

Supply—National Defence

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, it is not surprising that the Minister of National Defence finds so little reason to be concerned about the information that he gives to the House of Commons when he has a demonstration of this kind, indicating that no matter how little information the committee gets, the Liberal members will act as rubber stamps just the same, and he can get their support.

An hon. Member: Get on with defence. Let us hear about that. Say some more.

The Chairman: Order.

An hon. Member: We cannot stop him.

Mr. Drew: That is another profound remark, "we cannot stop him", also from one of the Liberal members. I assure you, Mr. Chairman, that you cannot stop me from saying what I intend to say with regard to this extremely important subject.

Mr. Sinclair: You go on like Tennyson's brook.

Mr. Drew: I have already said to the Minister of National Defence—I agree that this has been said since 1949; and it was said before that—that the members of the House of Commons should have the assurance of continuing access, through a select committee, to information as to how the defence preparations of this country are proceeding. On one occasion the Minister of National Defence made the statement that the reason for not appointing such a committee was that it would take from the government the responsibility for policy which is theirs. No suggestion at any time has been made that the responsibility of the government for policy should be in any way limited or abridged. What has been urged—and it has been urged over and over again—is that a select committee on national defence be set up in exactly the same way that a committee is set up to deal with external affairs, so that the members of the house may have an opportunity of discussing these matters in detail and finding out what the facts are.

Mr. Fulton: As with the Canadian National Railways and Trans-Canada Air Lines.

Mr. Drew: Committees are also set up to deal with such matters as the Canadian National Railways, Trans-Canada Air Lines and other public operations of that kind. Why should the Department of National Defence alone not be susceptible to the ordinary supervision of a committee, just as are these other extremely important departments? Surely the Department of External Affairs deals with just as secret material as does the Department of National Defence; and yet the Department of External Affairs is at this very time seeking the approval of a motion

to refer to a committee the examination of their own accounts. The Minister of National Defence heard the very excellent speech made by the hon. member for Quebec South. That speech, made by the dean of the House of Commons, illustrated what is thought by hon. members with long years of experience as to the necessity for bringing back under parliament itself effective control over the most important subjects that are being considered by this body.

If such a committee were set up, it should be set up as a continuing committee, authorized to sit not only when the house is in session but when the session has prorogued. Members from every party with special knowledge of these subjects could be appointed, and I feel sure, Mr. Chairman, that if such a committee were meeting, were supervising the details of national defence, hon. members would be satisfied in almost every case with their reports without any further consideration of the detail beyond that which had already taken place. That is what we find happens when other committees are set up to deal with extremely important but involved details of government business.

I am not certain that the government has yet advanced to the point of parliamentary maturity that it would follow Westminster to the extent of appointing as chairman the man who is obviously best qualified. But this house is in the fortunate position of having as a possible chairman of that committee a man with unique experience, the hon. member for Nanaimo, who could sit as the chairman of this committee with experience such as no other member of this house possesses. But whether the government was prepared to appoint a member of the opposition as chairman, or insisted upon a member of their own party as chairman, would not in any way lessen the opportunity to have a real examination of all these details by a committee that could sit down in an orderly way and proceed to deal with the thing in a businesslike manner, if men like the hon. member for Nanaimo and other experienced veterans in this house were sitting on such a committee and asking the questions and obtaining the information which could be obtained.

In the closing part of his remarks the Minister of National Defence did say that he wanted these accounts examined in detail. These accounts cannot be examined in detail in this house unless the Minister of National Defence will take a preliminary step. That preliminary step would be to prepare a detailed statement of every one of these items which are now called details. This afternoon I referred to some of the so-called details. I just