

THIRD READING

Hon. Mr. KING moved the third reading of the Bill.

Hon. B. F. SMITH: Honourable senators, I should like to make one or two observations that I probably should have made on the motion for second reading. I listened with a great deal of interest to the explanation given by the honourable leader of the Government (Hon. Mr. King), and to the remarks of the honourable leader on this side (Hon. Mr. Ballantyne), and I cannot say that either one of them touched the vital point in connection with this Bill. It seems to me that the Government to-day is on a spending orgy and is to a certain extent glorifying spending, and I believe the people throughout this country appreciate that fact. The procedure seems to be: tax, borrow and spend. Now, I feel that in this country we have not a proper system of checking expenditures. Neither the leader of the Government (Hon. Mr. King) nor the leader on this side (Hon. Mr. Ballantyne) made any reference to this matter, which to me is of more importance than anything they referred to. As honourable senators know, taxing the people and spending their money without telling them where it goes have disrupted many countries in the past. Such procedure would disrupt this country as well. Let me say that the Government will not get by with the glorification of spending money and with no proper system of checking its expenditures.

I come of United Empire Loyalist stock—of people who had a strong belief in thrift. My mind goes back to the time when I was a boy and listened to the school meetings that were held in our district every year. At those meetings there was criticism of every dollar of expenditure. The people wanted to know where every last cent went. Later I attended meetings of municipal councils, which I believe are pretty good safeguards of economy, and I found that they kept a very careful check on expenditures. Still later I went to the Provincial Legislature in New Brunswick, where I found a public accounts committee, which had authority to criticize every expenditure made by the Provincial Government. But to-day the Government of Canada is spending huge sums—I heard the honourable leader (Hon. Mr. King) read off millions and billions as though they did not amount to anything—and when you stop to think, honourable members, you realize that we have no adequate check on those expenditures.

The suggestion that I had in mind to make when I rose was this, that after this Bill is passed—I would not attempt to obstruct it in

any way—we ask the Government to approve the appointment of a committee by the Senate to scrutinize the public accounts and the expenditures which are being made by reason of the war. I believe it was the honourable leader on this side who said the Prime Minister had remarked to him that he regretted the Senate did not have more to do. Well, what I am suggesting would mean some work for us. Such a committee might be composed of, say, eleven members—two from Quebec, two from Ontario and one from each of the other provinces. I think that recommendations by a committee of that sort would go a long way towards assisting the Auditor General in making up his mind.

I really think that under present circumstances we have not a proper check-up of expenditures the Government is making. The people are getting tired of this state of affairs. They are taxed such and such an amount, and they are willing to pay their taxes; then the Government asks them to lend money by buying bonds, and they are willing to buy bonds; but they know there is not that rigid check there ought to be on expenditures.

Hon. J. A. CALDER: Honourable members, I have on previous occasions referred to this feature of the present situation, that the expenditures in this country and every other country of the world are simply appalling. And an amazing thing about it is that the public take this attitude: "Oh, well, let the Government have what it thinks it needs." I have no doubt at all that our Auditor General has full power to check the Government's expenditures, and that he does check them. I doubt very much if anything gets by him. If it does, he should cease to be Auditor General, because he is appointed to his position, where he is independent of the Government, for the very purpose of checking all expenditures. But what I fear—and I believe my fear is well grounded—is that all sorts of expenditures are arranged for that never should be arranged for. That is a very different thing. About a year ago I strongly urged the Government to set up a committee of thoroughly able men to keep a check on the countless obligations that are being incurred all the time, not only when Parliament is in session; a committee that would sit day after day and decide, upon proper representations being made to it, whether or not there was good, sound, valid reason for proposed expenditures. Honourable senators follow me?

Hon. Mr. COPP: That is, whether contracts should be awarded?