

hanky-panky here is nonsense. Whenever it has been done it has been clearly identified.

● (1610)

**Mr. Andre:** Would the minister not agree that it is meaningless to have his officials appear before the press pointing with satisfaction to increases of 8.9 per cent and 9.7 per cent and saying that since 1975 there had been only modest increases, less than increases in the gross national product? Would the minister not agree that these are meaningless numbers when in fact the programs included in the total spending have been changing year by year? The government has not disguised the fact, it has admitted there have been changes, but does the minister not agree that in these circumstances the comparisons are meaningless?

**Mr. Buchanan:** I am puzzled. Maybe it just shows the Conservative nature of the hon. member's thinking. His idea is to lock things into a static, unchanging position and never change. What about the new programs which have been introduced? Are they to be eliminated so as to compare apples with apples? The situation evolves. Things change. New programs have been introduced and certain programs have been dropped. It is unrealistic to suggest things can be frozen at one point in time and shown always in the same way forever in the interest, the hon. member says, of an undistorted picture. The situation changes and will continue to do so.

**Mr. Rae:** It always changes in your favour, though.

**An hon. Member:** Well, well, where have you been?

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** I have a question in which the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. McIsaac) is very interested. How does the government determine its priorities when cuts are made? I notice from the blue book that some \$90 million is being cut from food production and marketing, over \$1 million dollars from crop insurance and about \$250,000 from animal research. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) has expressed concern about increased inflation arising from imports of food. It seems to me that if the government had a real strategy it would be promoting the production of domestic food in a move toward self-sufficiency. Such a policy would call for increased funding for programs I have mentioned. In working out its cuts, does the government seek to support through budgetary priorities the economic policies of the Minister of Finance or the general thrust of the statements made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau)? Or is it a matter of trying to pin the tail on the donkey?

**Mr. Buchanan:** Not at all. The hon. member is well aware that over the last few years we have, I understand, increased in an unprecedented fashion the amount of our food exports. It is absolutely wrong to suggest that this does not enjoy a priority on the government's part. If the hon. member wishes to ask questions on various detailed aspects of this program he should obviously address himself not to me as President of the Treasury Board but to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan).

### *Main Estimates*

**Mr. Orlikow:** I should like to ask the minister to give us more information with regard to the reduction of 5,700 in the number of public servants of which he spoke. What percentage of these will be in the national capital area and therefore engaged in administration, and what percentage will be out in the various communities engaged in the actual delivery of programs?

A second question. I am speaking from memory but I believe the hon. gentleman told us there would be a reduction in the number of post office personnel of either 1,600 or 1,800 people in the coming year. We have spent well over one billion dollars on equipment to computerize and automate the post office operation, yet the mail is moving slower than ever. It took five days for a letter mailed to me from Toronto last week to reach Ottawa.

**An hon. Member:** You're lucky!

**Mr. Orlikow:** A friend of mine—

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. member was about to put a question, I believe, before he began to make a speech.

**Mr. Orlikow:** I am trying to give an illustration. The mail is moving slower than ever. At the same time there are tens of thousands of people in the new urban areas who have been waiting up to four years for door to door delivery of mail and cannot get it because the government is putting a freeze on increases in service. How does the minister propose to reduce the number of post office staff unless he is prepared to destroy completely an already unsatisfactory delivery service?

**Mr. Buchanan:** Questions concerning the operation of the post office should be directed to the Postmaster General (Mr. Lamontagne). As to lay-offs, the latest information we have from the Public Service Commission—these are estimates—is that by April 1 the figure should be roughly 450, of which 60 per cent will be in the national capital. These figures are obviously based on best estimates we can get from the commission and over the succeeding couple of months there could be an additional 250 to 350, for a total, nationwide, in the order of between 700 and 800 individuals.

In his comments the hon. member suggested we were insensitive to the requirements of post-secondary education, of medicare and the needs of the family. I do not know whether he was listening when I made my remarks. I stated that approximately 58 per cent of the \$4.3 billion increase this year is going directly to transfer programs to individuals and to the provinces to pay for things such as old age security, the child tax credit, medicare and post-secondary education. These are precisely the areas which are receiving the highest priority.

**Mr. Orlikow:** Mr. Speaker, when I said the government was reducing its contributions to the various shared-cost programs, I had this in mind: from the inception of the programs until April last year the government was paying approximately 50 per cent of the cost. As of last year the government put a cap on the increase it would pay in any year, the cap being the amount of the increase in the gross national product. If the