

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): Perhaps not. We have to try to find a desk and chair. The Department of National Health and Welfare has doubled or trebled in the last two years. The Department of Veterans Affairs is another department which has increased its work. When these departments ask for all this furniture I look around to War Assets Corporation and then to private enterprise to get it. It is all bought after tendering by well-known firms or by agreement. We cannot always get what we are looking for. I do not think I can bring about much economy under this item, because when a request comes in from a department it is approved by the official, a report is made and sent to the director who is appointed specially to scrutinize these requests. It then comes back with approval and is later sent to the treasury board after we have accepted it. I do not know how I can change the procedure; it is the regular procedure.

Mr. GRAYDON: I would be content not to view this as a special criticism of the minister but rather as an indication to him of how the committee feels. If he will do his part in conveying to the proper quarters the remarks that he has heard to-day, and indicate to them that if this kind of thing is to continue these items will meet a forest fire of criticism at the next session, then I think we shall have done a job.

Mr. BOUCHER: Perhaps the minister will accept a suggestion with a little humour and a lot of common sense. If the minister knows that furniture is required in one department, and that another department which is closing up has a surplus, and if he will transfer the furniture from one department to the other we would have economy in the assisting of the one and the closing down of the other.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: All the information that we have received has not as yet cleared up anything. The Minister of Public Works is in the unfortunate position of having other departments make requests of him. He indicates that he does not know whether they are justified. He does not understand the circumstances; he does not know how much is purchased from War Assets Corporation. He has not the information, and it is not his fault because he essentially is in the position of representing a department which is the cats-paw of all the others. In order to bring this matter to the attention of these people, and having regard to what the hon. member for Peel has said with respect to the surplus of furniture which one sees on every hand, and also with a view of showing the attitude of

the committee with respect to a policy whereby one department of government sends back this surplus furniture to War Assets Corporation, and another department of government purchases it from that corporation, a most uneconomical system, I am going to move that item 600, amounting to \$300,000 in the estimates for the year 1946-47, be reduced to \$10. I do that because nothing has been indicated to support the necessity of it.

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): I do not know that I would admit everything which has been said by the hon. member for Lake Centre. If hon. members wish to be fair to my department they could not reduce this amount to one dollar because up to date they have voted at least five-twelfths of it.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I am reducing this item.

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): Five-twelfths of the item has been voted.

Mr. GRAYDON: I take issue with the minister on that.

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): Does the hon. member think that amount was not voted in interim supply?

Mr. GRAYDON: No. I would say to the minister that when the interim supply bills were before the house and were passed the definite undertaking was given by the Minister of Finance that nothing that was done with respect to that vote would in any way place us in a worse position than we were before the supply bills were passed in connection with the individual items. That undertaking stands. May I say to the minister that he is quite wrong in his assumption that the five-twelfths item applies to any one individual item, all of which are left to the discretion and the decision of the committee itself. I think everybody will understand that.

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): Perhaps my hon. friend is right. When we voted interim supply it was understood that it took away no rights that the committee possess to decrease the vote; but on the other hand we have to face this situation. Having had at my disposal five-twelfths of this amount to buy furniture requested by other departments, I have proceeded on that assumption and have purchased furniture. I do not know who will be held responsible for the meeting of those payments. I am giving the real facts, because on that assumption my officials assumed that we could dispose of the five-twelfths at least; and when requests came in in the ordinary course