

Supply—Trade and Commerce

year may not call for him. He was employed until recently. When he left I do not know.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Would the minister get that information?

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): No, I will not.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): What was the minister's answer?

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): I said no.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): I shall return to that point in a moment. Further down I notice that we are employing a canal man. Would the minister tell us where the canal is located? I had better remain on my feet until such time as the minister wishes the floor.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): I can tell my hon. friend that we operate the power house at the mouth of the Rideau river. The canal man is employed at the power house. We call him a canal man. My hon. friend will probably ask me now why we call him a canal man. I do not know that, but I do not think it is important to my hon. friend to know it either.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Apart from the sarcasm, that was a very reasonable and fair answer. Now I know why the department needs a canal man.

I am perturbed—and I return to my previous point—because last night in the discussion of another department we had a case where this same minister stated something very definitely and then admitted only a moment later that he did not know whether or not he was right and that he had just pulled the figure out of the air. I can give the minister the exact quotation if he thinks that is an unfair version of his statement.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): Who is complaining? My hon. friend takes himself much too seriously. The only thing I doubt is the wisdom of the electors who sent him here.

Mr. Macdonnell: We doubt the wisdom of a lot of electors, too.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): I do not take myself seriously but I have taken the minister seriously, and I realize that I was in error in so doing. I realize there are times when the minister will say almost anything that pops into his head if he feels it will satisfy somebody on the other side or shut them up.

Mr. Hosking: That is not true. He is one minister who does not do that.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): He demonstrated that last night. Last night the minister was asking for a very large sum

of money in connection with a project which he knew he had no intention of carrying through when he came before the committee. Despite the fact he had no intention of carrying it through, he insisted that the money still be provided. I did not make an issue of the matter at that time. But now we have another case involving a specific example, and I am pursuing it because it is a test of the minister's estimates as such.

We have three pages of detailed figures here. If the government is doing the best job it can, we on this side of the house have every reason to put our trust in these figures when we are examining the estimates. If we have some reason to believe that the figures are not right—and I am beginning to feel that at least in certain cases that is so—then it is right and proper that we should test the figures just as any good auditor would in making an audit, or as any good accountant would in examining the books of a company.

Here is a specific case. It is a little microcosm of the whole estimates. I have asked the minister as politely as I know how for an explanation regarding a specific position. The minister said he did not know. I can understand that because no minister could be expected to know the myriad details of his entire department. I then asked the minister if he would please send for the information. That is the point of departure between the minister and myself, because the minister said no. It is my interpretation that we are entitled to information we ask for on these estimates. I realize it will make me most unpopular—

Mr. Lesage: You do not need that to be unpopular.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace):—but those of us who in this case are on the side of the angels can quite realize that the devils on the other side may find us unappealing at times. After the explanation I have given the minister and the reasonable request I have made, I wonder whether he would consider getting that information for me in order that we can have some idea whether this item was put in after it was obvious that the man was not going to be needed, which I believe to be so because the minister has told us that the airport was closed down last summer or before. I think we have a very clear indication here that some of these estimates are being padded in order to build them up and get a larger amount than the department actually needs so that various amounts can be moved around at the discretion of departmental officials.