lengthy interview with a convicted murderer to which was appended an example of his literary merit and his artistic turn of mind.

I should like to ask the minister, is it the policy of the Department of Justice to permit press interviews of convicted murderers serving their term in penitentiary? Personally I

think this course is not one that will contribute to the administration of justice; it has too much of the melodrama that sometimes we see in the neighbouring republic, in which convicted murderers become sentimentally greater than their crime should permit.

I want to know by whom the permission was granted to interview this man. Was that permission granted by the Department of Justice or by the minister himself? By whom was the request for the interview made and what was the reason for granting it? I will have something more to say after I have received answers to these questions.

Mr. Pennell: If I may interpose, Mr. Chairman, if any fault arises out of this incident it must be charged to me, because under the transfer of duties I must advise the right hon. Leader of the Opposition that I am now responsible to the house for the penitentiaries service. I undertake to obtain answers to the questions the right hon. gentleman has raised as quickly as possible.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is the minister not in a position to answer these questions?

Mr. Pennell: I am not, sir. I say quite frankly to the right hon. gentleman that I am not in a position to answer them. But the officials of my department are standing by and I expect to have an answer from them almost immediately.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The answer given by the minister, with the frankness that always characterizes him, lends emphasis to a view that I have expressed, namely that the trifurcation of the Department of Justice will not make for strength, certainty and effectiveness.

There is one other matter I wish to refer to, Mr. Chairman. It does not come under justice but it comes generally under the question of the estimates. We have tried to co-operate in bringing about the passage of the estimates that have come before us. They amount to a vast amount of money, billions of dollars. Today we got into a controversy which has made impossible the completion of the estimates that are before the committee. There are still five or six departments whose estimates have not been touched, two of them of major importance.

We as members of the House of Commons would be recreant to our trust if we rushed in and gave rubberstamp approval, as it were, or carte blanche approval to a mass of expenditures which has yet to be examined.