

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Johnston (Lake Centre) in the chair.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Suppression of local electrical interferences, \$205,478.

Mr. NEILL: I should like to ask the minister a question which I think I brought up last year, or when he had some bill before the house. There is a feeling that the inspectors do not have sufficient—in fact I do not think they have any—mandatory power in correcting local disturbances. A man has some kind of electrical machine which is a perfect curse to the whole community. The inspectors, who are very competent men, go around and find that out. They approach the man about whom the complaint has been made and suggest that a change be made, at perhaps small cost. If these changes are made—and in most cases they are, because people are fundamentally decent—it is all right; but there is the odd case of the man who will not do it. I suggested last year and again suggest that it would be advisable to clothe these inspectors with power to compel people in default to do as they are told, or to have them fined.

Hon. C. D. HOWE (Minister of Transport): When the act of 1936 was passed we took almost unlimited power. If we found there was interference with broadcasting in Ottawa, we could even go so far as to close down the Ottawa Electric Railway Company. I cannot say whether the mandatory powers are used as much as they should be. Of course we try to effect results without compulsion, but if compulsion is necessary we have ample power to shut down any machine which causes radio broadcasting difficulties.

Mr. NEILL: Has the minister any record of prosecutions, or action of that kind, during the last year?

Mr. HOWE: We have not taken action under that section of the act.

Mr. NEILL: But I suppose you can use it as a threat?

Mr. HOWE: We are doing that constantly.

Mr. PELLETIER: I notice there is an increase of \$11,972, in the vote. I imagine that that increase is necessary because of the development of radio in Canada, and because more inspectors and administrators are required. On the other hand I believe a useful purpose would be served if the minister would tell the committee exactly to what

individual one should go to request the suppression of local electrical interference. With whom must a person get in touch, and how is one to follow up his complaint in order to see that the suppression is carried out? I ask the question because a number of people in the smaller towns do not know what to do about the electrical interference affecting their towns. Many of them are not aware what steps should be taken, to whom they should address their correspondence, or how far they can go towards having improvements made.

Mr. HOWE: There are fifty-two officers engaged from coast to coast in Canada in that kind of work. A letter addressed to the radio branch of the Department of Transport in any of the principal cities, or one addressed to the radio branch of the Department of Transport at Ottawa, or to myself—many people write me about it—would have the desired results. When I receive a communication of the kind I forward it to the inspector, who traces down the complaint as rapidly as his work will permit. I have found out that our service is fairly prompt. Usually when a complaint is made the local interference branch can effect an immediate improvement.

Mr. PELLETIER: Is any cost involved in a request for assistance from the department?

Mr. HOWE: No.

Mr. HEAPS: Will matters pertaining to radio broadcasting come under the review of the committee which has been appointed?

Mr. HOWE: I presume the matter under discussion could be included in the work of the committee, because interference is closely connected with broadcasting.

Mr. HEAPS: Members of the special committee would have a much better opportunity for discussion, if one is afforded, in the committee than they can have in committee of the whole. If the administration of the department is under examination, officials can appear and tell what is being done in practically every broadcasting activity.

Mr. HOWE: We shall be pleased to have officials present to discuss radio interference. Perhaps I should make a statement with respect to interference. It may be known to hon. members that there is a cycle of sun spots, an eleven-year cycle, and this year the cycle is in its worst phase so far as radio interference is concerned. Last year it was very bad, but this year it is at its worst. The consoling thought is that next year we