

Supply—Finance

Mr. McGee: The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River has not considered that perhaps the exercise of jumping up and down for the telephone might be just what the doctor ordered, so to speak. I would also like to offer him the suggestion that if he moves his secretary's desk over close to his own he could simply hand the telephone back.

Mr. Benidickson: I can see that the hon. member is an efficiency expert.

Mr. Fisher: I hate to be the dreadful Willie in this but I should like to inform the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River that I know of one member of parliament in the opposition who has two telephones in his office. I do not want to be sneaky and reveal the name, but there is a member in this committee who has two telephones in his office. It is not too big an office, and his secretary and he sit facing each other and each has a little telephone. I think it improves their efficiency tremendously. I hope no one is going to run around trying to find the office with the two telephones in it. I think it works out very well.

An hon. Member: The hon. member is over in the west block; he is one of those who caused the expense.

Mr. Fisher: Someone suggests this office is in the west block. This man is not in the west block; he is in the centre block. In the west block there are special considerations. I know one Conservative member over there who has an office so big it is a route march from the door over to his desk. His poor secretary is really in trouble. The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River has a little office. This member's office is a great big office, and the hon. member sits away over in the big bay window looking out on the Ottawa river and his secretary is over by the door. When the telephone rings there is all this jumping back and forth.

It seems to me that we have a problem here of great importance. I refer to the juxtaposition of the member and the secretary. It could raise all kinds of questions. I am very much bothered that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River should bring up the question. I know it has been brought up about my office. I have my secretary sit right next to me so she can answer the telephone.

Mr. Benidickson: Is that the reason?

Mr. Fisher: Therefore, in fairness to the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River and the Minister of Finance, I think that maybe someone with the authority should approach the members of the internal economy commission to see if we can all have telephones just

[Mr. Benidickson.]

where we want them. In particular, if it will improve the efficiency of some members of the House of Commons I think it would be an excellent idea. I can just tell from the look on the faces of most hon. members that they would like to see the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River have two telephones in his office.

Item agreed to.

631. 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 \$4,071,008.80, \$1.

Mr. McMillan: This vote authorizes the treasury board to delete from the accounts certain debts, which I presume were legitimate debts, each of which is in excess of \$1,000, the total amounting to \$4 million. That seems like a lot of money to be writing off. I notice that in the Department of National Revenue there are 913 claims each of which is for \$1,000 or more and amounting in total to \$3.7 million. I should like to know whether the department is forgiving people their income taxes or just what this means.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The details on page 18 indicate the amounts in relation to each of the eight departments concerned. It will be seen that by far the largest amount is in the Department of National Revenue where there are 913 claims within the scope of the proposed write-off. In general the cases presented in these estimates fall within one or the other of two categories: first, uncollectable debts due the crown in excess of \$1,000 where treasury board has approved deletion subject to inclusion in a special estimate item and, second, debts due the crown in excess of \$1,000 in respect of which the governor in council has granted authority not to take recovery action and where sufficient time has elapsed to ensure that their status is unlikely to be altered as a result of changing circumstances.

I can give more information about these various categories if that is the wish of hon. members. They will see from the details the number of claims involved in each case. I have before me a very long list of the items concerned. To take the Department of National Revenue, for instance, most of the claims are very old, some of them having been incurred as long ago as 1935. There are no live claims written off here where there is any hope at all of collection. I see others here going back to 1931, 1929, and 1928. Therefore I think the hon. member can be assured that there is nothing written off that has any material value.

Mr. Chevrier: What are they for?