

Public Reports

type of government agency or service—this is true of the large corporation in the private sector as well—is the tremendous amount of paper of one kind or another that is generated in the ordinary conduct of business. Sometimes this paper is very fancy paper, coloured, expensively printed, and done up in elaborate binders. At other times it can be in very simple form. The point is that this is just one other area of use for which, in one way or another, the consumer must foot the bill.

In some ways it would probably be very difficult for the government or any of its agencies to put a dollar stamp on each order it might process, as this bill suggests. On the other hand, I think what is being proposed is something which might be investigated a little more carefully by various levels of government, perhaps starting with our own, namely, an attempt to cost out various programs which are being undertaken. This may result in some very large figures.

The problem which I think some of us face is that in the past we have been members of committees which have examined expenditure proposals and have seen a program which might, for sake of argument, cost \$10 million. I have been on committees with the hon. member for Vaudeuil and I have discussed this question. I think it is very difficult for members to analyse this \$10 million and to ascertain just what the money is for. There are paper costs, reports and so on which are all basically hidden, as they must be. After all, you cannot be faced with large lists of items which include the number of paper clips being used, for example.

Nevertheless, the point remains that this \$10 million cost represents tremendous value even though it will not figure, as it were, in the actual production of the department concerned to the extent that you can call the service being provided its production. The money is going into overhead, the overhead involved in producing reports for someone to read, on which are based further reports which analyse the situation, and so on further up the line, with various other mini-reports circulating while major reports are in process of preparation.

I honestly do not know, Mr. Speaker, how one comes to grips with this question and I am not sure that this is the answer. However, what the hon. member points up is something which should be followed through by the appropriate agencies, and presumably by Treasury Board, so that the ordinary taxpayer is constantly thought of in determining the kind of overhead that is associated with government services. As I say, this overhead can vary from paper to office supplies, to office space, to furnishings, and all the rest of it.

The average consumer in Canada today is not convinced that there is a general feeling of cost consciousness among the various levels of government, universities, school boards, or organizations which do not have to worry about a bottom line or have to meet a payroll which is contingent upon the profit they make. The ordinary consumer does worry about how much organizations determine the amount to be spent by way of overhead. I suggest they will worry more and more in the future, and will insist upon more cost consciousness throughout all these kinds of organizations.

[Mr. Martin.]

This bill requires each printing order of more than 500 copies to be costed as such, the total amount and the per copy amount. Knowing the way government bureaucracies tend to operate, this would probably mean that someone would have to say; "We will have to hire a number of extra people to do this for us". I can see this situation spreading throughout each department, each bureau, as it were, and this in itself would create a problem in terms of implementing the program. For this reason I am not completely in support of the detail that the hon. member has put forward, but I very much support the general thrust of this bill.

I hope that somehow or other, as we grapple with the larger items of government expenditure and worry whether we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars in the right place, groups and agencies will also worry about the lesser amounts which, when added together, do not take very long to amount to several million dollars.

● (1752)

In conclusion, I know the hon. member brings this concept forth with the utmost sincerity and a deliberation of his point of real intent to try to pinpoint a concern that more and more Canadians need to have, including members of parliament, in the various costs associated with making the whole governmental process work. To that extent, whether this bill moves beyond this chamber or not, I think he has served a very real purpose. I hope the appropriate persons will take the message back to the departments that are in a position to do something about this very real area of concern.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas H. Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I want to join my colleagues and once again congratulate the hon. member for Vaudeuil (Mr. Herbert) who has drawn once more the attention of hon. members on a matter of interest to himself and his constituents.

[English]

I would like to say, as previous members have stated, that the question in this bill raises many other questions. In other words, should the cost of a public document put out by a government department become the main criterion in deciding whether such a document should be published?

A document may interest very few persons because it is a highly technical and very complicated publication. Therefore it would have a very narrow distribution. It may be very important as a reference document. The cost of each such document would appear very high related to other documents, pamphlets or booklets which had a very wide distribution. Such a technical document, while only for certain scientific groups, may have major repercussions on the way of life and future of Canadian citizens. That is one objection I have with regard to publishing the cost of such a document.

Printers will often quote a certain price for a stated number of publications. Because they then have the plates and the staff is trained to reprint a pamphlet, there will be a reduction in