

The Economy

waves of pessimism that are inherent in some of the comments we hear.

● (1642)

To return to the more specific subclauses of the motion before us, I quote:

(1) the enactment of "Sunset Laws" to provide for the termination of programs or agencies which have outlived their usefulness;

I do not find too much argument with the selective application of "sunset laws" of a very special type and for very special situations. Indeed I think this government has done that on occasion, and I can think of certain programs. I remember that when I had the responsibility for housing and urban affairs we had the sewage treatment loan program which had an expiry date, which is a "sunset law" application. We have the Neighbourhood Improvement Program right now, and I think we have to take a close look at this one. It is due to expire at the end of March. There is the anti-inflation program which is operating under the date of a "sunset law" and requires a review by parliament if it is to be continued.

If that is the kind of application, and one could think of others, that the opposition is suggesting be wisely used over a period of time, I can agree with that. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that we go the route that is being touted in the new American fad that all departments and agencies be placed under "sunset laws", then there are certain theoretical advantages to the review or evaluation that that triggers. But let us face the practical fact of life that this parliament could not, nor could the American Congress, deal with the legislative burden that kind of a blanket across-the-board "sunset law" application would require.

Mr. Clark: You could do it one at a time.

Mr. Andras: If the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about a selective, periodic review, zero based budgeting and that kind of thing, I do not think he made it clear, nor is it clear in the motion that may be different.

Mr. Clark: "Sunset laws" applied one at a time.

Mr. Andras: That is exactly what I said, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Clark: No, Sir.

Mr. Andras:—when I said I had some sympathy with it on a selective basis and on a very carefully planned basis.

An hon. Member: Let us have a committee look into it.

Mr. Andras: Before you have a committee deal with that particular subject, there is another committee that perhaps should meet and look into the total revision of the rules and procedures of this House.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Right on.

Mr. Andras: Because the legislative procedures under which we are operating now are about 19th century, and we would

[Mr. Andras.]

have to bring this House into the 20th century in order to provide for many improvements of that nature. That is where you would have to begin, because the theoretical suggestions of these kinds of improvements would absolutely bog down if you did not have that accomplished.

Mr. Clark: Talk to Allan MacEachen.

Mr. Andras: While I listened with great interest for the specific nature of the dramatic chops that the opposition was going to make with respect to Crown corporations, I only heard FIRA and Petro-Can mentioned. I thought Petro-Can would come up; it is one of their favourite flogging horses. FIRA, that is another matter.

There is a suggestion of the development of criteria. I have not heard a suggestion of what the criteria would be for the elimination of Crown corporations. Again, I am simply saying that in my disappointment at not hearing specific suggestions here, just the grand generalizations, this does not mean that we do not have a great deal of sympathy or that we are not looking very closely at the idea of what we can effectively get rid of and put into the private sector. I will look forward to constructive suggestions respecting that aspect.

Because of the pressure of time. Mr. Speaker, I would like now to come more to the final subclause in the motion, the adaptation of budget planning techniques, etc. I think this is an area to which, on a non-partisan basis, that we, at some time, have to address ourselves in this House. But let us please understand what we are really getting at here. As the President of the Treasury Board I doubt that there are many people more conscious of the rigidity and lack of flexibility that our present expenditure process involves.

Under any acceptable ceiling of expenditure I can tell you that you start off with about 57 per cent of your budget precommitted in about 11 or 12 statutory programs. Let us not argue about the quality of those programs, I am simply telling you the facts. Much of this is in a book which was published about a year ago explaining how your tax dollar is spent, and I commend it to you for reading. This is a mutual problem for all of us if we are going to be serious about whether it is bigger government or better government, or whatever the clichés might end up saying.

Some 57 per cent of our expenditures are committed at the beginning. They are basically the social programs, of which most of us in this House are proud, even if a lot of us think they are probably things which have to be looked at, for example adjustments. An extra 10 or 12 per cent, I cannot recall the exact figure, is also precommitted in the nature of contractual obligations to the provinces, such as manpower training contracts etc. You could argue about their value, but they are commitments. There are longer term commitments, established program financing, and a dozen other things, with the result that 23 per cent of the budget of expenditures of the federal government today are transfer payments to the provinces. The federal government collects the revenue in the main, obviously through taxation, and then transfers this to the provinces. Equalization payments and many others of that