

Financial Administration Act

of the committee system so there can be a more effective examination and analysis of the spending programs of government. We have seen an increase in the frequency of the use of one dollar vote items, a use that I think is a definite abuse of the parliamentary system. Surely if we are to bring control of the expenditures back where it rightfully belongs, we must seriously come to grips with this situation.

I was taking part in an agricultural committee meeting the other day examining supplementary estimates. Incidentally, those estimates are deemed to have been passed sometime today whether or not we have considered them. If we have a day or two to consider the estimates that is fine, but if not they are deemed to have been passed. During that committee meeting of about an hour and a half I had the opportunity of questioning the minister for five minutes. I asked two questions, which probably consumed a minute or less of the time, and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) probably used ten minutes to respond. I suggest this is a farce.

First of all, we do not have the kind of background information necessary to an explanation of the objective of the expenditure. More important, hon. members do not have an opportunity to ask for and obtain such an explanation. Unless that changes, parliament will continue to deteriorate.

● (1422)

The rules being what they are today, as the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Patterson) indicated, the opportunity for bringing the estimates to the House of Commons where a minister is put on the carpet, is held accountable, and must defend his spending program, while it exists in some sense, it is not sufficient to do the job effectively. So we as members of parliament are having the finger pointed at us because we are responsible for ensuring that the interests of the taxpayer are being protected, but we do not have the opportunity to protect them because of the mechanisms.

Unless there is a more effective way of policing the government's spending habits, we will continue to experience a decline in confidence in this institution, we will continue to see a growing proliferation of Crown corporations and agencies which do not have to come back to this institution for approval, we will see the government of the day become increasingly less responsible and therefore less accountable to the taxpayers of Canada, the electorate of Canada. Without those checks and balances in place, the door is open for this kind of waste, extravagance, and misappropriation of funds.

On the question of Crown corporations, just recently we have been asked to write off a debt for the CNR amounting to \$808 million. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) suggested it was merely a little technical bill, a housekeeping matter which should not be the subject of much debate. We intend to debate that issue, we intend to call witnesses before the committee and to call the Auditor General to see what he thinks about writing off \$808 million of taxpayers' money. Also every time we misuse the dollar items, we circumvent parliamentary authority, and this is wrong in terms of the responsibilities and traditions of parliament to provide for the

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

collection and distribution of funds and the responsibility of passing laws.

When I came to the House some ten years ago, total government expenditure was something in the order of \$9 billion. Today it approaches some \$49 billion, and by the time all the supplementary estimates are passed, it will be probably \$50 billion.

Two things concern me very much, as I am sure they concern other hon. members and the people of Canada in particular. First, I am concerned about the magnitude, the massive amount of money that we are talking about, and second, I am concerned about the appropriation of these funds, the priorities and purposes for which the government has seen fit to allocate these sums of money. It seems to me that over the past ten years we have been on a spending spree. Perhaps I could describe it this way. We have been on a cultural, sociological, and linguistic binge, engaging in many political programs. We have engaged in the dramatic growth of government, but the priorities of strengthening the economic base of this country and creating an environment where the individual can become more enterprising and innovative have been cast aside.

A recent article in the *Financial Times* of June 27, 1977, indicates that 40 per cent of Canadian voters are now on the government payroll. That includes people who are working for the various Crown corporations, for the government, retired public servants, war pensioners, those who receive unemployment insurance benefits, old age pensioners, and so on. It has become a very significant issue.

We have failed in our ability to strengthen the economic infrastructure of this country and, as a result, have not inspired individual incentive. This has not served the best interest of national unity as well. I look at some of the programs on which we have spent money, for example, on Canada Council grants. This is why I am sure the government of the day has lost control, and I am sure it is not very proud of some of the programs funded under the Canada Council. One example is of \$170,000 to study air breathing fish of the Amazon river, or \$4,280 spent on a study to determine what people do with themselves when they have nothing to do, or \$15,000 spent on an evaluation of interview techniques and data in the 1971 census of the Kingdom of Morocco. Many taxpayers are getting tired of that kind of foolishness.

As I said, in 1968 government expenditures amounted to \$9 billion; today they are \$50 billion. In 1968 we had a 4-cent postage stamp and the mail was delivered; today we are paying 14 cents for postage stamps and mail is not being delivered. It is those kinds of things that are irritating and bothersome to the Canadian people. As I said before, this has not served the best economic interests of this country, nor has it served the individual interests in society or the best interests of national unity. Remember it was in 1968 as well that the theme of the election campaign was national unity and the redressing of regional economic disparities. What have we today? Look at the money we have spent. The money has been misspent, and that is why many Canadians are irate and outright angry.