

Mr. Green: There is no more trouble?

Mr. Sinclair: This is not my department, but as far as I know there is no more trouble.

Item agreed to.

Special—

636. To provide, subject to such terms and conditions as the governor in council prescribes, (a) for payment of assistance to producers of salted fish on products designated by the governor in council, in the amount of 50 per cent of the laid down cost of salt used in their 1956 production, and (b) for payment of assistance in respect of the 1955 production as specified in vote 795 of the Appropriation Act No. 5, 1955, but not previously paid, including authority to charge administrative costs to vote 160 of the main estimates, 1956-57, \$582,000.

Mr. Nowlan: Can the minister say a word concerning item 636? This is the item concerning salt assistance, and I think the policy was changed last year. Isn't that the one included here?

Mr. Sinclair: No, the salt assistance program is the policy under which we assist the salt cod trade by paying half the cost of salt to fishermen. The complaint made by hon. members earlier this year was to the effect that the form which was designed for the fishermen to fill in to secure the assistance was so complicated that one required the help of a chartered accountant.

Since that time I think we have improved on the form. Although the form is long the great majority of fishermen are required to fill out only the first part of it, which related to fishermen who were engaged in only one type of fishing, for salt cod. This has been welcomed down there not just as a subsidy but as the way of trying to level off the costs of salt. We spent a little more than half a million dollars last year in this type of assistance.

Item agreed to.

637. To recoup the lobster trap indemnity account, established under vote 540 of the Appropriation Act No. 5, 1955, to cover the net losses incurred in the operation of the account during the fiscal years 1953-54, 1954-55 and 1955-56, \$57,680.

Mr. Nowlan: Mr. Chairman, am I right in assuming from the wording that this is a detailed account which is necessary to recoup losses for the three years?

Mr. Sinclair: Yes, that is right.

Mr. Nowlan: There is no vote provided for that, is that it?

Mr. Sinclair: No. We had a loan account but we have not drawn on it. It is obvious now that with our present premiums and the present group we cover in lobster trap insurance, we are going to have an annual

Supply—Post Office

deficit. When we started this insurance for vessels and lobster traps we were told by the insurance people, I must confess, that it would be difficult to bring in an actuarially sound system for gear. We tried it and worked out what we thought were good average rates. We had a loss in danger areas where we have a much higher chance of loss than average, but despite the loss it is less than we have paid in recent years in loans to fishermen losing their traps through hurricanes.

Item agreed to.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

324. Departmental administration, \$1,596,132.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Does the minister propose to make a statement at this point, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Lapointe: No, Mr. Chairman, I did not propose to make a statement. The estimates of the department were rather thoroughly scrutinized and studied by the estimates committee. I did make a statement before that committee, and I did not intend making one at this stage.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): I did want to offer the minister an opportunity to put forward any remarks he might have to make at the very inception of the examination of his estimates, Mr. Chairman. I agree with the minister that the Post Office estimates were examined with considerable care before the estimates committee and that all our questions were answered at that time, some quite exhaustively. However, there are a few remarks I would like to make before we proceed to an examination of the individual items and the asking of further questions.

I think I should say at this point, as I said in the estimates committee, that the post office and its operations present one of the biggest administrative problems that we have in Canada. In the course of a year they handle over 1½ billion first-class letters and over 3½ billion pieces of mail of one kind or another. In handling such a vast quantity of material it is almost impossible to be, one might say, "letter perfect" in every case, and I do not think even the most severe critic of the post office would expect that every last single piece of mail could be handled without an occasional mishap.

On the other hand we do have quite a right, I think, to expect that the great majority of the mail be handled with complete efficiency and dispatch. We found in examining the work of the department in the estimates committee that in 1954-55 there had been some 167,000 complaints regarding