

Business of Supply

members of the various committees looking at estimates.

Members of committees will have to be reasonable about the attendance of ministers, but if ministers adopt a high and mighty attitude and will not come before committees then we will have difficulties. However, on the basis of last week's performance I have no cause for complaint at all either with the ministers or with the officials.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I now want to complain about what I think was the deliberate action of the government house leader in devising the schedule for the study of these estimates and their re-appearance in the house. I complained about this matter in the committee, in particular in relation to the \$1 items upon which we should have had much more extensive examination but which was not possible because the guillotine was falling.

A house order with reference to the committee's handling of the estimates was made almost concurrent with the tabling of the estimates, and hon. members did not have a chance to look at the final supplementary estimates and consider their implications. These matters cannot be fully appreciated in a period of five minutes. One has to study them and see what is involved. Yet the house was asked on Monday last to approve an order which sent these estimates to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates, and that committee started its hearings at 9.30 the following morning. Study of the estimates was to be completed by Thursday evening, if not sooner, and I suppose members of the government hoped it would be sooner. The net result was that we sat on Tuesday. On Wednesday there was a vote in the house and I think we sat in committee for about an hour and fifteen minutes. Then, of course, we started again at 9.30 on Thursday. I object to this kind of performance. True enough, the government was only asking for about \$200 million. There is about \$50 million transferred and about \$150 million new money. But is the time to be spent on these estimates to be rationed on the basis of the amount of money involved? In other words, are there to be so many millions of dollars per hour allotted to the committee? To this I must object.

There is another very important point. I do not know how many people had to devote almost the whole week end in overtime work in the preparation of the Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence so that they would be

available to the house this afternoon. By special effort I was able to obtain my copy of Thursday's transcript at about 2.45 this afternoon after I had come down to the house. I had to send out for it in order to get it. That is not good enough.

Hon. members are asked to participate in a debate and are expected to have acquainted themselves with the detail of what went on in the committee and yet they do not have the evidence. This is what I complain about. It is in the spirit of the proposed 16A. In other words, the government house leader reaches down into a committee and tells that committee it must have its business done by such and such a time regardless of whether or not it is complicated and regardless of whether or not the members unearth many things which require investigation. In effect he says that this does not matter one iota, that it must be done by that time and if it is not the house order has authority behind it and if it is put to a vote there will be no question but that the iron heel will prevail. I object to this procedure because it is an iron heel. The President of the Treasury Board may wince a bit at that, but it is nothing more than an iron heel. I say here and now that we do not find that acceptable.

I should like to refer hon. members to the proceedings and evidence of the committee, particularly pages 91 and 92. First of all, what attracted me most was the contingency item of the Treasury Board, item 5b. I agree with my friend the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that it lends itself to abuse. I think the purposes have been stretched rather more than they should have been. I understand what the minister is trying to do, as I told him during the committee proceedings, but this is the wrong item for it. The contingency account of the Treasury Board is not a catch-all item; it is not a fund in which reserves are to be accumulated as is provided for in this item. There is nothing here that says there cannot be raiding. I can assure you this is something I am watching with a great deal of apprehension. Unless the house expresses its disapproval of the instructions in respect of the use of this account, on some occasion in the future when an emergency may arise because of the fact that the government cannot get legislation or certain estimates through, certainly not the type of contingency or emergency that this account is intended to cover, there will be a raid on the contingency account because the money happens to be there. I am fearful of what might happen.