

Supply—National Defence

gave as one example not the general item but the detail: "Major procurement of equipment, \$406,167,927." Even with a pencil and paper, if the minister were prepared to go through every detail that made it up, hon. members could not possibly follow it in an orderly way sitting in this house and obtaining it by question and answer; but there is one simple and obvious way to do it. The Minister of National Defence I am perfectly sure has, in the mass of material in these two great black boxes that he has beside him, fairly substantial detail in regard to these items. If a committee were meeting and dealing with these subjects then that committee would be entitled to have a statement of these various real details that go to make up that total.

Do not let us be misled by any suggestion that contained in that total are pieces of secret equipment. There is not a single hon. member in this house who would not be prepared at any time to take a reasonable explanation that some particular thing was really secret. Hon. members would soon be able to determine whether it was secret or not. But the broad answer that it is not in the public interest, which has been given so often in this house, is altogether too often simply a statement that the government does not think it is in the public interest for hon. members and the people of Canada to know how far they have failed to carry out the assurances they have given the public on earlier occasions.

The Minister of National Defence does not leave the members of this house with any real opportunity to go into detail by simply confronting us with a huge item like that, an item that is more than the total budget of this country for all purposes only a few years ago, and then say: You ask the questions and I will give the details. The Minister of National Defence knows how it would be done in any businesslike examination. Set the things out in detail. If there are subjects that should not be disclosed let them be so indicated, but the total given, and then hon. members will be able to discuss those with some knowledge of what the facts really are.

I come back to the fact that when, according to the statements made by the government, inflation and the defence of the country go hand in hand as the two greatest problems we face, then the time has come to be sure that we have something more than guesswork in regard to all this, to be sure that we have the real facts. And once again with all earnestness I urge the minister to reconsider the position that he has taken and to agree to setting up a committee, and to adjourn the consideration of these items, as will be done in the case of the Department

[Mr. Drew.]

of External Affairs, and refer all these items to such a committee of the house.

Mr. Pouliot: I have listened with great interest to the eloquent speech of the leader of the opposition. His conclusion was for the establishment of a select committee on national defence. I am for it, and I will surprise the hon. gentleman when I tell him that we have it already. This is a committee of the house, and this is a committee on national defence, and when my hon. friend the leader of the opposition speaks it cannot be otherwise. This is a select standing committee of the house. Still, Mr. Chairman, there is more to it.

I listened to the hon. gentleman before dinner. I was moved by his speech. Then I had to eat a little to get some strength to listen to the continuation of his speech. I was wide awake. I did not miss a word. He spoke very well, but he complained that he had not received detailed information with regard to an item in the estimates.

Mr. Fulton: Any item in the estimates.

Mr. Pouliot: I would remind the hon. gentleman of one thing. He made a statement, but did not ask a question. The minister could not guess what his question would be. He asked no questions; he made a statement. That is not detailed enough. I am sure that if he had asked the minister for further information he would have got it.

Mr. Drew: I have.

Mr. Pouliot: No, no.

Mr. Fulton: Yes, yes.

Mr. Pouliot: I heard the hon. gentleman complaining of the fact that it was not detailed enough.

Mr. Fraser: It is not.

Mr. Pouliot: I did not hear him ask any questions of the minister. I am sure that the minister, who is familiar with the constitutional and parliamentary practice, just as is the hon. gentleman, would give him any possible information about expenditures. That is why I am all in favour of a committee like this one to discuss national defence, as a matter of expenditures and as a matter of dollars and cents. But when it comes to a matter of strategy, when it comes to the national defence, proper, of this country, I do not see why it should be discussed in public.

To my mind the treatment of General Marshall at the hands of a committee of congress is disgraceful. Here is this man—

Mr. Fulton: So also was the treatment of General MacArthur.