

Control of Public Funds

dures designed to give parliament a better opportunity to scrutinize expenditures. The hon. member for Peace River has chosen to present a picture of a government that seeks to slight and ignore parliament in the matter of expenditures. I shall be able to offer sufficient evidence to refute, if not to ridicule this charge.

I should like now to refer to the many profitable discussions which were held with the Public Accounts Committee of this House in 1968 and 1969 about the new form of estimates then under development. I spoke to the committee in November of 1968 at some length about our general thinking in this matter. In particular I said:

The blue book of estimates constitutes the framework for parliamentary control and the examination of departmental expenditure plans. The primary objective of the proposals that I have presented to you is designed to facilitate your task in carrying out your responsibilities as Members of Parliament.

I spoke about a new system of expenditure coding to replace the existing one that had become outmoded, a new system that permitted the classification and cross classification of expenditures in many different ways. I said that the new form would include much more information about Crown corporations than had been included in the past.

Mr. Nielsen: What a laugh that is.

Mr. Drury: I showed how we proposed to make a clear distinction between grants and contributions; an important distinction obscured by changing circumstances. There were many changes proposed, but most fundamental of all was the proposed system of classifying the expenditures of each department and agency onto one or more programs, each with its own appropriate vote structure. In each program, statements of objectives would be made in the estimates, supported by descriptions of activities to be carried on in pursuit of these objectives as well as by much detail about the manpower to be used, the nature of the expenditures to be undertaken, the related major capital projects and other matters.

This open end frank presentation of our plans to the designated representative of this House in matters relating to financial procedures was followed by several meetings at which the committee questioned officials of the Treasury Board. Of significance is the fact that these meetings resulted in changes in the proposals of the government in response to the suggestions of the members of the committee; changes made because the government recognized the importance of a clear presentation of ample information about expenditures to parliament to facilitate the work of parliament with regard to expenditures.

I may say, and recall to the hon. gentleman, that this committee charged with the responsibility of improving this presentation gave unanimous approval to the new form.

Mr. Nielsen: It was not unanimous, and that fact has been raised as a question of privilege before.

Mr. Drury: The research work undertaken to prepare the remarks, from which the hon. gentleman has read, represented another means of improving the efficacy of the tools available to Members of Parliament. I will not dwell on that, but his remarks rather indicate that the new

[Mr. Drury.]

form of estimates was some form of concoction by the government designed to mislead the House.

Mr. Baldwin: Right.

● (1240)

Mr. Drury: This new form of the estimates, I repeat to the hon. member, represents the unanimous approval of the conclusions of the committee of which a member from his party was chairman and of which, on an off-and-on basis, he himself has been a member. I can only wish that in formulating his criticisms of the present form of the estimates—the present form of the presentation—he had taken a little more time when this matter was under discussion to improve them in the manner he is now suggesting.

Mr. Baldwin: There are three official languages, French, English and bureaucratese.

Mr. Drury: I would interject that there is another official language the hon. gentleman uses which falls under none of those headings. He is, perhaps in his own terms, obfuscatory. The new form was put into effect first with the main estimates for the year 1970-71 and the form of the supplementary estimates was altered subsequently. Since that time, the government has gone on to make changes this year to further improve the quality and increase the quantity of information in the blue book and its supplements.

If any member of the House has further suggestions for improvement other than general ones I—and I can speak on behalf of the government—would be glad to have these and to take them into consideration. To refer again to the situation in 1968, pre-1968 experience indicated that the House had ceased to deal with the estimates in an effective way. There was clearly a crying need for some changes in procedures that would give hon. members a chance to discharge their responsibilities in this regard. With the concurrence of the House, amendments were made to the standing orders calling for early reference of various sections of the main estimates to the Standing Committees according to the subject matter in which each committee specializes. For the last few years, the estimates have then had a much more searching review in these committees than it had been possible to give them in the House for many years. This has been the case, I may say, despite the seeming inability or unwillingness of some members of the official opposition to use the opportunities for inquiry given them.

Mr. Nielsen: What tripe!

Mr. Drury: The mover of the motion said that the work of these committees was "flub". I am not sure what that term means. My dictionary does not contain it. I would suggest that if this is pejorative, then he might examine the performance of some of his henchmen in respect of these committees, if indeed they are not working satisfactorily as a means of making effective inquiries.

In summary of my remarks to this point, let me say that the government has understood, as the hon. member apparently has not, the essentials for parliamentary review and control of expenditures. And having under-