

Supply—External Affairs

I think the house every now and again should stop and look behind some of these large figures. It is altogether too easy, indeed deceptively easy, to take these large figures and not make a detailed examination of some of the expenditures that lie behind them.

Now, in connection with our post at Rio de Janeiro, I think the house ought to be aware of some of the information at least that was obtained by members of the committee at sessions of the external affairs committee by questioning officials of the department. In this regard, I think the house should be aware of the extent of the expenditure in acquisition of the embassy property at Rio de Janeiro, and also of the expenditures on the building.

It happens that the department had an option at one time to purchase for an embassy the residence of a Canadian living in Rio de Janeiro, Major MacCrimmon, a senior official of the Brazilian Traction Company for, I think, the amount of \$80,000. That option, according to the wisdom of the department, was not exercised and over a period of several years the department showed interest in a property which eventually it purchased at a price of \$350,000. The actual amount in Canadian funds was \$341,700. That was only the purchase price of the building. The department then found it necessary to spend \$25,000 in the renovation of that building. But that provided only an empty building, so the department incurred expenditures which will total \$95,000 for furnishings. The aggregate of those figures is \$470,000 for that one embassy and the furnishings.

Canada has now a good many of these embassies abroad, and I think hon. members will need to ask themselves whether this expenditure on this one embassy is justified under the circumstances. The expenditure has been incurred, and it is not a situation where the committee can undo what has been done, but this is the sort of information which I submit the committee should ponder well in approaching the proposed vote of \$2 million for capital expenditures abroad for the housing of our diplomatic representatives.

Let me say at the outset that having seen a good many of our posts in different places abroad I am not disposed to be narrow or cheese-paring in my attitude toward the acquisition of properties abroad as embassies for our diplomatic representatives but—

Mr. Dickey: Why do it?

Mr. Fleming: If my hon. friend will keep his wisdom to himself I think we will make

more progress. There is, however, a great difference between being reasonable in these matters, as I think most of us would wish to be, and approving extravagant expenditures. I should like to submit to the committee that in this expenditure of \$470,000 to house one Canadian ambassador abroad we have a very striking example of extravagance.

We had comparisons in the committee with some other embassies abroad or posts of high commissioners. It seems to me that there is no reason why Rio should be regarded as a place where the expenditure of these amounts should be proper and be condoned, when in the capitals of other countries which are as important in the world family of nations as is Brazil the capital expenditures which are thought to be adequate are only a fraction of this sum. For instance, we were reminded that our property in Dublin for the high commissioner there is very modest by comparison. But I am not putting this simply on the basis of comparison with what exists in other capitals. I think the committee would wish to look at the intrinsic merits of this particular expenditure I have referred to, which totals \$470,000. Let us see what was said by the officials of the department to justify this figure. Mr. Macdonnell representing the department was asked who made the decisions in regard to these matters, and he replied:

The problem of selecting the right scale of furnishings is a difficult one which we face constantly. I do not believe that we are entirely our own masters in this field. Some regard has to be paid to local conditions, and to the type of establishments that other countries comparable to Canada maintain. Our scales of representation, of course, vary a good deal from one country to another. In some places they can be relatively modest, partly because of the customs of the country and partly because of the scale of prices when we come to buy land or property or to pay rent. It happens that in Brazil prices are high and the standards of representation are pretty high. I think perhaps the brief historical summary which I gave will indicate how long the department spent in exploring this situation before making any recommendations to the government. It was our view that this was about the best purchase that we were likely to be able to make for as far ahead as we could see. We spent five years, really, in looking for it. The house is a large one and the furnishings have to measure up to a certain standard.

In dealing with the standard, as I said, I am not one of those who would take a narrow or cheese-paring view, but—

An hon. Member: No, no.

Mr. Fleming: If hon. members do not wish to contribute to our progress with this, they can carry on as they are; or do they wish to obstruct?

Mr. Lesage: Blackmail.