

Order Paper Questions

money voted, may themselves be changed by the \$1 item in the estimates.

In listening to the argument of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre I found that he noted very carefully the many precedents which exist in defence of the practices that are contained here. The parliamentary secretary has mentioned them as well. It was clear that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was arguing in favour of what he would like to see the procedures be, but was not effectively dealing with what they are in fact.

I would like to refer to one particular item and to clear up an apparent misunderstanding. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre referred to the Loto Canada precedent in supplementary estimates A for 1976-77 in June of last year. That would have been a precedent perhaps for establishing Via Rail or other similar organizations, but I should make it clear to you, Mr. Speaker, and to hon. members—because in the remarks of several members it was not made clear—that this is not an item to create Via Rail Canada Incorporated. That company has already been created under the Canadian National Railways' power to create a subsidiary, and therefore fully in accordance with the law of the land and with the order in council approving the acquisition by CNR of the shares of that company.

The item might come before the House from time to time with specific, large sums of money in order to accomplish the purposes of a better rail passenger service. The main reason it is here is in answer to some concern on the part of the men and women working on the rail passenger service that the regulations have an immediate statutory base, so the item is contained in the estimates to give that base. I do not think the fact that it is \$1 rather than a more substantial amount can affect the argument, as the parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Assiniboia, has said. In the case of the Seaway, I should like to point to the immediately previous precedent in vote 108b in 1976-77 with regard to the Northern Transportation Company Limited where the same type of item was used to transfer debt to equity.

I am not sure whether hon. members opposite would find it any different if, instead of the use of the \$1 item, there had been a vote for the amount of \$624,950,000 which could have been voted for to purchase shares in the St. Lawrence Seaway, which money would then be used by the St. Lawrence Seaway to pay back to the Receiver General the same amount. Clearly, that would have been a straightforward item in the estimates in any hon. member's argument. However, it would have been rather misleading if the \$1 item which has been used for other transfers of funds were used again for what amounts to that transfer not between votes but, between forms of equity, being created. I think it is clear that the argument of the parliamentary secretary is correct. Items in the estimates which affect legislation or which purport to create new programs must stand on their own merit, and that argument is the same whether the item is \$1 or is for a substantial amount.

Therefore, I believe Your Honour will find, in the deliberations you will give to this question, that the precedents are

[Mr. Lang.]

strongly in favour of the maintenance of \$1 items of the type being attacked and that, as I said earlier, whether or not one could argue about what the procedures might be one day in line with what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said he would like to see, the fact is, and the precedents indicate, that our procedures support these items at this time.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, the arguments have been canvassed very thoroughly and therefore I will be brief. With reference to vote 1d, the Post Office item, I think it supports quite readily the arguments advanced by both the Minister of Transport and the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council. First of all, this is a supply vote, an addition by \$1 to the total Post Office vote, and therefore that \$1 is deemed to be a supplementary estimate. Its purpose is to authorize the payment to COJO of amounts that will be received by the Olympic organization for the sale of Olympic coins and Olympic products after December 31.

Under the existing statute which was passed for one specific purpose, namely, the indirect financing of the Olympic Games and the sales of philatelic items, the authority to pay the income to COJO from philatelic products ceased on December 31. What we are doing through the \$1 item, the vote for supplementary estimates totalling \$1, is to pay to COJO the amount less \$1. The figures have not yet been completely defined. Without the additional \$1 it would be impossible to pay the amount to COJO and it would have to be included within the general Post Office revenue. All that proves is that in this instance we are dealing with the authority that is extended by the House, which is master of its own procedures, through a legislative measure, namely, a \$1 item in an appropriation bill to authorize the payment of funds in a way that was not contemplated in the original statute.

I adopt the argument presented by the Minister of Transport in the sense that what we are doing, in effect, is to take a \$1 item and, by adding it to the estimates which have been previously voted by the House and adding to it a description of the purpose of that \$1 item, permitting, through a bona fide legislative measure, something which otherwise could not have been done.

The precedents have been quoted by the parliamentary secretary and they support the contention that this practice has been honoured for some time. Once you accept that it is possible through a \$1 item, which is a supplementary estimate, to transfer votes from one vote which is unused to another vote, or, as quoted in the precedents which have been cited, created a corporation such as Loto Canada, it must be recognized that the practice is established and it is a valid way of legislating changes. This has been demonstrated time and time again in precedents, and I see nothing in the arguments of hon. members opposite which would justify a change in that practice.

● (1630)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Postmaster General said that the subject has been canvassed very thoroughly, and I am