

Interim Supply

of the various departments and in the operation of government. So, we have reason to wonder whether the Auditor General, in this instance, might not find that something had been done which was contrary to normal practice or possibly contrary to the statutes.

The approval of supply by parliament, following the precedent now set by the government, will be clouded with suspicion in the future unless there is a complete disclosure to parliament by the Auditor General of the nature and the scope of the present financial transactions. I think this is what has to be done in order that the whole matter may be cleared up. It is all very well for the minister to get up and tell us what he has done and encourage us to read his speech half a dozen times so that we may understand it. I have already pointed out, however, that he did not include in his remarks some of the information we want. I have shown now that from the standpoint of the Auditor General, we may not get this full information for at least a year or more likely some time in the year 1968. By that time the government will hope everything will have been forgotten. My hope is that in the interval the government will have been defeated and dismissed. We will not have the facts before us until far into the future. We should have all this information now.

I will leave it to others to develop some of these points in greater detail, but I should like to answer some of the things the minister said in the early part of his remarks. He was his usual political self.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, before the hon. member changes his direction, would he permit me to address another question to the Minister of National Revenue and President of the Treasury Board. Can the minister tell us how much of the money we are voting in this interim supply is surplus or is a cushion against the possibility of having to use it in a future month?

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, when we vote amounts to departments, usually for each month's supply voted there is one-twelfth of the complete vote granted to each department. Whether or not it is expended at the same rate is very difficult to tell, because usually in the early part of the year the spending is not as fast as it is in the latter part of the year. Where it is apparent that the spending is going to be over the number of twelfths which has been voted, it has been the practice to ask parliament especially for this additional

amount. Normally, however, parliament is asked only for one-twelfth, three-twelfths, and so on.

Mr. Knowles: So, there may be another cushion in what we are now voting.

Mr. Benson: There may be, and there has been in the past; this is not something new this year. When three months' supply is granted in a particular vote, it is not always the case that these payments are spent in that time. A certain amount of the money is voted for the government, and this is available for it to spend.

Mr. Churchill: We have voted by way of interim supply to the end of October seven-twelfths of the money available for the fiscal year, in addition to passing the total estimates of ten departments, so there may be a cushion somewhere. This is what I should like the Auditor General to find out for us. Of course, this points out the faulty administration of this government. Here we are in November asking for interim supply for the month of November. Unless the estimates are passed this month they will come to parliament and ask for interim supply for the month of December.

Last spring I pointed out to the government house leader that if, concerning in April, he would bring forward the main estimates on Thursday and Friday of every week, we could complete the main estimates by the middle of July by adding in one or two extra days here and there. Under the rules which the government forced on this house there is a limitation of 30 days to deal with estimates, including the main estimates and interim supply. The chairman, one of the members who has been here a long time, will recall that in the past the practice was to deal with estimates on Thursday and Friday of every week. Then, sometime before the end of the session, we would add Wednesday and perhaps an odd Saturday. By working on estimates on Thursday and Friday they could have been completed in 15 weeks which is only four months. All the main estimates would have been completed and the government would not have had to ask for interim supply. I pointed that out to the government house leader last spring. I said, "Let us get back to the old system". The number of supply motions was reduced to four rather than six on the third supply interim motion, on the suggestion of the opposition, he called all the departments except one which left him free to move and have a little flexibility.