

Supply—Privy Council

studying the status of women when there are so many other problems to solve. I am thinking specifically of fisheries. I have difficulty answering some of the arguments which have been presented to me by my constituents. When I ask questions on behalf of the Atlantic people I am being very serious. I think one of our greatest problems here in the House of Commons results from the fact that when we talk about the serious fisheries situation many hon. members do not consider seriously what is being said. Very often these questions are interpreted as being facetious. Questions relating to this subject are very often glossed over or taken as a joke. I am very serious when I pose these questions to the parliamentary secretary and I should like a reasonable answer and I am not reflecting on your attitude, sir, when I make that observation: I am referring to the house generally.

Mr. Walker: I wish I could answer the hon. member's question in a satisfactory manner, but I am unable to do so. He has asked me to comment on the expenditure of a considerable amount of money on royal commissions when at the same time there are problems in respect of fisheries. This is not my role at this time. If the hon. member will take my word for this, he will realize that my role is not to explain the policies of the government to the house. My only role at this time is to provide whatever explanation I have available on these specific items. I cannot speak for the Minister of Fisheries, as I am not responsible for those estimates.

Mr. Danforth: Mr. Chairman, I am sure hon. gentlemen opposite who are speaking on behalf of the government this afternoon are experienced parliamentarians. They have both held seats in this house for some time. The people of this nation are concerned and familiar with the activities of royal commissions which have been given specific and important tasks. They know that the members of these commissions are appointed directly by the government and that their duties are set out in terms of reference. The people of this nation are concerned when they consider the tremendous amounts of money spent by these royal commissions and about what control the government has over them once they have been seized of their assigned tasks.

In view of my profession I am very much interested in the royal commission investigating the farm machinery industry. It was said this afternoon that the report from this commission can be expected about June, 1969. The terms of reference were given to this

[Mr. Lundrigan.]

commission in 1966. Many people would like to know what the government does to follow up on these terms of reference. How is time allocated, and how does the government go about getting these commissions to report back within a certain period of time? I know the situation varies in respect of the subject matters presented to these commissions, depending on the complexity of the subject matter and the number of people who wish to appear before the commission, but the government must have some control. I should like to know how this control is applied. Does the government make a preliminary survey and anticipate the length of time required to investigate a subject, or what is the procedure in this regard?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, it is difficult to give a precise answer to this question. I suppose the result in each case is a balance between two conflicting principles. The object in appointing a royal commission is to seek the advice, the knowledge and the skill of someone who is independent and will be able to look at a problem objectively. We cannot gain the benefits of independence and objectivity if we try to control these people by telling them what to do and when to do it. If we do so we are in effect hiring the dog and doing the barking ourselves. Apart from a general outline of the problem to be considered, the matter is left to the royal commission which has been chosen because of the knowledge, skill, dedication and objectivity of its members. It is left to them to select the means of finding the answer in the most appropriate way.

Human nature being what it is, naturally people with responsibilities such as mine cannot avoid urging royal commissions to hurry up and get their work done. We urge them not to spend so much money, but these are in the nature of exhortations rather than controls. This is the way it should be. Perhaps that is not a satisfactory or precise answer to the hon. member's question.

Mr. Macquarrie: I have some concern, and I recognize certain temporal improprieties in discussing so briefly a matter such as a royal commission. I was very taken with the minister's simile about hiring a dog and doing the barking yourself; that is very good. I have only a little time to bark. In view of what he described as exacerbations, I am wondering if they are indeed exacerbations—and I am thinking about what has resulted from the bilingual and bicultural commission.