

They sit up late night after night trying to figure out amendments of this kind.

Mr. Pickersgill: I suppose the minister is speaking from experience.

Mr. Green: And they nearly always take the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate into their camp because he has that kind of mentality. But after he has paid a visit to his adopted province of Newfoundland and met a few of his constituents in some of the post offices we have built there perhaps he will come back in a more sensible frame of mind. We are not gullible enough to fall for an amendment of this kind, and we hope that before the end of the session members of the two opposition parties will be able to come up with some suggestions which are a little more statesmanlike than the one they have made this afternoon.

Mr. Pickersgill: If I had intended to vote for the amendment before the Minister of Public Works spoke, he has given me a much better reason for doing so now because he has drawn attention to the fact that something has now been omitted from this vote which in earlier years was there.

When Mr. Mackenzie King first introduced the system of appointing parliamentary assistants and put this vote into the estimates, I think it was in 1941 or 1942, there was a limitation to 14 contained in the vote. Parliament was told without equivocation that the number would not be greater than this. Now the leader of the house has said that perhaps the Prime Minister would appoint more than 14. Perhaps an effort has been made to deceive parliament in order to appoint more than 14, in other words, perhaps there is an intention to increase the number appointed as compared with what has been done in the past by increasing the expenditure of public money on members of parliament which, except for this vote, would be contrary to the Senate and House of Commons Act. I think the committee should be told how many assistants, as a maximum, are to be appointed. There was never any doubt about this in the past and I must say I had overlooked the omission of the limitation to 14 in reading this vote hastily, but having read it hastily while the minister was speaking, it appears that there is no limitation as to numbers in this item and it seems to me that this is a very serious departure from established practice and that we should not be asked to vote this money until the government gives us a positive assurance that it is not going to appoint more than a certain number.

I agree with my hon. friend for Essex East that these appointments should have been made long ago, and I think it would be

a scandal, as I said earlier, to make them in the dying days of the session, because the very term parliamentary assistant surely means that the assistance for which this extra money taken from the taxpayers is to be used is mainly for assistance in parliament.

Going back to the amendment itself, I want to repeat that it does seem to me absolutely contrary to the kind of thing that the minister used to argue from this side of the house and from what the Minister of Agriculture and Minister of National Defence and many other ministers used to say about voting more money than was going to be spent, to vote money for April, May, June, July and nine days of August. On one point I do not think the hon. member for Assiniboia was correct, because the item says "*pro rata* for any period less than a year", so I do not think there could be any dating back. But it does appear that more than 14 people could be appointed, and if the government has no such intention they should come clean and tell us and not try to slip it in surreptitiously as the Minister of Public Works has suggested they were trying to do. Before we vote on this item I hope the Minister of Public Works or someone else speaking for the government will give us an assurance that we are not going to use this money late in the session to appoint 25 or 30 or 40 parliamentary assistants and then divide up this \$56,000, as the minister suggested could legally be done once we pass this vote.

Mr. Green: Perhaps we could appoint 175 and pay so much a head? How would that suit the hon. member?

Mr. Pickersgill: Perhaps you could. That is precisely the point. The government should not be so sloppy in drafting these estimates, nor should this committee be so careless about passing them as to leave that possibility open to the government and it seems to me that our duty—and this is especially true of those of us who were elected to oppose the government—is to see that the government does not get away with practices of this kind. It is not good enough that the law should make possible a practice of this kind even if it is not the intention of the government to indulge in it.

The minister spoke about leg-pulling. I do not really believe that even this government would appoint everyone of its supporters who was not in the ministry to be a parliamentary assistant for a few weeks, though some of their friends in one or two of the provinces have appointed so many people to their governments, and as assistants to ministers that the situation has reached a point where nearly everyone in the legislature—and I am thinking in particular of one of their close