

Main Estimates

As far as the comment about the form of the estimates is concerned, I indicated shortly after I took this portfolio, I think in response to the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), that with regard to the question of the form of the estimates I was sympathetic to the need for more detailed information but that I doubted very much if it would be possible to introduce those changes for the main estimates this year for a reason I knew then, and that was that it would be a commitment to the members of the Public Accounts Committee particularly in their participation in the revision of the form of the estimates.

I can say now that I am more familiar with the problem than I was then, and there is a great deal of work and planning for some improvements which is going on and which, I hope, I will be in a position to announce with a fair amount of conviction in the not too distant future.

As to the estimates, I would be glad to co-operate to the degree I can, but I cannot make more time than has been available.

Mr. McGrath: Perhaps by way of a supplementary I can amplify or crystallize exactly what I am looking for from the minister. Will the minister give us an undertaking that he will examine the experiences of the last three years? Such an examination would demonstrate to him that there were departments last year, the year before, and the year before that which never did get before committee for examination of their estimates. Since we are talking essentially about the management of the House, can the minister at least give us an undertaking, given the concern about government spending—and rightly so—that he will consult with his colleague, the government House leader, so that we can be assured that there will be a sense of priority on the part of the government House leader and the committees of the House with regard to the examination of estimates and that, notwithstanding any other government legislative program, estimates will receive priority by the committees?

Mr. Andras: I will certainly examine the practices. I myself have been party to those practices in terms of having taken the estimates of my former ministries before committees. To the best of my knowledge they have been examined before those committees. I appreciate that when we get down to the deadline there is often not enough time to go over them in detail. If that is what the hon. member is referring to, I will co-operate to the maximum, but I think it becomes a question of procedures to which all of us are party rather than government initiative by itself. However, I would be glad to look into it.

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) a question. Given the fact that the amount of spending increase the minister has indicated is virtually nullified by the increase in inflation, and if we are spending about the same amount in this year's estimates as last year in real dollars, and if we have one million and more unemployed, would the minister please try in a brief way to justify what kind of fiscal conservatism we have at this time, and specifical-

ly, could he explain to us why such important human and job-creating areas as housing, for example, have been cut by \$30.6 million for next year, and urban renewal spending by \$1.6 million, and could he explain to the people of Canada why the government embarked on that course of action?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, on this occasion I do not want to go into detail on all the figures in the bluebook, but with regard to housing I believe there was a reduction in the capital budget estimate, to which the hon. member referred. However, as I recall there was an increase of about \$267 million in the operating aspect of the housing program, and I think that represents a 70 per cent or 75 per cent increase. One would have to take the whole thing together. I appreciate that the hon. member has not had an opportunity to do more than pick out a few things—and I am not making any accusations or allegations—but I think there is a deeper consolidation he might want to make before he gets too far out on a limb and makes that kind of statement.

With regard to general philosophy we have experienced substantial increases year on year over the last several years, as the hon. member well knows. There are many philosophical differences which could be debated here as to which way is the best way to stimulate the economy or the best way to attract investment, create jobs in the private sector, or spend our way through the public sector, but as the hon. member knows, he is arguing about the degree of these things. There have been increases for job creation and manpower training. These are designed to increase the opportunity for people to get gainful work while the economy is still slack. I suppose it is a question of philosophical argument.

Mr. Broadbent: Assuming that the philosophy of the government remains constant—and that is politeness on my part—I would like to ask the minister how he can explain the difference in spending from the 1971-72 period, when roughly three times the amount was allocated to direct job creation programs, from that being allocated now in the estimates for the forthcoming fiscal year when unemployment in the coming fiscal year is expected to be much higher than it was back in 1971-72. If there is any consistency in the philosophy of the government, why is spending not at least at the same level in direct job creation programs now as it was back in 1971-72?

Mr. Andras: I must seriously argue with the hon. member as to the accuracy—albeit inadvertent—of that comparison. It has been a few months since I was directly familiar with tracing the size of expenditures through those years, but I certainly do not recall a three to one difference in those ratios, as the hon. member has indicated. I would certainly want to see a consolidation of the job creation, employment producing measures today compared with what they were in 1971-72 or in any other year. If the hon. member brought them all together, I really believe he would find that there has been a steady increase. I have some personal familiarity with this, so I will try to get the figures together in an honest comparison to see what the relevance is.