

Business of Supply

sandbag, the ability to delay, is a demonstration of control to some extent because, after all, stopping things amounts to controlling them. But this is control in the negative sense whereas what we are looking for is effective, positive control.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) and the Treasury Board generally continue to amaze me. I should like to take a few minutes of the time of the house in order to discuss some of the things which have been on my mind and some of the things to which the hon. gentleman has just referred. I shall not try to make anything of the proud boast he made about the government having everything under control, because it is not even necessary to refute that kind of statement at the present time.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He knows better himself.

Mr. Stanfield: The President of the Treasury Board is talking to us about the desirability of increasing the information available to the house but really he is not paying the slightest attention to the criticism suggesting there is something wrong with the present procedure. I have been on my feet recently complaining about the inadequate support which the government is providing for the Auditor General who is an officer of this parliament very well able to ensure that the house does get information not only about expenditure—after the fact, admittedly—but also about appropriate procedures. I have put forward the case for important changes in the relationship between the Treasury Board and the house, but I cannot get the hon. gentleman to pay the slightest attention to this point, one which I think and will continue to think is of the greatest importance until someone on the government side at least takes the trouble to persuade me I am wrong.

I am not really surprised that a member of the government should not pay much attention to me, but I am surprised to find the President of the Treasury Board sweeping aside the opinion of a committee of this house with regard to the appearance of these dollar estimates. He sympathizes with the concern of the committee as though it were, so to speak, an abstract proposition, and then, without any real explanation, he goes on to say that in this case its concern is not justified. If we put the two sentences together and try to make sense of them, we find it amounts to this: in the opinion of the President of the

[Mr. Drury.]

Treasury Board the committee did not know what it was talking about. So it is not only a question of the relation between the Treasury Board and the Auditor General; the government is really not paying any attention to representations made by a committee of the house with regard to this matter.

The minister spoke about giving the house more information. He told us the aim of the government was to provide more information thereby giving the house greater control. Well, I suppose there will not be any more dollar items in the future with regard to transfers of money within departments. They will not be necessary since I understand there are to be so few votes that the government will not need to make any transfers. Hon. gentlemen opposite are arranging things in such a way that in future they will not even have to make reports involving dollar items. I think this is the case. Yet the President of the Treasury Board—and I do not like to be too critical of so honourable a gentleman—comes before us and pretends that the aim of the government is to provide the house with more information. In fact, though, it is clear that the government intends to place itself in a position where it will not be necessary to present any dollar items. Certainly, with a smaller number of votes the minister will not be obliged to report to the house that there has been some change in priorities here or there, that some money has been saved, and that it will be moved over and used for something else. He will be spared the embarrassment of coming before the house, if there be any embarrassment, with regard to these dollar items.

As to these new procedures, I believe the Auditor General has criticized the government for reducing the number of votes, not necessarily for the reason I have given but because the ultimate result will be to reduce the control exercised by the house over the expenditures of the government. It may be that initially the estimates will be presented in a manner which will give a more intelligible picture of what is going on. But if the President of the Treasury Board is suggesting that this change will give the house more control over the expenditures of the government, I dispute that contention. The debate this afternoon indicates this clearly. In future we shall not have even the kind of information which is given to us in these supplementary estimates. There will be no estimates involving changes of this sort because the government is taking the precaution to arrange things to ensure we shall not have