

War Appropriation Bill

for the actual material, as received by the engineer, is not forwarded as promptly as it should be to the paying or checking authority. There has been a heavy burden of work on the engineer. The other is the fact that sometimes—and here I mention the department of my colleague the Minister of Munitions and Supply—the notice of acceptance of the tender, which contains particulars of the material which is to be supplied and the price for which the contract has been let, does not go forward in sufficient time to be received by the engineer on the ground, and he has to wait until he receives it in order that he may check the material received with the specifications which were required in accordance with the acceptance of tender; so that there may be some delay in that way.

I think the only practical thing to give my hon. friend is the actual payments which have been made up to a fixed date, I will say up to January 31; I think I can give that to him. I should like him to understand that commitments can only be estimates in most cases. There are two classes of **commitments**. There is such a thing as a commitment made when the article has been actually bought but payment has not been made. In that case we know definitely what is the price, but generally that is the smallest of the two classes. In the other class we put forward what we call a contract demand on the Department of Munitions and Supply, asking them to purchase certain articles for us. We have estimated that the cost may be so much. Whether that will be the cost or whether the cost will be greater or less depends on the tenders received by the Department of Munitions and Supply.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): That is hardly a commitment.

Mr. RALSTON: It can be a commitment only for the purpose of endeavouring, as best we can, to have the treasury officer note something opposite that particular vote as the estimated dollar obligation which will be incurred when that transaction is finally completed. Therefore I would prefer not to put those contract demands on record. I could do it easily enough, I suppose, but I do not think it would give my hon. friend very much information.

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): Along with the actual disbursements as of January 31 would the minister be prepared to give an estimate of the amount his department believes will be required in order to complete the whole project at Debert, in order that we might have the total contemplated expenditure on that whole project?

[Mr. Ralston.]

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): You do not mean the pay of the soldiers; you mean the cost of building the camp?

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): Just the cost of developing the camp itself.

Mr. RALSTON: I do not mind giving an estimate. My hon. friend understands what an estimate is. They do their best, but as my hon. friend can understand services may be added afterwards which throw the estimate out, and naturally I do not want any reflections on the engineers because their target has been overshoot or they have not succeeded in keeping within the estimate given.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): With that reservation understood, could the minister give the figure?

Mr. RALSTON: Yes; I have a figure in mind now. I can tell my hon. friend now that from the information I get the Debert camp may cost \$5,500,000.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Does that include the airport?

Mr. RALSTON: No, that does not include the airport.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): How much more for that?

Mr. RALSTON: The airport, of course, is in addition. It must be understood, of course, that with the possibility of changes in requirements such a figure has to be more in the nature of what one of the officers in my department calls a "guesstimate" instead of an estimate. We try however to see that it is at least an intelligent guess based on whatever probabilities can be reasonably foreseen.

Mr. POWER: I have the figures with respect to the Debert airport, with the same reservation that was made by the Minister of National Defence. The estimated sum required for the buildings at Debert is \$829,517. I have not the figure in connection with the runways, but I would say they would cost probably another \$150,000 or \$200,000.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): That is about \$1,000,000 altogether.

Mr. POWER: Yes, I would say about a million. It may be that Debert will be still further developed during the course of the coming summer, in which case the expenditure will be very much greater. The buildings are completed; the runways will be completed about April 1.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): That includes all the hangars?