

Interim Supply

● (4.40 p.m.)

I inquired as to the amount of money which it would be necessary to transfer from the finance contingencies vote No. 15 to make possible a meeting of all mid-November payrolls. Perhaps at this point it would be useful for me to read into the record the wording of vote No. 15 under finance contingencies.

Contingencies—to supplement other votes and to provide for miscellaneous minor and unforeseen expenses not otherwise provided for including awards under the Public Servants Inventions Act, subject to the approval of the Treasury Board, and authority to re-use any sums repaid to this appropriation from other appropriations.

I was advised later in the day that the amount in question was \$3.4 million, a figure which was revised the following day to \$2.160 million. I was further concerned about the legal position if the contingencies vote were used for the purposes which I have described in the circumstances which existed at the time, and gave instructions that a legal opinion be obtained from the deputy minister of justice covering this aspect of the matter.

Mr. Douglas: Is that a written opinion?

Mr. Benson: There was a verbal opinion obtained; this is being supported by a written opinion to follow. The opinion of the deputy minister was obtained on the following morning. It confirmed that the wording of the finance vote No. 15 (contingencies) clearly contained authority for making transfers from that vote to supplement other votes, either for payment of salaries or for other purposes. At that time it was also confirmed that the amount of money to be transferred was of the order of \$2.16 million, over half of which was required for a single vote—the Royal Canadian Mounted Police vote—arising out of the pay increase awarded to the R.C.M.P. in September of this year.

When I received this information—this was on Thursday—I gave instructions that the necessary Treasury Board minutes should be prepared for a regular meeting of Treasury Board on Thursday afternoon. It was at this meeting on Thursday afternoon, November 10, that the minutes were passed conferring authority for the transfer out of vote No. 15 of the funds required to meet the mid-November payrolls.

I should like to assure hon. members that these were the only transfers made. The transfers were made out of vote No. 15 (contingencies) to supplement those few votes in government which did not have sufficient

funds already voted by parliament to meet their payrolls.

I do not think there is anything further I can add as to the chronology. At this point, with the permission of the committee, I should like to table extracts from the minutes of the meeting of the Treasury Board held in Ottawa on November 10, 1966, transferring amounts from vote No. 15 to a number of other votes. I should like to indicate the votes which were transferred and the total amounts: to the Auditor General, \$53,000; to the Department of Finance, \$120,000; to the Department of Fisheries, \$15,000; to the Department of National Health and Welfare, \$349,500; to the Department of Public Works, \$315,000; to the Department of the Secretary of State, \$105,000; to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, \$1,120,000; to the Department of Trade and Commerce, \$37,000, and to the Board of Transport Commissioners, \$45,000.

There were no other transfers, and the only transfers made were from the financial contingencies vote in order to meet the payrolls, and, later, by approval, to pay the suppliers accounts which had accumulated.

Mr. Knowles: Would the minister permit a question? In view of the wording of the item which he has read into the record, does the hon. gentleman not recognize that there is a difference between using money to supplement a vote and using money to replace a vote? Isn't that what was done in this case, to provide money to take the place of money which had not been provided by parliament up to this point?

Mr. Benson: I must, of course, rely on the advice of the law officers of the crown in this regard. I have relied on this advice, and I believe my position has been further reinforced inasmuch as the Auditor General, who is the watch dog of parliament and who is particularly concerned about what is done by the government in matters involving finance, was one who applied for an allocation from this vote to make up enough money to meet his own payroll.

The Chairman: I am wondering whether the minister wishes to have these documents printed in *Hansard*. There is the question of tabling documents in committee—

Mr. Knowles: I should like to suggest that that be done. They are relevant to the argument, and they can only be tabled in the house. I suggest that the committee give consent to having them printed.