

What is the practice of the Treasury Board in dealing with those estimates; not whether some member of the board wanted to cut them down or some member of the board wanted to increase them.

Hon. Mr. PICKERSGILL: It is possible that the Minister of Finance who is chairman of the Treasury Board may come before this committee and answer such questions, but I do not think it would be appropriate for me to describe the procedure followed in the Treasury Board. I would defer to his superior wisdom. But speaking for myself as a privy councillor and as a former clerk of the Privy Council, I do not think that would be a proper thing for me to do. I am perfectly prepared to discuss quite fully what happens up to the point at which we sit down at the board to consider these estimates. But I do not think it would be a proper thing for me, at any rate, to describe how it is done at the board.

Mr. FULTON: Well, Mr. Chairman, let us see how we get along. I do not want to get into an argument right away, but I do think the minister is being overly cautious.

Hon. Mr. PICKERSGILL: The minister himself has indicated that he is timid and careful in his utterances, and he stands by that. But to come to Mr. Fulton's point about how these estimates are put into shape up to the point when they reach the Treasury Board for consideration by the board itself, I think I would like to say one or two things and then ask the deputy minister to carry on from there.

The minister, of course, does not prepare the estimates at all. That will surprise nobody. What happens is that the officials of the department, under the direction of the deputy minister who is the administrator of the department, prepare a draft of the estimates; and if there is any new departure either in form or in substance—at least that has been my experience in this department and in the one I previously was associated with—if there is any departure from the practice of previous years, then it is drawn to the attention of the minister before any discussion takes place with the Treasury Board officials, and the minister either agrees to have that done or says—as is often the case—“You had better see what the Treasury Board officials think of that,” or he says “No, I do not think we ought to make such a proposal.”

It sometimes happens, since these are the Minister of Finance's estimates, that the Treasury Board officials themselves take the initiative in suggesting changes in form, particularly any kind of change which would apply not merely to the department in question, but which would apply to the estimates of all departments. I am sure that the members of the committee know that every year there are some changes made in the form of the estimates with a view to making it clear what really is happening in the financial operations of the government.

I think perhaps I might also say—I am not putting this very consecutively—that obviously one always starts with the previous year's estimates. I do not think anybody ever starts to try to build a new structure. Any Minister would try to follow the well established British system of moving from one precedent to another; and having no precedent, he would always try to find a precedent afterwards.

As a matter of fact, I have had a long experience in trying to rationalize a position which I wanted to take and a position which my friends wanted to take. I think, to get down to brass tacks, I had better ask the deputy minister to carry on.