

## Supply—Public Works

**Hon. Howard C. Green (Minister of Public Works):** Mr. Speaker, I find that there is voluminous correspondence which will take some time to have copied. I have no doubt that the hon. member already has copies of the correspondence he requires.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Has the hon. gentleman himself read the correspondence?

**Mr. Green:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very personal matter.

## SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Sevigny in the chair.

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

328. General administration, \$8,536,892.

**The Chairman:** The Department of Public Works, vote No. 328; this item will be found on page 67 of the blue book, the details on page 457.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Mr. Chairman, I must begin by apologizing to the minister for my regrettable and unavoidable absence last Friday; but in my capacity as the member for one of the constituencies in Newfoundland I felt that it was desirable to visit my constituency.

**An hon. Member:** For a change.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** While I was there I had an opportunity to investigate the speed with which certain of the public works were being carried on in that province by the hon. gentleman's department. I was rather astonished, I must say, on reading the minister's opening statement in *Hansard* for last Friday, which I have done rather carefully, to find that the minister was taking great credit to himself and to the present government for the acceleration of the works that are being carried on across the country by his department. I would not presume to express any view about acceleration in most parts of the country, but I do know that in the province of Newfoundland, where we have had what I am told is one of the earliest springs on record and where there would have been an opportunity to get ahead with work very early this year, there is a deplorable absence of starts on any of the public works about which I was able to inquire.

I must say I am very pleased that the hon. gentleman has seen fit to make provision for certain works in the town of Bonavista, works that are very badly needed, works that were planned by the preceding administration.

**Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert):** And never proceeded with further.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I will come to that in a moment if the hon. gentleman can possess his soul in patience. I noticed that the minister also made a good many references to the St. John's harbour development, about which I intend to say a word shortly. The one thing that is conspicuous about the St. John's harbour development is that so far as I can see nothing whatever is happening about it outside of the newspapers, where there is plenty happening.

Now, sir, I think there is no doubt that in one way the minister's statement as found on page 901 of *Hansard* for Friday last is quite correct. When he talked about accelerated construction, I think there is no doubt that is true in this very limited sense. I believe it is common knowledge—I do not think the minister would deny this for a moment—that when the present administration took office last June they thought the boom was going to continue and they hoped that by stopping public works wherever they could, decelerating wherever they could and slowing things down generally, they could make an apparent saving and justify the claims they had made during the 1957 election campaign that they could save half a billion dollars.

I give the minister full credit for realizing, around October or November, that this was a very unwise thing to have done, and about October or November the government very belatedly began to rush ahead with those projects which had been delayed, in some cases for three or four months. The consequence was that they were able to show quite a considerable record of activity in the winter months, activity that should have taken place last summer. In that sense, and in that limited sense only, the minister can claim some credit for accelerated construction.

I think the minister's claim, also found on page 901, that 97 per cent of the allotments for the year 1957-58 had been spent, is a very creditable record indeed. I think it is a remarkable achievement. In my opinion it is a great credit to the efficiency of the department and its officials, and all the greater credit to them because of the pause last summer. But I should like to remind the members of the committee that these estimates, of which 97 per cent was spent, were the estimates of the Liberal government of last year; and what the minister said at page 901 is a great and deserved tribute to the administration of the department by Hon. Robert Winters and to the care taken in treasury board by Hon. Walter Harris in seeing that honest estimates were made. There can be no possible credit to the govern-