

In time of war the difficulties of being the watchdog of the treasury are greatly increased. They are greatly increased, not because expenditures have to be so much greater but because of the flexible system we have to have in time of war. We bring in a War Appropriation Act which enables money voted thereunder to be applied to almost any project or purpose. The various departments decide that money should be devoted to this, that or the other purpose, and the responsibilities of the Minister of Finance thereupon become much greater than if the scope of the expenditure were limited by a parliamentary item. That is the reason why all through the war the tendency of the treasury has been to force expenditures into the estimates as much as possible and out of the War Appropriation Act.

I am afraid I am making a self-righteous speech here, talking about other ministers and so on. The treasury may be wrong about this; in fact the treasury is apt to be very wrong in time of war, because action is more important in war than economy. Other ministers with the very best of intentions, men who get action and so on, desire flexibility. They desire the power to put money to this, that or the other purpose, and they find themselves up against this somewhat financially minded Department of Finance which is cramping their style all the time. I do not know whether on balance to take credit for these watchdog operations or not, but they go on to the best of our ability.

We have an institution called the treasury board. With the exception of the Minister of Public Works the other night, who, thank heaven, did say a good word for the treasury board, I cannot remember of anyone ever saying a good word on its behalf. We talk about putting a watch on expenditures, but how much assistance do we get in this house in watching expenditures? Nine-tenths of the speeches in this house are asking for bigger and better expenditures. That was the case all through the last parliament. While this session did not start out in that way, it finally got that way. If the government is making large expenditures, it is not because the ministers are trying to make those expenditures; it is because of public and parliamentary demands for those expenditures. That is why the expenditures are being made. At times I feel as though I am against the whole world when I try to keep a lot of these expenditures down. We just do the best we can, that is all, and keep them down.

Mr. MACDONNELL (Muskoka-Ontario):
Mr. Chairman, first I want to say that I
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realize what the minister is up against. I have been trying myself to avoid making any suggestion for increasing expenditures because I wanted to be in a position to come along and talk about economies. I am perfectly conscious that we on this side have been suggesting expenditures. In fact we had differences of opinion in the ranks of this party no later than last Saturday night.

There is one thing I should like to ask the minister, a thing which I believe goes to the root of the whole matter. I think he will agree that in the next two or three years economies will have to be made that are just beyond anything that have ever been attempted before by the Department of Finance. If things go on as they are now, first of all the minister is going to break his own heart, which would be undesirable and, second, he will fail, which would be even more undesirable from a public point of view.

I ventured when I spoke on the budget to refer to what is called the Geddes committee in Great Britain after the last war, and I was careful to say that I thought that Geddes' axe went too far and probably produced evil results. Nevertheless I do not believe that there is any hope of getting our expenditures down within any reasonable time until the shoe is put on the other foot, and until somebody—and I cannot see anybody else but the Minister of Finance—tells the other departments what they are to have. Otherwise it seems to me the minister is just fighting a heroic battle, if you will, but a losing battle.

Take just one thing mentioned in the house by the hon. member for St. Paul's, the civil service estimates, amounting to \$229,000,000, or half as much our whole pre-war budget. Without taking more time I suggest to the minister that the procedure which he has just suggested will utterly fail in the years that are ahead of him. He must devise some entirely new procedure. I understand that in Britain the shoe is more or less put on the other foot, that the treasury there does call the tune; that it tells departments what they can have. I am speaking without any parliamentary knowledge, just looking at it as a business proposition, and it seems to me that as I said before unless the minister does that he will break his heart, and second, he will fail.

Would the minister care to take a single item in the estimates, the film board item or anything else he likes, just to show the committee what happens when a supplementary estimate comes before him? Perhaps he would take one of his own estimates. There is an item at the top of page 22 of the supplementary estimates, 1945-46, \$200,000