

Interim Supply

so no money was necessary for them. We had the complete authority of the House of Commons to meet the payrolls in those departments, and make all payments for the balance of the year. In regard to other departments, we found that some votes had sufficient funds left in them to cover their payrolls as of the middle of November.

Mr. Knowles: Is the minister referring to money that had been voted for payrolls?

Mr. Benson: Yes, money that had been voted by parliament for the specific purpose of the vote. The only amount which it was necessary to transfer from the contingency to other votes so as to bring them up to the required amount was \$2.160 million. No money was spent that was not voted by parliament.

Mr. Churchill: Then all the stories in the press with regard to computers operating for three days in a row, and a tremendous search among all departments to see where the money was to be found, is just a tissue of lies? Was it a lie that \$54 million plus \$2 million from the contingency fund was required, making a total of \$56 million in order to meet the commitments of the minister at the present time?

Mr. Benson: I should not like to accuse anyone of fabricating a tissue of lies, as my hon. friend seems to be doing so easily. I suggest to him that he read my statement carefully and he will then understand the situation completely, even though it may be difficult for him to pick up figures in a hurry.

Mr. Churchill: It is not difficult for me to pick up figures in a hurry but it is difficult to get to the root of the matter with an evasive minister. I was just drawing attention to stories that have appeared in the newspapers, and to statements made by the minister over T.V. and radio, which did not indicate to the general public that all he was doing was withdrawing \$2.16 million from the contingency fund under the Department of Finance and using that to pay the salaries in other departments.

The minister has not denied these stories so we are left at sea, despite the fact we have heard the minister speak on this subject. Now, we are instructed by him to read his statement two or three times, which of course we will do. He tells us that all he has done has been to transfer money from the contingency fund of the Department of Finance to meet the salaries of people in the various departments.

Mr. Benson: Perhaps I should explain to the hon. member that the real problem was not in the transfer of \$2,160,000 but going through the various votes and supplementary accounts in the departments in order to determine how much to transfer and whether or not it was necessary.

Mr. Churchill: Perhaps before this debate comes to a conclusion we will have a little more information from the minister, and an exact statement from him as to how much money was moved from one place to another. I also hope we will have the legal opinion of his advisers on whether or not this is the correct procedure.

It is our hope that we will hear from the Auditor General. The minister referred to the Auditor General in his statement giving us the impression that the Auditor General rushed over to the minister and said: "Look, I need \$36,000 in order to pay my staff. Please supply it from the contingency fund."

It may well be that the Auditor General has only heard of this from the minister's statement.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, on a point of privilege. The treasury board does not issue funds without having a requisition from a department. When I said there was a requisition from the Auditor General for this particular amount of money I would ask the hon. member to take me at my word and look at the treasury board minute.

Mr. Churchill: It is only now that we are informed that the requisition was from the department of the Auditor General. The minister left us with the impression that it was the Auditor General himself who asked for this money, and this is what I objected to.

Mr. Benson: No, it was his department.

Mr. Churchill: We are watching the minister very closely. He left us with the impression that this was approved by the Auditor General. Whether or not he intended to leave that impression is not for me to say, but the fact that he mentioned the Auditor General during orders of the day and immediately afterward in the first statement that he made created the public impression that the Auditor General had approved of this action. This is what we do not know yet.

Mr. Chairman, I think a complete investigation should be carried out over and above the minister's statement. We like to accept the minister's statements on all occasions but we are entitled to get all the facts.