

Financial Administration Act

I think it is important for this House to realize what can happen. Manitoba Hydro has given excellent service to the province of Manitoba. Manitobans have paid some of the lowest hydro-electric rates in the country for hydro generated from the Winnipeg River. In the last years of the former administration, however, Lake Winnipeg was regulated. Russian turbines were put in at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, but those turbines are not producing electricity. There have been the Nelson River diversion and the Churchill River diversion. All those programs in themselves might have been valid, but today of every dollar Manitoba Hydro takes from Manitoba taxpayers 50 cents is spent on debt. The comparative advantage we had is gone.

I say to this government that the way it is spending and overspending, the legacy of debt we have in Manitoba Hydro will be the legacy of debt which will accrue to every Canadian. We will never repay that debt, but the generations who will follow us will.

With regard to the estimates, I suggest that the federal government seriously examine a method used in Manitoba, not because Manitoba is my home province or because this method was developed by the former NDP administration and the Conservative House leader of the day, but because the system is quite simple. Under the system X number of hours are provided for the examination of supply in the legislature. The opposition has the right to call whatever department it wants to call. The opposition has the right to hold ministers in their seats answering questions for as long as it wishes. When the total number of hours are used, that is it. So it is up to the opposition to bring public attention to spending in the legislature, because that is where the public attention is directed. It is not directed to committees, as is the case here in Ottawa.

In response to public pressure the opposition in Manitoba has the ability to hold ministers accountable. If they choose to start with agriculture, for example, and spend all the hours on agriculture, obviously the estimates of the other ministers do not come before the legislature. However, by that time the opposition should have analyzed clearly which departments it would like to scrutinize publicly, and that is the method used.

At times the legislature agrees not to see the clock at the end of the day and to go beyond the appointed hour. That might be of some advantage here. Under the system I am describing the government has an opportunity to know how much time will be spent. I think governments have to know that. We cannot go on here forever, but I think the government should be able to respond in a positive way. Under this system the opposition is able to apply public pressure and to hold a minister and his government responsible. I say to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), as I said earlier, that I think we would have better government and I think ministers would be more confident in their roles if they knew that their estimates had been scrutinized and passed after a meaningful debate.

I welcome the appointment of the comptroller general. I just hope that we will not stop there but that we will go much further in the examination of estimates and that parliament

[Mr. Epp.]

once again will be able to do the job it is called upon to do. The democratic process can demand nothing less.

Mr. Roger Young (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned me in the course of his remarks. It is true that I did throw a quip across the aisle while he was speaking, and I want to clarify for his benefit that I said that if he was sincere about wanting to get on with control procedures in order to control government spending, and if he was sincere in wanting to see an improvement in the watchdog role of parliament, he and his colleagues would get on with the bill, pass it and install the comptroller general in office.

It is true that time and money is wasted in this institution, as in any institution. Time is wasted by repetitious speeches when some hon. members are ready to go on with other measures, particularly when they have been given an indication that certain other matters might be proceeded with, as was the case a day ago. It was indicated to us that we would be through with this measure and go on with some other measures. I want to point out that I have been waiting here with notes to deal with Bill S-8 and Bill C-42 since yesterday. As a result of some indications I cancelled three very serious appointments in my riding today, one of which had to do with a model parliament. When some 400 or 500 interested students at a local high school look next week in *Hansard* for the remarks I told them I undoubtedly would be making today on those two other measures, they will not find them. I want to point out that my remarks will not be there because we have been delayed by a series of repetitious speeches today on this bill, which I thought we would get on with.

Improvements could be made, and that is why we have this bill. We want the comptroller general not one day, one hour or one minute later than necessary, and if opposition members want to continue delaying this measure by making speeches, that will be upon their shoulders.

Mr. Towers: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Apparently the hon. member does not realize that the comptroller general has been appointed and has been in his office for three weeks. He is doing his job, and that has nothing whatsoever to do with this point.

Mr. Young: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows that, whether the man has been appointed or not, he needs legal authority through this bill to do his job, and I repeat, not one day, one hour or one moment later than necessary.

If there is a delay and if the cause of it is repetitious speeches, that will not be on the shoulders of hon. members on this side of the House. The public will be quite aware through television where that responsibility lies.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great respect and great interest to my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Young), who advanced a complaint which is, I suppose, the