

Olympic Financing

The Postmaster General co-operated with us in committee, but the hearing was a farce. Government supporters on the committee expected the bill to pass in the one Thursday afternoon sitting, but they were so badly informed about the bill that they were unable to ask any questions. They expected the committee to pass it without any questioning. We asked some questions which went beyond the responsibilities of the Postmaster General. At any rate, he could not answer.

Incidentally, Mr. Gerry Snyder, the vice-president of COJO in charge of revenue, attended the committee hearing. Who is more qualified to answer questions about accounting than the vice-president in charge of revenue? When we wanted to ask him questions about COJO financing, the hon. member for Labelle (Mr. Dupras) made it clear that in his opinion Mr. Snyder was not a witness qualified to answer such questions. Again I ask, who could be more qualified to answer than the vice-president to COJO in charge of revenue? The committee chairman did not allow us to question Mr. Snyder or even to vote on the matter. Hence, we were unable to question a COJO official. We questioned the Postmaster General but not the President of the Treasury Board who should have attended.

Now you know, Mr. Speaker, why this bill is still before the House. If the government and COJO had co-operated in committee, we could have passed this bill by now. We are entitled to know cost figures; we are entitled to know how COJO has been spending its funds. Now we learn that COJO is to make its budget and accounting data available to the Quebec legislature tomorrow in Quebec City. That is beyond comprehension. Here we are, federal members of parliament discussing a bill for helping the Olympic program and COJO, and we get absolutely no co-operation from COJO or the government. Right from the beginning, from 1968 when the Prime Minister sent the letter of acceptance to the International Olympic Committee, COJO and the government have attempted to hide the facts. In fairness, I repeat that the Postmaster General did the best he could to answer questions relating to the area for which he is responsible.

● (1620)

Why is this bill before us? Why are we even discussing coins? It is for one solitary purpose, namely, to assist COJO and the Olympics in Montreal to make as much money from the seigniorage of the coins as possible, for financing the games. Because of that fact it is very difficult to understand why the Postmaster General would be reluctant to reduce the amount of gold in the proof coin and make it uniform with the regular coin.

Had this motion suggested that we increase the gold content from one quarter to one half-ounce in the regular coin and make it uniform, I would understand the minister rejecting it. His reasoning behind rejecting it would be that we are taking away a certain profit that COJO could be getting from these coins. However, we are suggesting a reduction of the gold in the coin in order to eliminate any questionable acts that may surround the possibility of any counterfeiting. The minister talked about counterfeiting. We never suggested that. We talked about the possibility of misdealings or an under-the-table situation of trying to fool the public when there are two coins nearly the same

[Mr. Jelinek.]

but with a different gold content. We suggested a reduction and, therefore, a bigger profit for the Olympic organization. There would be a bigger seigniorage involved for the top price proof coins. We could have a regular coin and a proof coin. There would be no question of cheating or underhanded deals, trying to fool the public with regard to different amounts of gold in the coins.

There are many more questionable areas which have to be looked at as far as this bill is concerned. However, I will reserve my time until we get to the other amendments. In closing my remarks on the first motion, I urge the minister to reconsider his stand. As the member from the NDP said, it is not in the hands of the committee or parliament; it is in the hands of the government. We are not trying to hold up this bill. We are not making amendments for the sake of making amendments. We are trying to better the situation and help the project, to assist COJO. Because of that fact, I urge the minister to reconsider his stand on this first amendment. I look forward to taking part in the debate on other motions.

Mr. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Mr. Speaker, I attended last Friday's meeting on the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates. I am a new member, a commoner from the streets. I arrived on this hill last September. Since that time we have been faced with some 80 pieces of legislation. I have been trying to orient myself with a procedure to protect freedoms that has evolved over many years; the procedure is a system of government that is trying to govern an increasingly complex society.

Last Friday I was pleased at the openness of the minister in answering questions from the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens). Today, I was very surprised at his closing remarks and the reasons he gave for saying he would vote against the amendment we are debating. When he says that he takes offence at the accusation or suggestion that he is hiding things, it really surprises me.

If one reads the act that is being amended, he will see that Bill C-196 does not go into any detail with regard to gold coinage. It discusses the stamp program and the silver coin program. It has been reported in the papers that a supplementary program is in the hip pocket of COJO, perhaps with the blessing of the federal government, and that it is a gold coin program. I can find nowhere in Bill C-63 any details on technology, technique or the impact of this gold coin program on world markets or what we are doing to past and standard practices as far as the Canadian Mint is concerned. Nowhere in the bill do I see explained the details that were raised in the committee last Friday. If the committee does not have people skilled in these specialty areas, such as the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), how are we going to find out what is in the mind of the minister in charge of the program?

The hon. member for High Park-Humber Valley (Mr. Jelinek) referred to the fact that this bill is sponsored by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) and we have not heard from him in this debate; we have been dealing with the Postmaster General (Mr. Mackasey). I am really surprised at the minister's reasons for saying he will vote against the amendment. What we on this side are concerned about is that there is a basic departure from the historic coinage practice of the Canadian Mint. It has been