

Business of Supply

deal with estimates, but so far as actual control of the public purse is concerned, it has gone.

Perhaps we should try to get back that control. I am not one of those who say we should return to the old methods that worked when the budget was a mere fraction of what it is today and when life in Canada was much simpler. It may be we are going to have to use other methods. Perhaps we will have to develop something in the nature of a public accounts committee of the house that will deal with expenditures before they are made rather than after. I think it is fair to say that since it has been the practice to appoint an opposition member as chairman, the public accounts committee has done a good job. But it can deal only with expenditures after they have been made.

● (3:20 p.m.)

The fact is that every month, every week and every day millions of dollars of public money are being spent. Those expenditures go through a computer or machine with which we in parliament have only a passing acquaintance. The point the hon. member for Peace River and I are trying to make, and which other hon. members no doubt will take up, is that the way these supplementary estimates are being handled demonstrates that parliamentary control over expenditures has gone through the window.

Reference has already been made to the fact that before us we have about 29 pages of supplementary estimates, most of them being made up of \$1 items. There are 51 of them, as a matter of fact. Every one of these \$1 items is either a piece of legislation being put through parliament by means of a shortcut or a proposal to transfer money from one account to another, something the Financial Administration Act says cannot be done.

The practice of inserting \$1 items has been growing in recent years. I recall occasions in the past when 25 such items were included in the estimates; I do not recall ever before seeing 51. In the past when nine or ten \$1 items were included in the estimates we objected so strongly that the government withdrew some of them and promised to reverse the trend. Nevertheless, the trend to include more such items has increased in recent years to the point where today the computer looks after our expenditures and we, in parliament, carry on a somewhat irrelevant debate on them.

In these supplementary estimates the \$1 items may be divided into two main categories. One group of items legislates. In other words, we are not being asked to vote \$1 in those items; we are being asked to use this device to legislate on something that ought to be done by way of an act of parliament. Because there is authority to include these \$1 items, the matters they legislate on become the law of the land. I point out that it is not only the \$1 items in these supplementary estimates that legislate. The government seems to be quite open and above board in item 5b of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Ostensibly it is asking for \$3,185,000; yet when one looks at the detail of the item one finds the wording, "to include authority to spend", "to authorize the transfer", and so on. The government wants to spend money which has previously been voted for one purpose on another purpose. In other words, not only the \$1 items are being used to give legislative authority for something to be done. Larger items in these supplementary estimates are seeking to do the same thing.

For instance, item 15b of the estimates for the Department of Manpower and Immigration seeks \$6,200,000. When one examines the item one sees clearly that it is a legislative enactment. I will not take the time to read the wording of the vote but it, too, authorizes certain things. In earlier days what this item seeks to do would have been asked of parliament in the form of a bill. The same is true of vote 10b of the Department of Regional Development. Again, that item has legislative effect.

I wish to comment especially on vote 5b of Treasury Board and I shall do so later. The government seems to be quite open and above board in asking for \$105 million. Yet when one examines the wording of the item one sees that what the item asks for would, in earlier days, have been the subject of an act of parliament. In other words, this item ought to ask for \$105,000,001 to emphasize that it, too, is a legislative item.

As I have said before, for the government to bring in this mass of legislation under the guise of supplementary estimates and for it to think that somehow the house can exercise its function shows that what is being done is not only a gross abuse of the use of estimates but also that parliament does not control the pursestrings of the nation.

Many of these \$1 items legislate, and many others have the effect of transferring money