

Department of Militia and Defence. These estimates contemplate the House being invited to vote \$1,250,000 for the Department of Militia and Defence. Some years ago complaints were made to the House and to a committee of this House, against the character of the supplies, the uniforms and materials generally dealt out to the militia. I took the responsibility of bringing that matter before a committee of inquiry. A large amount of evidence was taken, and the committee made a report. That report was submitted to this House, and was the subject of discussion. I contended at that time that the evidence showed a most unsound system in the purchase of militia supplies, the result of which was bad material, bad workmanship and consequent loss to the Government. However, the argument and the evidence fell upon deaf ears, the House declaring itself perfectly satisfied with the administration, with the system in force, and the way it was being worked out. Not an hon. gentleman on the other side of the House was found prepared openly and publicly to express his disapproval of that condition of affairs, although some military men among them who recorded their votes in approval of the administration, had been almost in open insurrection against the department by reason of the existence of these very grievances. Nevertheless the House told the country that everything was being done that the public interest demanded, that the system in force was all that was needed. What was the system? A member of Parliament through the guise of a corporation contractor for the sale of supplies to the department; no system whereby public competition was invited; but the whole arrangement appeared to be either the result of corruption or negligence, certainly a violation of the true spirit of Parliament in allowing a member of Parliament to be a contractor to these enormous sums each year. There being those relations between the contractors and the Government of which I have spoken, it followed that there was not that proper supervision over the actions of the contractor that otherwise would have obtained, and the result was, whether through political influence or whatever it might be, there were sold to this Government thousands of dollars worth of material and supplies for the use of our militia that were in no sense in compliance with the conditions of the contract, and in no sense were fit supplies. But as I have said, it was idle to talk to the House. The evidence was conclusive, we had the testimony of veterans in the service, whose testimony was certainly not likely to be adverse to the Government, if the facts would not warrant it, everything was ready for a reformation, except sound public opinion in this House and in the Government. Matters went on as before, and last November the officer commanding Her Majesty's forces, I suppose, from a sense of duty, was obliged to put himself on record in regard to this state of affairs; and

before this House resolves itself into Committee of Supply to vote another million and a-quarter to maintain the Department of Militia and Defence it is due that assurances should be given that there has been a change of method in regard to the management of the militia force. Permit me to read to the House from the report to which I have referred, which is dated 30th June last. Under the head of equipment, I find this paragraph in the report of the officer commanding the Department of Militia:

The condition of a large proportion of the equipment in use in the militia, is even worse than I have already represented. Not only is a great part of it worn out with age, but much of that which is issued as new is of the worst possible quality. I have seen saddlery and other equipment, when issued fresh from store, which failed to endure the ordinary usage of a twelve days' camp. I have seen boots that had been issued to soldiers, the leather of which had no more consistency than paper.

Speaking of stores, the commanding officer goes on, in a later paragraph, to say:

The system under which clothing, arms, equipment and military stores are now procured and issued to the militia, appears to me open to very serious objections.

The responsibility for purchasing stores, making contracts, viewing the stores furnished by contractors, as well as for their custody and final issue, is all vested in one office, regardless of the conflict of opposing interests, affected by the performance of duties of such widely different character. It would seem more in accordance with business principles to vest the responsibility for purchase and contracts in the financial or civil branch of the department, and give to the military executive the duties of custody, inspection and issue. This would be more easy since the amount of stores (exclusive of obsolete and condemned articles) in possession of the department amounts to little more than an "expense store" calculated to meet the current requirements of the militia, but not providing for any reserve.

I submit that the House is entitled to guarantees on these certain points. We are entitled to be told, first, is the manufacture of the clothing of the militia of Canada directly or indirectly under the same management as before? In the second place, are those contracts filled by the same contractors? I do not mean by a new deal, because I understand that, in order to get over the criticisms that were very properly directed against the system some years ago, the then contractor with the Government has become a sub-contractor and another person appears as direct contractor, while, I understand, the work of manufacturing the clothing goes on in the same establishment as before. I submit that it is due to the House that it should be informed whether the clothing is manufactured at the same establishments as heretofore. If so, with the record supplied to the Committee on Public Accounts, which this House said was wholly valueless evidence, and with the testimony of the officer commanding, I think the time has come when we should treat those contractors as all persons treat unworthy contractors, men who will not live