

Supply—Legislation

the hon. member has just said, he does not know whether or not there are going to be parliamentary assistants appointed. How then can he say he will reduce the sum by a certain amount? Obviously, we should leave the amount in the vote, and if that amount is not spent in the way that parliament has authorized it be spent, it lapses in the ordinary course of proceedings.

Mr. Pickersgill: I rise to support what was said by the hon. member for Essex East. I can remember when he was appointed among the first parliamentary assistants—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): After a long period of expectancy.

Mr. Pickersgill:—as he himself has said, after some time spent in hope. I can never remember any occasion in any parliament when the appointment of parliamentary assistants was left to the end of the session. It would appear to me if these appointments are not made during the session it would be an abuse of the vote and an abuse of the rights of parliament to appoint parliamentary assistants almost on the day of prorogation and pay them for a period when they obviously would not be serving in the way in which they would be serving during the session. Therefore it would seem to me, unless these appointments are made almost at once in contemplation of three or four more weeks of session, this money will not be needed until next January.

Perhaps the hon. gentleman in moving his amendment has not moved to reduce the vote enough. One thing is perfectly obvious, this money cannot be spent for April, May, June, July or nine days in August. It is, therefore, quite ridiculous to ask us to vote \$56,000 when it is quite apparent more than one-third of that money cannot legally be spent in any case.

Mr. Argue: It is quite true, as the Minister of National Defence has said, that these estimates were prepared many months ago. I would think that the people, in preparing these estimates, assumed parliamentary assistants would have been appointed long ago. It seems a rather strange theory of government that an item placed in the estimates is so sacrosanct that, even although it is obviously not needed, parliament should not move to reduce the amount. As the hon. member for Essex East has so well said, many members of the government when they were on the opposition side of the house were most careful to point out to the former administration that this was a very bad practice and should not be followed.

I do not want to say anything to prejudice the position of parliamentary assistants or to

put any blocks in the road of the many hopefuls to whom reference has been made. As a matter of fact, I have had a great deal of sympathy myself for these hon. gentlemen during this session. It has caused me a good deal of concern that so many capable young members were being bypassed, overlooked and given no consideration because these vacancies have been allowed to remain. Not only is it a disappointment to hon. members of this house who may hope to be appointed parliamentary assistants but I think it is rather degrading to the office itself. There will be going abroad the feeling that if in this session—with the tremendous amount of work that is being done; with estimates that are the largest in the history of this country; and with probably the heaviest work load we have ever seen in any peace time session—we were able to operate without parliamentary assistants in this streamlined fashion that has already become the vogue on account of the hurried up, 3½ month session, then perhaps it is an office that is superfluous to the efficient working of this house.

But in opposing any reduction the Minister of National Defence would seem to have in his mind the possibility that if these gentlemen are appointed to their positions they can be given 12 months' pay for 7 months' service. I am not nearly as expert an authority on what is legal and what is not in a vote such as this as is the hon. member for Bonavista-Twilligate. But with the wording of vote 189 as it is, and realizing that it is just an item in the estimates and is therefore not statutory, I take it that it might be possible to give them all of this pay for very little work. I would hope that thought is not in the mind of the Minister of National Defence.

For a government that has expressed so much desire for economy in administration this would seem to be a very obvious motion to support. It is really not going to take away from any person anything that he has earned but is merely bringing the estimates in line with reality. Some hon. members may feel that the appointment of certain parliamentary assistants has become something of a political plum, and that some of the offices are not necessary. I do not express that opinion. However, I say that it has been a mistake to allow this session to come nearly to a conclusion without parliamentary assistants being appointed. That has been a strange procedure for the government. The attitude of and the statement made by the Minister of National Defence at this time are even more strange. In keeping with the beliefs of members of the government in the past I would appeal to the Minister of Public Works and to the members of the government to accept this