

structure? What would happen if there were such a committee, in a position to review the estimates of this important department? We would have an opportunity to get to the meat of some of these questions that it is almost impossible to deal with in a committee as large as the committee of the whole house. To go into detail on some of these questions which should be gone into by a parliament that undertakes to say it is doing its duty in respect to health and welfare would provoke from all sides complaints about taking up too much time. I will readily agree that to study a great many of these questions in the detail in which they should be studied, if done in this parliament, would involve a wastage of man-power. So in that respect a standing committee of the house would save a great deal of time; and I believe we should devise means to economize the time of the house and direct the energies of hon. members to better advantage than can be done in committee of the whole.

Moreover, there is a great deal of information we have no opportunity to dig into in this house. It would be beneficial if, through such a committee, we could devise a procedure which would enable us to bring officials of the department before the committee. I am not at all deprecating the efforts of the minister, this minister or any other; but it would enable us to obtain the thoughts and ideas of the senior officials, who in the case of this department are very important officials indeed. We could be given their advice and recommendations in regard to policy, instead of having all our questions answered at second hand by a minister. What happens? Somebody asks a question that involves detailed information. It is necessary for the officials sitting on the floor of the house to try to brief the minister in whispered conversations in a matter of seconds, so that he can answer these questions.

Mr. MARTIN: You have not tested me yet.

Mr. FLEMING: It is only because of my fondness for the minister that I have refrained from testing him. I am very fond of the minister, and I have to be careful of him.

Mr. MARTIN: The respect and love is mutual.

Mr. FLEMING: Thank you; I am very glad to have that assurance.

There is another aspect to this matter. Parliament does not provide an opportunity at the present time for doing justice to some valuable proposals that are made from time to time both in the house and outside the

[Mr. Fleming.]

house with reference to measures of health and welfare and social security. What happens? On many occasions organized labour has brought forward most valuable suggestions, but what becomes of them? They are made to a minister and go into the files of his department. When does parliament hear about them? Parliament does not hear about them until at long last the government decides to move an inch in some direction. There is no opportunity of breaking down the distressing inertia of this government unless we have a chance, through a committee organization, to sift these proposals through and obtain views upon them on the part of senior, competent officials of the departments. At the present time, we are not doing justice to proposals of that kind. And there is support for this idea on the government benches. Let a free expression be given on the other side of the house in this connection, and I venture to say that under those circumstances we would be setting up such a committee in very short order; the need for it has been so abundantly proven.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we have had many useful suggestions in the course of this debate, and I have not the slightest intention of reviewing the ground which has already been so well covered. Mention has been made of the shortage of hospitals. That shortage is serious. There are other shortages that could be coupled with it, and one is the shortage of nurses. The Minister of Veterans Affairs, in a press release which appears as a Canadian Press dispatch under date of April 29, had this to say about the large number of nurses who had been serving as such in the armed forces during the war:

A survey of former nursing sisters in the armed forces shows that about 44.5 per cent still are employed as nurses, Veterans Minister Mackenzie announced today.

The survey was based on replies from 1,571 of the 4,400 who served in the armed forces during the second great war, and showed that 27.9 per cent are busy with home duties, 17.9 per cent taking DVA rehabilitation training, 3 per cent unemployed, 2.4 per cent in poor health, 2.2 per cent awaiting suitable employment and 2.1 per cent employed in an occupation other than nursing.

We are faced with a serious shortage of nurses in this country. This is also borne out by the return which was referred to on an earlier occasion recently brought down by the minister, in which it was indicated that the latest estimate of the present shortage of nurses in this country is 8,700. We wish to hear some concrete proposals for encouraging more young women to train as nurses. We wish to hear some concrete proposals for