

Business of Supply

So all I say is I do not like the practice, and other hon. members signified they did not like the practice. The minister himself did not like the practice. Here is what he said as recorded at page 91 of Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence No. 7 of the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates for Tuesday, February 25:

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I am interested in, first of all, the use of the contingency account. I think perhaps you are establishing a general grab-bag here, Mr. Minister. I fully subscribe, I think, to the purpose that you are setting out, and we realize that you must have some funds available for paying these retroactive pay increases. But why use the contingency fund? This is the wrong use, I think.

Mr. Drury: I agree. It does not confine or meet strictly the notion that the contingency fund is for the sole purpose of looking after unforeseen, unpredictable contingencies. And I find the necessity for this not entirely satisfactory—

The minister was quite frank. I say to him that he and his officials must tax their ingenuity to find some other method of dealing with this problem with which they are faced and not hide it in a contingency account. I should like to refer hon. members again to the last paragraph on the right-hand side of page 91 and the top paragraph on page 92. My question was this:

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): But, Mr. Minister, is it proposed to, shall we say, get away from the use of this contingency account? There is unfortunately also the temptation that, having put this money in here in a vote and you come up against some other emergency where the government might be pushed by reason of opposition or one thing or another, you resort to the contingency account to tide over in an emergency. That is not the purpose of the contingency account. The contingency account as such, is there for a purpose and it is a question of parliamentary control over government. I, for one, would insist upon that.

This business of creating this fund for your labour negotiations, this is something new, but I think you are going to have to find some other device, to place your money in some position, or in your votes, or in some other place. Using the contingency account is an abuse, and it certainly is an abuse of parliamentary control. It is for that reason that I question it. You have been frank with us here in saying what it is. But I personally think that it is not to be repeated, that some of your staff have got to use their ingenuity for something else.

Mr. Drury: As I have indicated to you, from the point of view of conveying information, this does not entirely please me. What we have been trying to do is to make the estimates as clear a representation of both past and future expenditures as we can. In this particular case, the object is not clarity.

It was clearly stated that the object was perhaps rather concealment, not parliamentary control. If the government is allowed to

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

do this once with regard to this contingency account, it becomes very tempting to do it in other accounts and to conceal or, shall we say, simply leave the purposes not clear. I do not think that should be the purpose. The government must be frank with hon. members. If this administration feels parliament should not have control over the pursestrings, why does it not say so? Why do the members of the government not say clearly that they feel there must be another form of government, that we should no longer have responsible government and that parliament itself should no longer have control over the spending of money?

As to the \$1 items, of course we saw eight statutory extensions at least. We have seen them in the past. I have here the Appropriation Act for 1967-68. Certainly these supplementary estimates are replete with \$1 items. I have not counted the actual number but there must have been between 20 and 30. In appropriation Act No. 7, (1967-68) there is one item creating a statutory extension under the National Housing Act.

● (4:00 p.m.)

When one considers how these estimates were passed and how little attention was paid to them, now that we have examined them I say that this is a bad practice, certainly in respect of the \$1 statutory extensions of which there are eight. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggests there are others in some of the larger amounts and I think he may be right.

It is not that I object to the purpose of the vote. Let us take one item in the estimates of the Department of Labour, vote 12b. This is to provide for continuing compensation to some miners on Cape Breton Island who are suffering from silicosis. Of course we agree that the Government Employees Compensation Act should be amended to provide for this compensation and make it legal. But I do not see why an act could not have been put through with a proper schedule to provide for this compensation rather than using a \$1 item. Someone will question this procedure in the future and suggest that it does not provide for payment to these people and others in similar circumstances. It will have been done through a \$1 item in the Appropriations Act for 1969. This does not make for good administration. I think we should know about these things and I am sure it would have taken no time at all to pass this item as a direct legislative change.