

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker with the House went up to the Senate Chamber.

● (1802)

And being returned:

Mr. Speaker informed the House that the Deputy Governor General had been pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bills:

Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act and to establish the Employment Tax Credit Program—Chapter No. 4.

Bill C-3, An Act respecting the reorganization of Air Canada—Chapter No. 5.

Mr. Speaker: It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock this evening.

At 6.07 p.m. the House took recess.

● (2002)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S.O. 58—ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Clark:

That in the opinion of this House it is essential to the economic well-being and good government of Canada that action be taken to reduce the scope and rationalize the role of government activity in Canadian society by reducing the share of the national wealth currently consumed by government, and to this end that a special committee be struck before February 28, 1978 to consider:

- (1) the enactment of "sunset laws" to provide for the termination of programs or agencies which have outlived their usefulness;
- (2) methods to limit the growing and undemocratic use of regulations;
- (3) the criteria by which the government would divest itself of those crown corporations which play no useful role in the public sector;
- (4) the adaptation of new flexible budget planning techniques to discourage unnecessary growth in departmental budgets.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, the motion we are debating this evening has four main thrusts. It has reference to the need to reduce the scope of government activity in Canadian society and to rationalize its role by reducing the share of the national wealth currently consumed by government. It refers to "sunset laws" to terminate programs and agencies which have outlived their usefulness. It refers to ways of eliminating the growing and undemocratic use of regulations and, presumably, other statutory instruments. Finally, it refers to Crown corporations and ways of

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getting rid of those which are of no further use and whose activities might better be carried on by the private sector and to more flexible budget planning.

No one can object to any of these objectives. But the motion would create a special committee to study all these matters and the question in my mind is whether a reference to a committee would really be the most effective way of achieving these objectives.

This afternoon the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) dealt with the general issue of government expenditures. He pointed out that provincial and municipal governments have increased their expenditures at an even greater rate than the federal government has; the sector we are considering, the federal government, now spends a diminishing portion of the national income from year to year. Nevertheless, all of us, regardless of the party to which we belong, are concerned about the objective advanced here, because it is basic.

There is a great deal of current mythology implicit in the motion. Hon. members advocate "sunset laws" to get rid of agencies or programs which have outlived their usefulness. Mr. Speaker, there is not a day of the week on which I do not interview people in my office whose services are redundant because the programs upon which they were working have been terminated. A determined effort is currently under way to review all government expenditures and bring about a measure of economy in the public interest.

When hon. gentlemen opposite were in power—it does not seem so long ago—they named a body to look into government organization, the Glassco Commission, whose terms of reference followed generally along the lines of the motion before us. The commission made a series of recommendations. The sum total of their philosophy was this: government was too big, too bureaucratic, too cumbersome; expenditures were controlled by Treasury Board with too heavy a hand under a Comptroller of the Treasury and all applications for employment were carefully funneled through the bureaucratic institution called the Public Service Commission. The Glassco commission said: let the deputy ministers manage things; let them be responsible; get rid of the heavy-handed apparatus of control and in this way we shall achieve efficiency.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know what happened. The Glassco recommendations were accepted in many instances and the result was not an improvement in government efficiency. Indeed, the upshot was the situation which the Auditor General called to our attention in his 1976 report. When the office of comptroller general was abolished the mechanisms designed to check government expenditure were removed; the financial control officers and the financial control manuals were not in place. Now the wheel has turned again. Under pressure from the Auditor General the government is restoring the office of comptroller general. The terms of reference have been changed and his functions are somewhat different, but from where I sit as a layman it all has a familiar ring. After all these years we are coming back closer to the machinery with which we started.