

Interim Supply

would fall due for payment and which it was necessary should be carried on during this period. I have no doubt that the item to which my hon. friend refers is one of those. Then there is an additional one-twelfth of certain other items, of which a lesser amount is required, such as the agricultural science service administration, plant protection, dutch elm disease surveys and so on. Finally, there is an additional one-sixth of three special items; one in agriculture, the freight assistance on western feed grains—the item which is in the estimates will be entirely exhausted by the 31st of July, the end of the current crop year—and there is an item under unemployment insurance which relates to the payment of unemployment assistance to residents of Newfoundland. Those are the usual additional amounts, over and above the further four months, which will fall due in the early part of the coming fiscal year.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, the statement that has just been made by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) certainly puts a new light on undertakings given in regard to the proceedings in this parliament. It is a new conception of an undertaking given to a sitting session that, when the minister says the members will have an opportunity of discussing something and puts that forward as an argument for granting interim supply or any other temporary measure, there is no other undertaking intended than that at some future time, any time in the future, some parliament, and not necessarily the parliament to which that undertaking was given, will have an opportunity of reviewing those items.

It would be utterly meaningless if that were the basis upon which undertakings were given in this house. As a matter of fact the whole theory of our system is that a minister can speak only for the government of which he is a member and for the parliament that is actually sitting at that time, to which he is responsible. In no conceivable circumstance under our system has any minister any authority to give an undertaking which is to be carried out by some other minister in some other parliament.

So that there may be no doubt about what the undertaking was, although it has been put on the record already, I shall place this in the context with my remarks, because this is the undertaking upon which the interim supply was voted earlier by the members of this party as well as other parties in the house, with very limited discussion, as is usually the case where that undertaking is given. This

is what the Minister of Finance said at page 2148 of *Hansard*:

As I have said, the form of this bill is exactly the same as in previous years, and the passing of the bill does not prejudice the rights and privileges of members of the House of Commons to criticize any of the individual items in the estimates. And I give the usual undertaking that such rights and privileges will be respected and will not be curtailed or restricted in any way as a result of passing this interim supply measure.

That interim supply measure is a measure that is adopted every year, or almost every year—

Mr. Abbott: Several times a year.

Mr. Drew: —for the purpose of carrying forward the business of the government past the end of the fiscal year and through that period when the ordinary procedure is being followed. But the right to discuss the items, and the opportunity to criticize items covered by that undertaking, is not limited to the statement of what those items are.

A parallel opportunity is afforded the members to obtain the facts through the operation of the standing committees of the house and any other committees which may be appointed for the purpose of obtaining particular information; that is an essential and vital part of our system. In this particular case the setting up of the committees has been delayed and delayed. The government has held back the opportunity to obtain most of the information which is essential. This is particularly true in the case of the public accounts committee, which is one of the most important committees related to the discussion of supply and the money which the government will have for any particular purpose.

There was another committee which the government undertook to set up. It was a committee to deal with a very important part of the responsibilities of this government and a very important part of the daily life of our people. Some time ago an undertaking was given to set up a committee to inquire into the control and administration of radio in this country. Today radio is not only a means of providing entertainment and cultural facilities for our people; it is also a very powerful means of propaganda, as every dictatorship has discovered in the years that have passed. To the extent that this new and tremendously powerful medium is placed under arbitrary government control, real freedom of speech is threatened no matter what professions of belief in freedom may be put forward by those who exercise that control.

[Mr. Abbott.]