

Business of Supply

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): With those remarks I intend to limit myself to the time allotted, but I must say I do not like these \$1 items. They represent a bad practice that has been extended and which must now be curtailed.

Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I think there are a few points which have been made to which I should like to reply. First, let me refer again to the remarks of the committee:

Your committee expresses its concern at the extensive use of \$1.00 items for the purpose of statutory amendments particularly in final supplementary estimates—

The report also states:

Your committee also noted with concern an even greater use of \$1.00 items for the transfer of moneys from one account to another.

The hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) drew attention to the fact that even Liberal members of the committee supported this expression of concern. I go along with those members and I share their concern. I think parliament should be concerned about the unwarranted extension of so-called legislation by \$1 items. However, in the present circumstances I suggest that worry is unwarranted.

● (4:10 p.m.)

The hon. member for Edmonton West, and I think also the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), expressed some worry that the government was endeavouring to strip parliament of its control over public funds. Here they were trying to look into the supposed motives of the ministry without producing much evidence, I must say. I would remind them in respect of parliamentary control that for the past year we have endeavoured to present and to explain to parliament a new method of preparing and presenting the estimates so as to make parliamentary control over funding easier to achieve than has been the case in the past. In any event, as members of the public accounts committee are aware, the new method of presenting estimates will provide members with a sounder basis of knowledge regarding programs and purposes for expenditure than does our current scheme of presenting estimates.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): More knowledge but not control.

Mr. Drury: The purpose is to provide more knowledge, and I submit that knowledge in [Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

the parliamentary forum is power and ignorance is weakness. There is no scheme of procedures that will assure that ignorance will be in control. Indeed, I do not think we want such a dispensation.

An hon. Member: The government is in control.

Mr. Drury: I agree it is, and if the government has control it is because of knowledge. If the opposition lacks control and authority, it is because of ignorance.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Smile, Bud.

Mr. Drury: I think members of the opposition cannot help but agree with this. What we are trying to do is to make it easier for members on both sides of the house to have more knowledge and consequently to exercise real powers in making proper and, I hope, enlightened decisions. This is exactly the reverse of what the hon. gentlemen to whom I have alluded have suggested is our approach to these supplementary estimates.

As I explained in the committee, these \$1 items fall under two heads: One authorizes transfers of funds which, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre pointed out, under the Financial Administration Act cannot be transferred without the authority of parliament, and it is this authority we are seeking. Why are transfers being made? The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) exhorted the government to restraint and charged it with lack of restraint and with spendthrift qualities. The purpose of these items is to be able to say to departments: If you wish to do things which appear to have a higher priority now than they had at some earlier date, then you must be able to select things which are less important and which are going more slowly. This accounts for the necessity of departments finding, where additional money is needed for an item emerging with a higher priority, a source which has a lower priority, and this means a transfer of funds.

These particular changes of priority are indicated in all these \$1 items for the benefit of the house and the members of the committee. I suggest that this is a step in providing to members the kind of information they need to make intelligent judgments. The alternative to this would be merely to seek the additional amounts needed for the newly emerging priorities, and I think all hon. members will agree that even during the short space of