

Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys

the best information that apparently the administration could sincerely and properly present to the house on May 13, was an item of \$1,900,000. If we had had only one additional presentation to this house in the meantime of administrative proposals for expenditure, perhaps there might be some excuse for the ministry coming forward within two weeks of the termination of the fiscal year with an additional supplementary proposal for an expenditure that is almost 20 per cent larger than the original proposal. That surely is contempt of parliament and of its traditional rights with respect to expenditure.

If these things had been foreseen when the first supplementary estimates were presented on June 2 last session, surely the minister would have seen that this vote probably was likely to be inadequate. He presented additional supplementary estimates to the house on August 30, 1958. No indication of this particular item was given to the house at that time. On January 30 of this year we had supplementary estimates No. 2. Nothing was said about this item. Within two weeks of the expiry of the fiscal year, parliament is asked to approve an item that is almost 20 per cent larger than the cost of the program as originally estimated. How can that amount be possibly expended in the next two weeks? In other words, we must be bound to assume that this government, with its supercolossal majority, is simply operating on the basis of giving commitments to those companies and others and saying, "You just carry on and finance through the banks, and so on; we are sure and confident that within the dying days of the current fiscal year we can with our majority, and regardless of conditions, make sure that this money is voted".

The Minister of Finance must explain whether or not he knew on January 30, when supplementary estimates No. 2 were presented, that this item, by commitment or otherwise, was being very considerably exceeded, based on the original estimate tabled in the house on May 13 of last year.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The hon. gentleman is wide of the mark, far wide of the mark, as he has been so often.

Mr. Chevrier: Don't lose your temper, just stick to the facts.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): This is a statement of fact. I have already explained how this item came to be increased. The program which had been embarked upon was a program to extend over a period of years. We found, owing to extraordinarily favourable weather conditions prevailing in the Arctic

[Mr. Benidickson.]

last year, that the program could, to advantage and economy, be accelerated last year.

Now, as to the knowledge of this, of course there are lots of matters in those final supplementaries that were within knowledge in January but are inappropriate items to be brought down then because these are matters that have to be adjusted as of March 31, and have to be complete. Therefore, this particular one, like a good many others that are presented now, is an item of which we knew well that the amount provided in the main estimates was going to be exceeded, but we have to come this much closer to the end of the fiscal year to be able to estimate it with precision, and that is the reason we have this situation before us today.

I referred to the extraordinarily favourable conditions which developed last year. This is illustrated in accrual to the public advantage and economies because those contracts with the three companies concerned were contracts which, while there are certain basic guarantees, nevertheless did offer the government the opportunity of effecting economies by accelerating the program under the extraordinarily favourable conditions prevailing. That is the explanation, and the full explanation, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Benidickson: Mr. Chairman, that is by no means a full explanation because the pertinent question I put to the minister was: when he last presented supplementary estimates to the house on January 30, did he not know the extent of this increase in possible expenditure on this item as compared with a year ago? I might forgive him for not referring to it on August 30; but surely he is disregarding the rights of this house in the matter of the appropriation of money if on January 30, when he came with supplementary estimates, he omitted any reference to this item. That is the essential question that the minister must answer.

We in the House of Commons feel that on a general basis—and the minister held these views when he was on this side and I do not think anybody on the other side will disagree with this—one of our primary functions is the right to pass upon expenditures and generally, unless something is unforeseen, we have the right to discuss and debate a projected program prior to the incurring of a liability by the crown. The very opposite has occurred in this instance. There is not anybody in the house, I think, who would want the crown commitment to be repudiated. In consequence of that, we are presented with items for expenditures after the commitment has been made, and particularly when that could have been prevented by a reasonable regard