

37. It does not follow that you are not going to call Parliament together until then. The question is that the "unauthorised" is used for a purpose opposed altogether to the spirit of "unauthorised." It was never intended to meet current salaries for any month out of unauthorised expenditure, was it?—No; but the appropriations which you extend meet those. If you go beyond the appropriations you go to "unauthorised."

38. But you are aware, are you not, that to meet the current monthly expenditure of some of the large Departments it has to be charged to "unauthorised"?—I understand that this very case arises out of that contingency. This arises out of circumstances of that kind.

39. "Unauthorised" was contemplated, was it not, to meet expenditure that is not provided for?—The "unauthorised" is described as "in excess of or without the appropriation of Parliament." "In excess of" means "in excess of the votes"; "without the appropriation," "without any votes."

40. It was never contemplated that "unauthorised" should be drawn upon as it has had to be owing to the four months' imprest. It was never contemplated that you should have to pay the ordinary salaries of these large Departments for a month of the year out of "unauthorised"?—If you exceed the appropriation, I think that must be so. I cannot understand the law, as it exists at present, as meaning anything else. I may say that ways of overcoming the difficulty are hardly for the Audit Office to suggest or to consider. If you take this particular case it would have been met by a limit of £200,000 instead of £150,000. The great question is whether the Government is to stop its expenditure—to take this case, that of the Post Office—for telephones and telegraph-lines, and so forth—whether it is to stop the expenditure or not. So far as the Audit Office is concerned, we are merely part of the statute.

*Right Hon. R. J. Seddon*: At all events, it is a contingency that may arise again, and it is for us to see whether you can aid us in providing against it. Of course, your remedy is a certain one. You say, "Stop the expenditure." That is all right; but, as a matter of administration, sometimes—say, if you have a contract proceeding—it is rather difficult.

*Mr. Collins*: In this case the expenditure was already made.

*Mr. W. Fraser* (to *Mr. Collins*): You have stated once or twice that when the expenditure was made there was enough in the Unauthorised Account to meet it, but when the vouchers came in there was not. Does that often arise, or is it a condition of affairs which can, by a little foresight and care, be avoided?

*Mr. Collins*: At the time the payments were made there was sufficient money in the Unauthorised Account to meet them. The payments were made in April—in fact, some of them prior to April—and there was plenty of margin; but when the vouchers came into the Treasury for entry we saw that if we entered them we should be in difficulties with the "unauthorised," and that the Railways or some other Department would have to suffer. Our "unauthorised" was so much taken up at the time by excess on votes that we were unable to enter them.

*Mr. W. Fraser*: Would it not have been possible, at any time while all these charges were being incurred, and before the vouchers came in, to know what the state of the account was, and to know whether you were not issuing charges which might overrun the constable?

*Mr. Collins*: We know that; but in this particular case the moneys were paid by the Post Office, and not by the Treasury. The Post Office made the payments.

*Mr. W. Fraser*: Without your knowledge?

*Mr. Collins*: They got imprest moneys from us, and were making payments. We did not know of the way they were spending the moneys. In this case some were spent by the Agent-General. At the time he had funds in hand, but as time went on other claims came in from the Agent-General and increased the amount charged to "unauthorised."

*Mr. W. Fraser*: Which you did not know of?

*Mr. Collins*: Not until the vouchers arrived.

*Mr. W. Fraser*: And which you could not have known of?

*Mr. Collins*: No; we could not very well have known. Had we not sent the money Home to the Agent-General for stores in the month of April we could have entered most of those vouchers up. There was £25,000 chargeable, I think, to the vote.

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