

*Supply—Public Works*

good use would be served by it. The provincial government has looked into this, and is still considering it.

I have asked two departments of government whether they would be interested in this building. I asked the Department of Manpower and Immigration whether the building might not be used as a training school for the forest industry—the most important industry in our region. I asked another department whether it could not be used as a cultural centre, because there is none in existence in northern Ontario at the present time. I happen to know that this building which is worth, as I say, \$750,000, could probably be purchased for a nominal sum, perhaps even for a token amount of one dollar. It is true that a few thousand dollars would need to be spent on its renovation.

So far these efforts have been futile. Various departments have replied with quotations from the rule books. I think this is a special case, one which is not covered by the rule books. It is not every day one can buy a beautiful building for next to nothing for the people's use. But not one of the departments of government appears to be interested, so I ask the minister whether he will take special note of this project—whether some means could not be worked out whereby this fine building would remain where it is and be used for community purposes. Otherwise, next spring it will be torn down, and this would be a tragedy to happen to the skyline of Kapuskasing.

There is another point I should like to mention. Many members of parliament have been concerned about office accommodation in their ridings. I know governments are hesitant to make any pronouncement on this question because it is not popular politically, perhaps, to announce that the government is willing to establish offices for members of parliament in their ridings. At the same time, there are a number of ways in which something could be done. For example, when there is a public building belonging to the federal government within a riding it seems to me space could be made available in it for the use of the member of parliament, at least when he is seeing people in his riding.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** I see by the estimates that improvements and alterations are going on to the federal building—it is a post office—in the town of Cochrane. I know for a fact that room could be made available in

that building, or that at least a small corner could be provided for a member to take his messages and see people, at least when he goes to his riding at the week ends. I do not think anyone in the house would be against using public buildings in this way, so I would ask the minister to consider carefully whether this privilege could not be extended to members wherever no additional expense would be involved. I do not think this is unreasonable.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Asselin:** Mr. Chairman, first of all I wish to echo the last words of my friend for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) who asked that premises be found in public buildings to accommodate the members, so that they might have a place to meet their electors. Indeed, I believe I speak for the official opposition in saying that if the government were willing to build such premises to make it easier for members to meet their electors, we would agree with the party in power.

If my colleague would kindly stop speaking with the minister, I would continue my remarks.

Mr. Chairman, the minister should take note—I believe he has done so already—of the unanimous request of the house. Though it may be said in certain quarters that the minister may only be temporarily assigned to that department, were he to provide each member with an office in his riding, I would say that he is a great Minister of Public Works. That is a necessity.

Most of the members do professional work which often requires them to see their clients as well as their electors. If the government in power, through the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Laing), decided to provide in each riding, in public buildings, premises where the members, not only the members of the government, but also the members of the opposition could meet their electors and discuss their needs. I say, in advance, to the minister that such a decision would certainly be welcomed by the members of the official opposition.

Often, there is a tendency to minimize the importance of public works; yet, to my mind, they constitute a refund, a dividend to all the taxpayers. This department is important, especially in the ridings located along the St. Lawrence river, and I also wish to emphasize at this point, the particular geographic location of the riding I have the honour to represent.