

*Business of Supply*

from one account to which it was previously voted to another. As everyone knows, I am sure, the Financial Administration Act says this cannot be done. It is not possible to transfer money voted for one purpose to another account where it may be used for another purpose. In fact, once a single appropriation has been made in the estimates a department must submit details of how it intends to spend that money. Any change in the original breakdown of how the money is to be spent must meet with the approval of Treasury Board. But the transfer of money from one vote in the appropriations to another is expressly forbidden and cannot be carried out, even with Treasury Board approval, unless there is parliamentary approval for that action.

What has been happening in these cases is that not all the money voted for other items has been spent and the departments in question say: Let us not go before parliament and ask for another \$1 million—that would not look good—let us transfer the money we have left over, and we will get by if we insert a \$1 item in the estimates. That demonstrates the validity of what I have been saying, that parliament has lost control over expenditures. The computer turns out bills in the form of \$1 estimates; parliament has the right to discuss and vote on the items, but the job they undertake to do has already been done. As a matter of fact, most of these moneys that are being transferred have already been spent. This is March, and the fiscal year ends on March 31.

We are not children, Mr. Speaker; we know how these things work. We know that departments may be short in one area and long in another and they decide to spend the total amount of money they have been voted before the end of the year. Really, these supplementary estimates are a fiction—and I could use stronger language to describe them. The computer age will not overtake us in 1984; if we have lost control over our expenditures, it has already arrived.

● (3:30 p.m.)

I was a member of the Special Committee on Procedure which developed the new rules under which we are operating. I agreed that it was a farce to discuss many of these items in committee of supply, and that it was better to refer them to the various standing committees. I hope the various committees will be allowed sufficient staff and facilities to enable them to do a good job. But with the government legislating by means of items in the

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supplementary estimates it becomes very difficult for Members of Parliament to keep in mind the relationship between the government and the way money is spent. As I suggested a moment ago, it may be necessary to develop more machinery or some new way to keep parliament in the picture. It cannot be done here with only three days to discuss supplementary estimates with Your Honour in the chair. It was not done when we had a committee of supply, and I doubt that it was done in the committee on miscellaneous estimates. I think it will be necessary to have a standing committee which would replace the Comptroller General. Such a committee could check on what is going on at the start rather than after the fact.

It is in that light, Mr. Speaker, that we complain about this whole process. In the whole picture, it has now proceeded beyond the danger point. Parliament has now lost control over the public purse. This is underlined and brought forcibly to our attention by what is before us now, namely, 29 pages of estimates, most of which are merely asking the house to approve the shuffling around of new ideas, new appropriations and new authorities that the government's financial computers have set up for approval.

There is one item to which I referred when I talked about these items having legislative effect, not only the \$1 items but some of the larger ones, which I would like to comment on. I refer to vote 5b under the heading of Treasury Board, contingencies, in the amount of \$105 million. We are far enough post-C. D. Howe that even \$105 million is not a large sum of money.

We are being asked to approve \$105 million under vote 5b. We are being asked to approve of the proposition that money approved for the 1968-69 year for public service salary increases which is not spent before March 31 can be used in the new fiscal year for that purpose. It has been a rule in parliamentary control of financial matters that moneys not spent during the fiscal year lapse. As long as that rule was in effect, the government was under certain pressure to reach agreement with its employees, formerly by negotiation and now by collective bargaining, before the end of that fiscal year.

When in Winnipeg over the week end I found that the usual grievances against the government still persisted. People want to know when something is going to be done about old age pensions, housing, and the pensions of retired civil servants. But I had a