

Dollar Items

Somehow they feel they must travel the country, or be absent for other business. They are not present for the discussion of their supplementary estimates. It is the last thing in their minds. It is almost impossible to get a minister to attend committee sessions when supplementary estimates are discussed. I know. I participate on far more committees than any of those people on the government side do.

An hon. Member: And much more effectively.

An hon. Member: Yes, we know. But ministers must attend to all their responsibilities.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I assure you that when I meet ministers, my relationship with them is most cordial and co-operative.

Now, at the end of this semester when the supplementary estimates are before the House, government backbenchers say that it is wrong for us to raise illegal items, that we should not say this use is wrong. I have before me an official list of \$1 votes, as provided to members by the estimates division of Treasury Board.

I see the former deputy speaker opposite me; he has just arrived. He had had difficulties with the weather. He should know that our present difficulties have arisen because of the change of rules in 1969. Prior to that there were supply motions. He knows, when he came to this House in 1962 or 1963, that there supply days. We had two-day debates for the referral of estimates.

An hon. Member: And you were in the Chair at that time.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): All of these matters, in reviewing supplementary estimates, were open to full examination. There was no guillotine—oh, no! In 1962 the then Official Opposition took 27 days debating estimates in this House and did not pass one item. They did not pass one item of final supplementaries. And the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council talks of obstruction! Be that as it may, it was a wrong practice. But the suggested correction in the new rules does not stand up to scrutiny.

It is the duty of hon. members to draw to the attention of the House certain illegal procedures. It was done in 1971, and Mr. Speaker Lamoureux ruled the items out of order. He did it again in March, 1974, and it was done again as late as June 10, 1976. It is known that the practice is wrong. The practice should stop—or will it continue, in an attempt to wear somebody down?

Having said that, I direct the attention of the House to the \$1 items. Altogether there are 52, of which 22 are unexceptionable as I said the other day. Authority is sought in 22 of those items to transfer moneys from one item to another. That was the accepted practice. Five votes authorize payments of grants. We do not quarrel with that. Then, nine votes authorize the deletion of debts, or the reimbursement of accounts for the value of obsolete stores, and the reimbursement of a revolving fund for an accumulated deficit. Those are perfectly correct. That is what one expects to see in final supplementar-

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

ies. Those are quite all right. I must raise one point, however. Some departments, having pretended to the House that the most careful scrutiny has been given to the provision for credits in the main estimates, now come along and say, "We under-expended this account by some \$3 million or \$4 million; therefore we will use it as a milch cow for any number of other items." In cases when there are such surplus funds it can be said that the department has not shown the appropriate degree of care. I would much rather see the other departments come forward and say, "We need that additional money," and not have the government transfer money with \$1 votes.

Then there are nine votes which authorize guarantees or affect existing legislation. That is the purpose of such supplementary estimates. If we must repeat our objections, we will again come to this House with the type of motion now being considered.

An hon. Member: Six o'clock.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I know hon. members hate to think they have been deluded. They love to think that the government has acted properly, when in fact it has been totally wrong. May I call it six o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before calling it six o'clock, may I draw to the hon. member's attention the fact that his allotted time expired at six o'clock?

It being six o'clock I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock p.m.

At 6 p.m. the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the opposition motion today, on what should be a most important day in connection with the voting of supply, relates to a matter of procedure rather than to the substance of what is contained in the estimates before us. The Official Opposition members have chosen to ignore all the other subjects which are open to them, and to address themselves to a question of procedural principal. They persist in following this course even though they had raised this question of principle—

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): And won it, too!

Mr. Lang:—indeed, after it had been decided, in one sense, in their favour. So there was clearly no particular reason why they should continue to deal with the matter. But, of course, the opposition likes to stay away from substance. For the first time in 20 years the Tory party is showing a certain amount of loyalty. They are following their leader.

Today, as yesterday, the opposition argued the question of principle in relation to \$1 items and in doing so they seem to be saying what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre