

Main Estimates

year, there has been a decline in the national debt as a percentage of gross national product, until the year 1975. Since then, year after year it has been increasing. The significant thing is that since this government embarked on its so-called restraint program in 1975 the debt of this country as a percentage of gross national product has been increasing year by year. It is that trend that should be worrying the government, and it is that trend that should be worrying the minister. Comparisons between 1946 and this year are meaningless. What is meaningful is the trend of the debt to go up and up and up in the last few years.

This increase in debt is producing in the coming fiscal year a debt load of \$8.38 billion. The interest expense for the next year will be higher than the entire budget of the Government of Canada when it came into power. We are to pay more for interest this year than was spent by the government in that year; more interest is being paid than the total amount spent eight years ago. That is the fact that should be concerning the people.

I sincerely hope this manipulation that has been carried out by this minister, together with the hidden and secretive way in which he has approached the disclosure of these estimates, will not fool the public, and that the public will realize that the government is planning to increase its expenditures this year at a higher rate than last year, that is, by 9.7 per cent as opposed to 9.5 per cent last year. I hope the public will realize that the global increase of \$4.3 billion is the largest dollar increase since 1975. I hope that by now the public has recognized the ability the government has for cooking the books on the non-budgetary side, by transferring certain loans over to Crown corporations and, voilà, they disappear from the estimates. The government claims it is cutting expenditures when all it has done is transfer them to other entities so they do not show up in the blue book. That method has been used again this year in the projection of federal supplementaries and lapses to the tune of \$400 million. These expenditures have been hidden from the public.

Let me repeat what I said in my opening remarks. This minister has not had the common courtesy of allowing members of parliament the same privileges given members of the press when they are locked up for a period of time to examine the books prior to their being made public. This minister did not provide us with an advance copy. Having withheld that courtesy from members who are spokesmen for opposition parties, it is difficult for members to comment in detail. The minister's predecessor has followed the practice of making copies of his remarks available in advance. That is a practice followed in this House by most ministers.

This is a marvellous book, and I am sure the secretariat of the Treasury Board spent a great deal of time putting together these nice little pictures of selected data designed to make this government look good. Honesty has not been a first requirement in the assembly of this data. Obviously the first requirement has been to pick out the numbers that make the government look good. This government has put these figures together in such a way that it hopes people will think it is

doing a good job. That is what the secretariat and the minister have done, and that is why the Auditor General is insisting that the Comptroller General assume responsibility in respect of the form of the estimates. Obviously the motivation of the present group is not to inform but in fact to deceive the Canadian public about the profligate spending policies of this government.

Without a copy of this material in advance it is difficult, as I have said, to go into detail at this time. However, in the days and weeks ahead the House can be sure we will fulfil our responsibilities by carrying out a double check on this government in an effort to bring some semblance of order and honesty to its approach to the spending of taxpayers' money.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I cannot get as excited as spokesmen for the official opposition about the failure of the minister to make copies of the documents available in advance. I do not think opposition members could get much more by having copies of the documents available at ten o'clock in the morning than by obtaining them at 1.30 or one o'clock. I suggest that what we need is not the presentation of documents one, two or three hours before the minister's statement, but weeks or months before. What we need is open government such as the Auditor General has suggested. There is no need for the kind of secrecy we have witnessed. Let me suggest to the minister that even in this country there comes a time when a government party may find itself in opposition and may regret that when in government it did not provide the opposition with more information.

According to the minister, the government is involved in a restraint program. I suggest it is limiting its expenditures in important fields such as post-secondary education, health and social services, not because needs in these fields have lessened, but simply because it seems to the government that this is the popular thing to do. The government has put a ceiling on the increases it will pay toward the cost of medicare and hospitalization, both of which programs were really pushed by the federal government and which are now to be paid increasingly by the provinces. This government has put a limit on Canada Assistance Plan expenditures for social services, again a program initiated by this federal government, the increase in the cost of which, when not to be paid by the government, will have to be paid by the provinces. It has put a limit on the amount which it will pay for the increasing cost of post-secondary education. It has cut back on employment programs, such as Outreach, which were doing a tremendous job of finding work for people who have found it difficult to find work, who did not fit into the work force in the normal way and for whom the manpower department was a complete failure. It has cut back on the amounts paid for the manpower training allowances. It has cut back on funds for housing although there are still hundreds of thousands of people in Canada who are poorly housed.