

Supply—Public Works

ment except—and I give them this gladly—credit for rather belatedly going ahead and carrying out that Liberal program.

It is also well known that at the time the estimates were prepared a year ago last December—I refer to the last estimates prepared by the Liberal government—it was realized that there was still a great deal of private construction going on in this country of a character and volume which gave grounds for concern about its inflationary effects, and that the view taken by Mr. Harris and concurred in by all his colleagues was that only essential public works should be undertaken, notwithstanding the fact that perhaps at times in the past, in years when there was an election, governments had not taken that view.

In the light of that fact and in the light of the fact that in 1957 there was so much private construction in contemplation—most of which, in fact was carried out in 1957, as the figures for the whole year show—it seems to me that the increases in the estimates for 1958-59 are very disappointing indeed, because we were led to expect something different.

Perhaps it does not matter what we in the opposition were led to expect, but the country was led to expect, and millions of people in this country were led to believe, by the speeches particularly of the Prime Minister, that we were going to have something entirely new, something entirely different in the way of a public works program to meet the current recession which the Prime Minister discovered only in January but which was known to the rest of the country as early as November of last year. We were led to believe that we were not going to get a public works program of the character which had been carried on in boom days, in the Liberal days, namely a program of the ordinary essential works. They must be done, of course and there is all the more reason for doing them now than there was a year ago. But we were led to believe that some vast new program which was going to deal effectively with unemployment was going to be presented to this parliament at the earliest possible date.

When the Minister of Public Works very graciously agreed to have his estimates come up for consideration first, I think we hoped that we were going to see the unveiling of what was to be the realization of stage one of the "vision". But what do we get? We get just the same ordinary routine public works, with practically no acceleration at all and with practically no substantial increase in their volume.

I have made an examination of the estimates, and in this matter I perhaps have an advantage that some hon. members on this side of the house may not have, because

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

I served on the treasury board for a number of years and therefore possess a little background information about this matter. On examination of the estimates one can see very clearly that there is in them nothing new at all that was not in the planning stage, and well known to be in the planning stage, over a year ago. Of course the hon. member for St. John's West admitted that quite honestly the other day, and we give him full credit for his candor.

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): That was in another debate which was finished.

Mr. Pickersgill: I am not sure that his colleagues were altogether pleased by it. That fact is apparent not merely as to the works that are in the estimates to be done this year, but I looked very carefully over that list of works the minister mentioned at page 907, at the bottom of the first column and the top of the second column.

Again I am not going to talk about things that I really do not know about. In Newfoundland it has been suggested that a federal building to provide accommodation for the unemployment insurance commission, and for the family allowances branch, is contemplated. Of course the minister knows perfectly well that that building was contemplated over a year ago as another step in the provision for accommodation for federal departments, and it was to be phased to begin about the time the present customs building would be well on the way to completion.

At that time I happen to know that a fisheries building was also in contemplation. Anyone who knows anything about the present accommodation of the Department of Fisheries in St. John's knows that a fisheries building is urgently needed. It is perhaps even more urgently needed than an unemployment insurance building, though they are both badly needed. It would have seemed reasonable to have accelerated some of these plans a good deal more than there is any indication of being done here.

Then I look at the buildings referred to for Ottawa. Not only have all these buildings, to my knowledge, been in the early planning stages; some of them were in rather advanced planning stages. The national library is in an advanced stage of planning. It is true that some of these buildings could have been begun a good deal earlier but for one thing.

I think perhaps I should interject a word at this moment so the minister will be saved the trouble of getting up and making the constant retort from the other side of the house, "Why didn't you do it when you were in office?" I will tell the minister—and