

Interim Supply

Mr. Churchill: Would the minister accept a question?

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, I really spoke in jest. I was simply trying to compliment hon. members opposite on having so many members of their party in their seats on a Monday afternoon.

Mr. Winkler: A fine compliment that was.

Mr. Churchill: Will the minister not accept my question?

• (4.30 p.m.)

Mr. Benson: May I continue with what I was saying?

Mr. Churchill: We showed the arrogance of the Liberal government today.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, for the past nine days—we are now in the tenth day—we have seen a violent abuse of the use of interim supply. I should like to take us back a little, to look at the purpose of interim supply. Interim supply is to allow the government to carry on for a single month, or for two or three months, and pay bills while the full supply of the house is debated before committees. This year the house, in its wisdom, decided that the time for supply should be limited to 30 days. We have referred many departments to committees.

Mr. Martin (Timmins): Would the hon. minister permit a question? Is not interim supply also an opportunity for the opposition to raise points which cannot be raised under any other item before the house?

Mr. Benson: In a moment or two I shall comment on that. This year the house chose to refer the estimates of a good many departments to committees, where they could have more intensive investigation by members of the house, in order to cut down the time the house spent on particular supply items. This, we hoped, would work relatively well. I believe the committees have done a good job. But, what do we find? In the midst of this the official opposition chooses to use interim supply, for a period which is the longest since confederation, to discuss an item which is on the order paper. This is not an unusual item, such as is ordinarily brought up during interim supply, but rather an item which is on the order paper and on which there will be ample opportunity for debate.

An hon. Member: Who started it.

Mr. Benson: There will be ample opportunity to debate both the merits and the details of the legislation involved.

I believe that we have seen a violent abuse of the procedure on interim supply. I should like to point out the times spent on interim supply in recent years. Interim supply is usually passed after items, such as mentioned by my hon. friend opposite which are not on the order paper and which cannot be brought up in the ordinary manner in the house, are debated. In 1950, there were four interim supply bills in four days. In 1956 there were four interim supply bills in four days. In 1957 there were three bills in three days. In 1957-58 there were three bills in three days. In 1958 there were three bills in three days. In 1959 there were two bills in two days. In 1960 there were three bills in two days. In 1960-61 there were four bills in three days. In 1962 we had two bills in two days, and in 1962-63, before dissolution, we took ten days to consider three bills. In 1963, after the new session, we took nine days to debate four bills. In 1964-65, 22 days were spent on five interim supply bills. This means that the time of the house is being used more and more on interim supply rather than in discussing those supply items which properly come before the house.

Mr. Martin (Timmins): Would the hon. minister permit another question? Is the minister aware that members on the government side have taken over 30 per cent of the debating time?

Mr. Churchill: Yes; explain that.

Mr. Benson: I would question this, Mr. Chairman. I should like to see the hon. member's figures.

Mr. Woolliams: Are you questioning the veracity of the hon. member? Are you questioning his honesty?

Mr. Benson: Not at all; I asked him to supply me with figures.

Mr. Woolliams: It is we who ought to have figures.

Mr. Benson: I submit that the past nine days—and this is the tenth day—have been the longest period spent on interim supply in Canada's history. Hon. members opposite, in the official opposition, have been trying to break the back of the government by starving suppliers and those persons entitled to pay from the Government of Canada. I think this is very unfair treatment of people who deal in