

Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys

for the rights of the House of Commons on the part of the administration, we feel offended.

Now, I say to the minister, if he knew last year that these flying conditions were such that the crown could embark on a program of this kind, as he says economically and advantageously, why should he present supplementary estimates on January 30 with no reference made to this program? In other words, the rights of the opposition to criticize or to suggest reasons as to whether or not that program should be amended or perhaps not embarked upon are completely lost because there is no one in any part of the house who, after a commitment has been made by the government, would want the government to repudiate its commitment. However, we are put in that position because these commitments have been made and there is not anybody who thinks for a moment that \$2,300,000 is going to be spent in the next two months of this fiscal year on this matter.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Mr. Chairman, I think I can claim to be as concerned as any member in this house about preserving the rights of all members of the House of Commons in relation to their responsibility to maintain control over public expenditures. We come to the study of supplementary estimates, Mr. Chairman, in a situation of this kind where what is asked of the house is the approval of a further amount required on the basis of a program having already been approved in principle. When the house has approved an item in the main estimates, it is approval in principle.

Now, this program of aerial photography was approved in principle in this house. The main estimate appears in the details of the volume of estimates approved by the house. This particular program having been approved in principle proceeded last summer, and as I indicated it proceeded under extraordinarily favourable conditions, conditions much more favourable than those that we or the companies could have foreseen. Then, this program went far beyond the end of the session of parliament which ended on September 7. Now, so far as January last is concerned, it would not have made any difference so far as the actual incurring of the expenditure is concerned because the work was done during the favourable flying season. It was a matter of amending and working out agreements with the companies concerned for the payments to be made. The house, therefore, is in just as good a position now as it would have been in January. There is absolutely nothing in the point the hon. member is making with regard to January.

The items brought down in January were items which were ascertained at that time. This is like a good many of the other items, and there are many in these supplementary estimates, that were not fully ascertained at that time.

Mr. Benidickson: This is a very strange form of argument on the part of the Minister of Finance. Really I am satisfied, knowing him as I do, that on reflection for another year he will not agree with what he has said at this moment. I do not think he will agree it is the proper practice to not advise the House of Commons at the earliest possible stage of his knowledge that it is desirable to overexpend on an item that, in principle or otherwise, has been approved by the House of Commons. There are many of us in this House of Commons who would, in our individual capacity, decide it would be desirable and proper for us to make an expenditure of, shall we say, \$1 million for a certain purpose. However, if we were told that our expenditures, individually or otherwise, were to be 120 per cent beyond what we had approved at a certain stage, I think that we probably would be giving the matter second thoughts. I say that in connection with a matter of this kind these second thoughts are denied the house because the commitment has been made and practically completed, although payments probably have not been made.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): My hon. friend is not at all right in talking about commitments. I think that is where he is leading himself astray. These companies have proceeded with this work. They are offering to sell the results of their aerial photography to the government, and we consider that it is very good business to purchase them. So far as commitment is concerned, the commitment rests upon a decision of this house and if the house does not approve, then these companies will just have to wait until next year for us to buy the results of their work.

My friend is quite wrong in talking about a commitment when he is talking about the matter of the purchase of the results of this aerial photography work. If the house does not want to buy it, all right, but there are advantages to the department in having the results of this photographic work earlier than would otherwise be the case. There are economies in proceeding on this basis. My friend is quite wrong in talking about a commitment. We are asking the committee to authorize us to purchase the results of this photographic work today.

Mr. Benidickson: This is another example of how the Minister of Finance seems to underestimate the wit and understanding of