

The Economy

more money. It is therefore essential that financial controls and procedures which protect the taxpayer in a meaningful way are implemented. I do not think a special committee of parliament is a solution. I do not believe the establishment of "sunset laws" is a solution either.

We must ensure that when a deputy minister places a budget before his minister requiring so many millions of dollars to run the department for the coming year, that minister knows the budget has received the utmost scrutiny. I personally hope that the comptroller general, as one of his functions, will be making absolutely sure of that point. This is not in the realm of the Auditor General's duties. He looks at expenditures after they have been made. This job, then, is parallel to that of a chief executive officer in the private sector, who must insist upon double checking all figures in order to keep his corporation healthy and competitive.

The concept of instituting better control over government expenditures cannot be argued with. We must be realistic. First, we must understand that the federal government consumes only roughly 50 per cent of the gross national product of this country. As the President of the Treasury Board mentioned this afternoon, only about 50 per cent of those expenditures, or 25 per cent of the gross national product, is really controllable. The other 50 per cent is taken up by ongoing programs to which a "sunset law" could not apply. For instance, the government cannot arbitrarily cease to make payments to the provinces. There are other kinds of statutory payments, such as interest and so on, which are impossible to control.

● (2102)

The way we control the other half of our budget is through the kinds of personnel and dollar controls that are being instituted by this government more and more through effective measures advocated by Treasury Board. It is our job as members of parliament to continue to push for those. That is our idea of the way in which we can ultimately get a much better grip on the public purse.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat mystified by a couple of things that occurred in the speech of the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) and the last speaker, the hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Martin), regarding their view of what this motion means. Either they have read the motion and not understood it, particularly the last speaker, or if they do understand it, they do not want to admit its validity. It concerns me that two parliamentarians have taken the view that parliament as such has no place in the boardrooms of the public service.

Mr. Martin: I did not say that.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The hon. member says he did not say that. He said he thought it would be best if the control of government expenditures was left to Treasury Board. There is nothing in the motion put by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) which says that Treasury Board ought

[Mr. Martin.]

not to have the kind of control about which the hon. member spoke. We say the facts speak for themselves.

Over the course of time the federal government has been a contributor to the eating up of the gross national product. The question in the minds of many members is whether Treasury Board control by itself has proved to be adequate. It is time parliament began examining the accounts from the point of view of the percentage of the gross national product being eaten up by government. When we consider the situation, there is only one group of people in Canada ultimately accountable to the people, and that is the members in this chamber who also occupy the committees.

There is nothing sacrosanct about the standing committees of the House of Commons. Of course, there ought to be a study with regard to their relevancy, and I intend to say something about that later from the point of view of control.

Let us not fool ourselves. Let us not try to get the public to believe that the present system of control has been satisfactory. Perhaps it is time that we got into the business of examining the expenditures of government and the operations of agencies of government to see whether the people of Canada are obtaining the best value for their tax dollar. That is the purpose of this motion.

I commend the Leader of the Opposition on the speech he made and the new approach he has taken. It is perhaps an indication that the old rules which have been tested on the old boys are not sufficient today for the control of government. For the sake of being able to supply the social necessities to the public of Canada, we must look at new ways of controlling the cost of government.

The speech by the Leader of the Opposition indicated a new approach. It is unique because he said that parliament has a part to play in it. What disturbed me about the approach taken by the first NDP member who spoke was not only that they were prepared to have the old ways prevail, but that they are going to vote against this concept because it is new. It is a crass kind of conservatism that shakes me. Perhaps it is an indication of where that party stands in the scheme of things. More than that, it probably indicates the trauma from which they have yet to recover resulting from the election of the government of Sterling Lyon in Manitoba and what that government has done.

The government of Manitoba has established a force to look into the expenditures of government. They have involved the public service in a participatory way. My friends in that government tell me that the response they have had from the public service has been tremendous. There may be possibilities that that kind of approach can be operated with the involvement of the parliament of Canada. The government ought not to take the view that parliament has no place in deciding the fate of crown corporations and agencies. Parliament should have a place in deciding whether programs have become useless or whether their objectives should be changed.

I was interested in the approach to this whole matter by the President of Treasury Board (Mr. Andras). He agreed with us.