

Supply—Finance

it had been felt by all departments that the Minister of Finance who is in charge of treasury board was perhaps the person who, over all, should review possibilities of economy in connection with an item of this kind. That is why it is under the minister's jurisdiction.

The minister has introduced estimates into this house for the forthcoming year which include an item such as is before us, and I find that under column 8 of his estimates for the coming year it is indicated that he proposes to spend \$22 million as against \$19 million in the last fiscal year. I suggest to the minister that this is a point that should be carefully considered by the Minister of Finance, because it was given to the Minister of Finance as an item for economy for a very good reason. Yet we see increases despite the fact that the Minister of Finance in past years used to complain against the former administration that they allowed this item to rise.

Mr. Pickersgill: Could the minister tell us, as a result of his listening in, how many unnecessary telephone calls and how much unnecessary cost through the sort of wasteful extravagance which he talked about in June of 1957, if he remembers that date, he has been able to eliminate?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Mr. Chairman, I can say this, that I have stood pretty firm against requests for extending services in different departments.

Mr. Pickersgill: Are there as many telephone instruments in the government departments today as there were on June 21, 1957?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I would not want to undertake to answer that question offhand because it would depend to some extent on how you measure the equipment. There has been a good deal of consolidation in equipment, switchboards, and that sort of thing. Changes of that nature have been occurring in the past couple of years. If the hon. gentleman wants something specific I would be glad to get that information for him, but I would hesitate to make a general answer.

Mr. Pickersgill: I do not think we want to hold up these supplementary estimates, but in view of the fact that for many years we had to listen to eloquent speeches on this subject from the hon. gentleman and some of his colleagues, I think that when the main estimates come along we should like a report from the Minister of Finance as to what he is doing about this telephone problem. It does seem a lot to be spending, \$1½

million, for just the calls which take place in Ottawa, not counting those made in the rest of the country.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I cannot control the rates, of course. The hon. member will agree with that, I think.

Mr. Benidickson: This item deals with telephone calls with respect to Ottawa.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Telephone service.

Mr. Benidickson: I do not expect the Minister of Finance to have full details with respect even to the section of the department which is strictly his, the minister's office, and still less with respect to the whole of his department, but I do hope that between the present time and the presentation of the final estimates for the coming year he personally will investigate whether or not there is adequate control in his own office over the number of long distance calls that are being made in comparison to the number made under his predecessor.

Mr. Chevrier: The minister did not answer my question in relation to the number of local calls as compared with long distance calls. Could the hon. gentleman tell us how much of the account which he has mentioned went for long distance telephone calls?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): No, I do not have the breakdown showing that. This is a figure which covers the telephone service.

Item agreed to.

654. To authorize the treasury board to delete from the accounts certain debts due to, and claims of Her Majesty, each of which is in excess of \$1,000, amounting in the aggregate to \$960,734.50, \$1.

Mr. Chevrier: With regard to this vote, there is a detailed statement on page 16 of the various claims which amount to \$960,000, roughly speaking \$1 million. This sum is made up of claims as high as 153 in number from the Department of National Revenue and 52, in another instance, from the Department of National Defence, the first amounting to \$674,000 and the other to \$170,000. Can the minister give some indication what these claims are for?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Yes. This is really an annual practice. Under the amendment to the Financial Administration Act passed a year ago, provision was made that there might be write-offs of certain amounts without further reference to parliament. Careful investigation has, of course, taken place to determine whether there is any hope of the recovery of the amounts claimed. That investigation is carried on in the first place by the particular department concerned, and then the matter goes to the treasury board. The