

Supply—Transport

sufficient information to justify the increase in these very important items.

Mr. Green: Mr. Chairman, I thank the minister for giving the committee the statement which he has just read. It should be very helpful in the discussion of the different estimates of his department. I noticed that in each category of expenditure the motto seems to be "higher still and higher". No doubt many of these increases are necessary, but I would point out to the minister that we shall expect greater things from his department during this fiscal year than we did in the past year because of the extra money being allotted to him.

Mr. Chevrier: We have been doing fairly well in the department.

Mr. Green: If the minister is to get all these extra millions, then I believe we are entitled to expect better results from him and his department.

The item now under discussion is the general item, and today I propose to bring up two or three matters and other members of the official opposition will be doing the same thing. We would ask the minister to deal with these different questions when he speaks again on this item, rather than delaying his answers until some particular item is before the house. I ask that because last year, for example, we had the experience of raising the question of Canada's shipping policy on the first item; the minister said that would be dealt with when we came to the vote for the Canadian maritime commission. Unfortunately, by the time we got down to that vote the session was practically over, and there was no opportunity for a careful discussion of the policy. I think it would be much wiser if we could have these main questions of policy cleared up in the discussion on the administration item.

Mr. Chevrier: I do not want to interrupt the hon. member, and I have no objection to dealing with it in that way. I want an understanding from the hon. member, however, that when we come to the particular item we will not then have a second discussion on it. It is as broad as it is long, and I could deal with it at the outset if that is the wish of the committee, but I do not think I should be asked to deal with the matter again when we come to the item for the maritime commission or whatever it may be.

Mr. Green: I think the minister will find we shall be only too glad to co-operate with him when these items do come up. We have no intention of having a repetition of the arguments, and we are just as anxious to

get the session ended in a businesslike way as the minister and the other members of the government.

First of all I ask the minister to make a statement of the policy of the government at the present time with regard to the Canadian merchant navy. I refer, of course, to ocean-going ships. I notice that in the estimates of the department there is a new item, No. 492, which reads as follows:

Degaussing and strengthening of sea-going merchant ships of Canadian registry of 1,000 gross tons and over, \$500,000.

In the explanations which were given to the press by the Department of Transport concerning the item, we find that this is supposed to commence equipping Canadian merchant vessels for service during a war; that the idea of the degaussing is as a protection against submarines, and the strengthening of the ships is so that they may be able to mount guns. In the press dispatches given at the time the estimates were brought down, we also find a statement that 79 ships in Canada's deep-sea trade will be equipped, along with 72 over 1,000 tons in the coastal business. The dispatch goes on to say that another group of Canadian-owned ships under British registry is expected to be handled the same way by British authorities and that there are about 80 vessels in the British registered group.

I do not know whether or not that figure of 79 ocean-going Canadian ships is correct today. That is one piece of information we should like to get from the minister. I would point out to the committee that at the end of the war Canada had 258 ocean-going vessels. I believe that there are now some 93 of these Canadian-built vessels which have been transferred to United Kingdom registry. Many others were sold. Apparently we are now in a position where our merchant navy has been reduced to 79 ships, or approximately that number. Furthermore, I understand that these ships are all old, slow cargo vessels. They were built during the war and none of them are fast, modern freighters, although the merchant navies of the other maritime nations, in these intervening years, have been receiving fast freighters. That is a situation which calls for serious consideration by the Canadian government and the Canadian people.

I need only point out to the minister that the subject was dealt with by the Canadian maritime commission in more than one of their reports. I have here the second report covering the period from April 1, 1948, to March 31, 1949, and at page 21 of that report