

Supply—National Defence

In so far as the estimates are concerned, the minister has said that apparently we do not want details. I assure the minister that we do want details, and we are going to get details, and we are going to get exact details, and they are going to be asked for in a way that they were not asked for before.

The way to find out what the details are that are required is to assure us that these estimates will be called, and then during the time that the minister is away the figures and the statements which will be required to deal with these estimates in the house can be prepared. That would actually indicate some willingness on the part of the government to submit these very large sums to an examination in the house. But unless an assurance can be given as to when we are going to examine national defence estimates again hon. members have not only a right but are in duty bound to avail themselves of every opportunity to discuss this subject.

Mr. Abbott: May I appeal again for an orderly discussion of the business which is before the house? There are three items under the heading of national defence to clean up details. One is to provide an extra amount for the purchase and erection of headstones for world war I graves. We can criticize that item if we wish. The second one is to pay a pension to Mrs. Alice Smuck. The third is to provide \$4 million to purchase certain admiralty property in St. John's, Newfoundland. The Minister of National Defence is not here. I am prepared to give a fairly full explanation of these three items. These are the items we are asking to have voted tonight. It is important to public business to get these supplementary items voted. There are two items in particular, one of which is the item for unemployment relief in Newfoundland, which it is essential, if these commitments are to be met, should be passed by this house and by the other place and receive royal assent within the next day or two. I would appeal to the house. The Minister of National Defence expects to be away for about a week on this matter of the meeting of the defence ministers on the Atlantic pact. I feel sure that an early opportunity will be afforded to resume the discussion of the general defence estimates for the coming year. All I am asking tonight on national defence is the three items that I have outlined.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, after all there is a very simple way of dealing with this, as indicated when I rose the first time. A discussion of this in detail, or a general discussion, could be brought up on these items.

Mr. Abbott: It could not be on these items.

Mr. Drew: A discussion in detail or a general discussion which could be brought up on these items would not be called for if there was some assurance as to when we shall be dealing with the general items of national defence for the coming year. Will the minister give us at least this assurance, that the estimates of the Department of National Defence now before the house will be brought before the house again definitely before the end of April?

Mr. Abbott: Yes.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Yes, when the house convenes on the 17th I think we will have—I cannot give a definite assurance because that is—

Mr. Drew: Oh, well—

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Will the hon. member please refer to standing order 17 which reads:

Whenever government business has precedence, government orders may be called in such sequence as the government may think fit.

I had forgotten that rule completely, and that order since I have been leading the house. I have tried to be pleasant to all hon. members, but to ask me a month ahead to give an assurance that on such and such a day we shall have these estimates before the house is asking something that I cannot give.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, this again is simply trying to becloud the issue. The point that we have before us is perfectly simple. The estimates of the Department of National Defence calling for a commitment of \$628 million are before us.

Mr. Abbott: Not tonight.

Mr. Drew: They are before the house.

Mr. Abbott: Not tonight.

Mr. Drew: In so far as this house is concerned it is in a position tonight to discuss national defence. The question before the house is whether we are going to have the general estimates before us. I have asked a perfectly simple question: Will those general estimates be brought forward by the end of April? It is not an answer to say that the government can call government business at any time. If the government continues to do it that way, then there certainly will be the kind of confusion we have had ever since this session began.

In this particular case, if there is a bona fide intention really to deal with national defence estimates, then the assurance can be