

War Appropriation—Army

improve; and by "improve" I do not necessarily mean increased cost, but enhanced utility and convenience for the same amount of money. I think I can say that we have in the army a standard type of hut, of which I am sure my hon. friend knows, both in the way of messing huts, which are built in the form of an H with the kitchen in the bar of the H, and in the form of sleeping huts, which are also in the form of an H, with wash-rooms and ablution rooms and toilets in the bar of the H. I believe these have been reasonably satisfactory and that the cost has been as low as it could be, having regard to the necessity of decent construction and of buildings which will house men properly.

The answer to my hon. friend is that the responsibility is on the engineers of the department, who are in constant consultation with others, including the engineers of the Department of Munitions and Supply, and the experience gained has been helpful in producing as time went by, an improved type of hut and of building at what is regarded as a moderate price, having regard to the service which has to have the accommodation.

Mr. GREEN: Well, is there no check by any other department? Apparently the defence department decides what buildings it needs and then builds them, and there is nobody to check the decisions. It does seem that there should be some check, perhaps by the Department of Munitions and Supply, perhaps by housing experts under the Department of Finance, to see that these buildings are not too expensive. I believe the idea is prevalent across Canada that a great deal of money is being wasted on these buildings. I would ask the minister to tell us whether it would not be possible to set up some system of checking both the types of, and the expenditures on, these different army buildings.

Mr. RALSTON: The D.Q.M.G. advises me that we have had independent engineers from time to time in consultation with regard to plans and specifications. There has not been any other department which checks on the engineers of the Department of National Defence (Army): that is part of our job, and it is in the deputy minister's purview to see that the job is done as cheaply as possible. I do not think that the Department of Munitions and Supply are in a position or would want to be in a position to check the matter of specifications and

[Mr. Ralston.]

that sort of thing for all the different kinds of accommodation which are needed. The Department of Munitions and Supply is a procuring agency for accommodation just as it is a procuring agency for armaments or equipment or anything else. The kind of specifications, the degree of need, et cetera, have to be checked by the department concerned, and the matter comes in due course to the government in the form of an order in council when the contract is let by the Department of Munitions and Supply.

Mr. GREEN: These buildings all require lumber and other building materials in huge quantities and necessitate labour of various kinds, with the direct result that it is impossible in Canada to-day to build sufficient houses to accommodate our people, apart from the cost that is incurred. I suggest to the minister that there should be some method of checking these military buildings. Here we have a vote of nearly \$63,000,000 for this present fiscal year, presumably for the construction of new buildings. The total expenditure on this item has gone up \$35,000,000 over what it was last year; yet the minister told us that the army in Canada was to be reduced by at least 15,000 men in this fiscal year. Buildings have been put up all over the place. Why is it necessary to have this greatly increased vote in the present year under these conditions?

Mr. RALSTON: The suggestion that the vote is increased is perhaps not strictly accurate. It is true that the figures show an increase but it is accounted for in this way. The expenditure last year is shown as \$75,000,000, whereas the anticipated and estimated expenditure was about \$90,000,000. That means that \$15,000.00 of the actual estimated expenditure was not used; it is \$15,000,000 less than was provided for the buildings intended. In other words, if the materials had been available and the projects had been completed, the expenditure last year would have been \$90,000,000, and instead of this \$15,000,000 being spent this year, thus increasing the amount to \$109,000,000, the expenditure this year would have been \$94,000,000. So that the vote is about the same this year as it was last year, having regard to the needs in the particular year.

My hon. friend asked why it was necessary to put up buildings. I have not before me the list of buildings but I can give some idea of the construction. There is a considerable amount of construction overseas—I am purposely not giving the amount—and a considerable amount for anti-aircraft and airport defences and coast defences. The completion