

Financial Administration Act

committee well prepared and ready to proceed and then been only allowed ten minutes? By the time you ask a question and get the answer, you have only introduced the subject. The chairman then goes on to the next member of parliament.

On the other side of the coin, other members of the committee sit there hour after hour waiting to get in their ten minutes' worth. How many of us have been prepared at the committee and were not even able to ask a question in that session? When there is a specific branch of the department before us, we might not have an opportunity to again ask a question of that branch during the course of that year. All we can hope for is that supplementary estimates, more spending, come before us so that we will have a chance at that point. It has become a farce. That is why I appreciate the comments of the hon. member for New Westminster. At least he got up to bat and got the estimates before his committee.

What are we to do in the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration when they have not even called the ball game? Those estimates came down in February and March. We have \$4 billion in unemployment insurance and one million people unemployed, yet we have not examined the estimates, not even in the perfunctory manner described by other members.

We have not looked at the Department of Employment and Immigration. I see the minister smiling. If I were the minister, I would smile too for not having to be held accountable in public. However, if you ask the minister, I am sure he would agree that better government comes from scrupulous study of estimates. I am sure he would have a better department and feel more confident if those estimates were reviewed by the committee.

We have not looked at the Department of Labour estimates. Even if we get them now, at the end of May, if we sit that long, they will be deemed to be passed, even though we have not yet started on them.

Just to show how partisan those committees can become, in the time we had the estimates referred to the committee and never studied them, we studied Bill C-8 in detail. When we were through with Bill C-8, committees were not called. We then got Bill C-45 which took away the right to strike during the time of an election campaign. It was top priority legislation. We sat again to examine Bill C-45. I say quite openly the issue got somewhat heated as to when we were going to get the estimates. That is the only chance I have had as a member of this House to say to the chairman of that committee, "Look, sir, when will you give us a chance to examine the estimates?" Bill C-45 has gone through the committee, this House and the other place.

Where are the estimates now? We have a block system. The Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration is locked into the block system. There are times when we should be sitting, but the chairman chooses not to call the committee. This week I moved a motion under Standing Order 43 asking this House to direct the chairman of the standing committee that we examine the estimates. Should it be necessary for a member of this House to rise in his place two

[Mr. Epp.]

months after the estimates have come down and one month before passage of time will pass them and plead with the Speaker for an opportunity to look at the estimates? That in essence was what I was doing.

Later on a point of order I asked the Speaker to intervene and look at the situation in order that we might deal with the estimates. I was very gratified by his comments. He seemed to be as astounded as the rest of us. He stated that one of the primary functions of a member of parliament is to look at estimates. I have looked at the schedule of committee meetings up to next Tuesday, May 2, but they are still not scheduled. To my knowledge, a steering committee has not been called. Maybe because of my tirade today we will get some committee hearings next week, I do not know. The point is that even if we do, we will only have three weeks to look at millions of dollars of estimates. I am sure no member of the government can say to us that is good government. I suggest, with respect, to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) that he had better get out of his seat fast, get to the chairman of that standing committee and tell him he wants his estimates before that committee.

It does not end there. I called the chairman two weeks ago to ask when the estimates will come before the committee. I was told that he was out of his office and in his constituency. I do not criticize that; we all go to our constituencies or on trips. I was informed that the deputy chairman was in charge. I knew the deputy chairman was out of the country for a legitimate reason.

I get up to speak today in absolute frustration. Although I support the concept of a comptroller general, there are much more fundamental issues that have to come before this House. Do the government actually want their estimates examined? I have come to the conclusion they do not. They at least gave the hon. member for New Westminster three strikes. They did not even call me into the batter's box. I say to the minister with all the sincerity I can muster that it is this kind of activity which raises in the minds of the Canadian taxpayers deep cynicism, which they feel not only for the government but for every elected official.

Mr. Young: Get on with the bill.

Mr. Epp: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Young) says I should get on with the bill. It is through this very bill that we are trying to bring into this public forum some methodology from the ground up to examine estimates properly, to have public money spent in as valid a way as possible. If the hon. member thinks I am not debating the bill, I say to him the very heart of the bill is how we get spending under control. And he has the audacity to tell me to get to the bill.

Mr. Young: I said if you were sincere you would get on with it.

Mr. Epp: All I can interpret from the hon. member is that the complaint I have now made a number of times in a number of forums is not valid. We are told "Pass the bill. Don't ask